

Attitude of the British towards the Tribal Community in 19th and Early days of 20th Century

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Abstract: The lifestyle of the tribal communities is different from people living in plain areas. They have their own culture. Their festivals depend upon nature and the forces of nature. Their customs and beliefs are not known to the people living in the plain areas. The British tried to disturb their cultural entities and their lifestyle. Unnecessary actions have been imposed and the tribals are subjected to cruel methods. Their natural resources have been exploited. The tribal labour was forced to exploit the minerals from their own motherland. The forests have been destroyed by the British, which have been considered as the birthplace of the tribes. The profession of the tribal community has been totally disturbed and they are sent to work in the plain areas. Their places have been disturbed and land was occupied for mining activities. For their own settlement, the British have destroyed the hill tracts and other resources have been disturbed. The trees have been cut off and the labour who depend upon the trees and hills for their livelihood has been thrown out of employment. These unbearable situations forced the tribal leaders to raise revolts against the British. The Rampa Rebellion, Lagarai Revolt, and other minor revolts have shaken the British administration. All these issues have been discussed in this article.

INTRODUCTION

East India Company has occupied entire Andhra country in 1802. The Andhra country was merged to Madras state. Andhra country was under the control of the Madras state till 1953. The Tribal communities are living in agency areas of the Andhra state from immemorable time. The British have started to implement a ruthless policy in Andhra including in agency areas. The British has imposed restrictions on Podu cultivation which is a custom of tribe living in the Andhra country. Some of the tribal leaders tried to rob their own people with the help of the British. A collusion between British and tribes have taken the entire agency area. The tribes have revolted against the British right from the early days of the 19th century. The revolt of the tribe has ended with the heroic struggles of Alluri Sita Ramaraju who was a great freedom fighter and tried to emancipate the tribal community from the wrath of the British. British have increased taxes and introduced forceful labour which forced the tribal community to raise their heads against the British Government.

The British administrators could find that the hill tracts would produce quality agricultural products and minor forest produce. The hill tracts contain fertile lands which produce quality products which are in demand among the people of plain area. The British officers have made plans to exploit natural resources available on the hill tracts. After conducting excavations on the hill tract, they came to the conclusion that the hill tracts are full of minerals such as plumbago, mica, iron, manganese and gold, etc. These minerals would yield much income and they can export the minerals to their own mother country to provide raw material for their industries. Hence the British government tried to link the rail road with mountains and small hills by constructing roads. The British government has taken first step to prevent podu cultivation being adopted by the tribes. The tribes are evacuated forcibly to other places from their residential areas which are full of minerals and having good fertile land. The tribes are reluctant to move to other places where they are accustomed to live for centuries together. Above all, the necessity of communications was deeply felt during the times of revolts. Therefore, the communication system in the hills was improved by alien rulers, to facilitate the troop movement to effectively control the hill men, and to exploit the rich natural resources of the hills. But these roads are inadequate to fulfill the needs of the people.

The British government wanted to suppress the revolts by sending troops in quick succession. But the purpose of the British government is not for the development of agency areas. Their purpose is to exploit the hill tracts for their commercial benefits. After the Rampa Rebellion of 1870, the British Government tried to improve the communications to provide road communication for their troops to maintain law and order in the agency tracts. The tribes generally are inhabitants of hill areas and they know each and every nook and corner of the hill tracts by which they can score some victories over the British army during the time of revolts. The British army or the police are new to agency area and they cannot reach the remote places where the revolutionaries are stationed. This kind of situation could be found during the Rampa rebellion during 1869-80 and the second Rampa revolt raised by Alluri Sita Rama Raju between 1922 and 1924. The scanty communication and road linking is responsible for the failure of British army to suppress the revolts raised by the heroes of agency area.

