

(STUDY MATERIALS FOR LONG QUESTION AND SHORT NOTES)

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Tribal Social Movements in India

Social movements among tribes aim at collective action to alter, reconstitute, reinterpret, restore and protect social structure, with a view to improve social, cultural, economic and political conditions of the tribal people. Hinduism, Christianity, British rule, modern education and post-independence legislations have generated a high level of consciousness among the tribals, which has in turn encouraged several movements.

Some movements have asserted their tribal identity and political solidarity. Ecological-cultural isolation, economic backwardness and a feeling of frustration have been responsible for these movements. However, those tribals who are either too isolated or too integrated with Hindu society are not involved in these socio-cultural movements.

The Unnati Samaj, an organisation established in 1912 for socio-cultural reforms, and the Adivasi Mahasabha established in 1938, aimed at revivalism in the Jharkhand region of Bihar. The Jharkhand movement in 1950 was, however, started to fight land alienation and exploitation and for political solidarity among the tribes of Bihar and the adjoining states of West Bengal, Orissa and Madhya Pradesh. This movement ultimately culminated into a demand for the formation of a separate state for the adivasis of these four states.

Tribal movements encompass a very wide arena. The unique geopolitical situation and historical background need to be taken into consideration while analysing movements in the North-East, including Manipur, Nagaland and Mizoram.

Movements in these areas generally refer to cultural and political revivalism. Political autonomy, control over the forests, socio-religious, cultural and linguistic considerations have been the key factors in other tribal movements.

For example, in case of the Jharkhand movement in Bihar, West Bengal, Orissa and Madhya Pradesh the main points were related to historicity, ideology, structure, leadership and sub-regional identity. Based on these considerations, Jharkhand was formed as a new state out of Bihar.

Along with Jharkhand, Uttranchal was carved out from Uttar Pradesh and Chhattisgarh was created from Madhya Pradesh. Socio-cultural movements have given primacy to status elevation through sanskritisation. The various modes of status elevation for tribes include emphasis on a specific script, language, religion and ethnic identity. A given region may have a particular type of movement because of its specific geographical and political situation in the wider context.

S.M. Dubey (1982) provides a classification of tribal movements in North-East India:

- (1) Religious and social reform movements;
- (2) State formation movements;
- (3) Insurgent movements; and
- (4) Culturological movements.

An all-India tribal movement has not emerged because of the diversity and unevenness among the tribes of India. K.S. Singh (1982) has given detailed accounts of 36 tribal movements in India, of which 14 were in the North-East region alone.

Singh classifies the various movements into:

- (1) Movements for political autonomy;
- (2) Agrarian and forest based movements;
- (3) Sanskritisation process; and
- (4) Cultural movements.

The questions which still remain inadequately answered are:

(1) Why have the tribals been pressing for cultural revivalism, autonomy and restoration of aboriginality?

(2) Why have some tribes been making efforts for cultural, ethnic and linguistic revivalism?

(3) Why have some others been raising their voice for the formation of a separate state and for a greater share in educational institutions, jobs and other opportunities? Exploitation of the adivasis by outsiders, non-adivasis and dominant elements from among the tribals is a stark fact of life.