The agency was a richly endowed country with an un-enviable reputation for forest resources of much economic value. The attempts of the British to exploit the potential of the area for the imperial cause, clashed with the interests of the native population, and caused bitterness among the latter. Many kinds of trees of commercial value in the agencies of these districts such as black wood, teak, sal, iron wood, yegisa or kino, nallamaddi, satin wood, pasi, yepi, kanba or bandar, tellamaddi, ebony and ban teak were found. The chief fruit trees were tamarind, jack, mohwa or ippa, mango, wood apple, neredu and oranges. Toddy was obtained from palmyra, sago palm or jilugu which were abundant in the agency. The minor forest produce

available were nux vomica, gallnuts, honey, soapnuts, wax, sikay, tumiki leaves, lac, gums and marking nuts. Tanning barks and tanning fruits were abundant in these areas. These minor forest produce had an international market. All these issues have been discussed in this article.

CAUSES FOR THE TRIBAL UPRISINGS AGAINST THE BRITISH:

MUTTADARI SYSTEM:

The Hill Zamindaries especially Rampa, Golconda and Madugula were divided into muttas. Each mutta was headed by a muttadar, the holder of a mutta. The origin of the system in the hilly areas of both the districts is obscure. Haimendorf is of the opinion, that the system was superimposed and had little organic connection with tribal institutions. It appears that the hill zamindars in the past entrusted the management of the tracts above or on the slopes of the ghats, after subdividing them into small administrative units to influential individuals to collect taxes from the hill men. The ordinary tribal people used to visit zamindaries and offer presentations and gifts to them. Each Mutta contains 20 villages. The people from the village offered kind or cash to the zamindars who are called Muttadars for their survival. The Muttadars maintain personal police whose responsibility is to maintain law and order in their muttas. The personal police have to provide information regarding the occurrence of revolutionary activities or fituri in their region. The Muttadars have to bend their lives before zamindars. The Muttadars have to provide all sorts of comforts to the zamindars with the help of their personal men. The Muttadars have to collect the taxes and a portion of the tax would be paid to the zamindars. Most of the zamindars have pressed for cash rather than kind from muttadars. Zamindars were oppressive towards muttadars and muttadars were so cruel towards the people in their region. The Zamindars have their political links with the British. The Muttadar commanded considerable respect from the hill people. He collected rent at the customary rates per plough, per house or per knife. The Muttadars were so cruel towards their own people. In order to satisfy the muttadars, the people used to offer fruits or other hill produce, fees on account of marriage, fines for caste offences, and house tax at a small rate. The Muttadars were the administrators of their muttas with the permission of local zamindars. They have their own customs and privileges. The people have to work for the well-being of muttadars as bonded labour. Sometimes, no payment would be made for the services rendered by the poor people.

Even after the advent of British, the system was continued for administrative convenience in the hills and for securing the support of muttadars. All the muttadars were not distributed in their tenures and were given title deeds. However, the muttadars never reconciled themselves to their degraded status and position under the colonial rule. Their position was much lowered when they were subordinated to the control of various government officials. But the Britishers have tried to exploit the muttadars. They are forced to supply goods and send men to serve the British officers. This kind of hostile attitude has forced the muttadars to fold their agony. The muttadars tried to raise their voice against the British who tried to suppress them. The Muttadars have encouraged their own men to raise revolt against the British. Most of the followers of muttadars have assisted Alluri Sita Rama Raju who has raised revolt and continued for two years from 1922-24 which was called as Rampa Revolt. The muttadars quite frequently organized disturbances and caused anxiety to the colonial rulers. In the Golconda hills, the muttadars combined to restore the old zamindars family. Between 1845 and 1848, they held out against the troops and finally surrendered on the promise of general amnesty.

The British officers have recommended the Madras Government for the abolition of muttadari system which caused fury among the muttadars. The British government wanted to remove muttadari system with a view to get the direct control over the people living in muttas. This attitude of British government was seriously opposed by muttadars, generally who are having a thought of using their power over the hill tribes living in their muttas. H. G. Turner, the collector of Vizagapatam was the strong supporter for the abolition of muttadari system. This action was strongly opposed by Koyas and Konda Reddies of Godavari region where the system was prevailed along with Vizagapatam. But some of the muttadars have supported the British government and helped them to suppress the revolt. The frequent quarrels among the muttadars could be observed during the last decades of 19th century. Some of the muttadars have helped the British in return for awards and gifts. But the attitude of these muttadars was not accepted by their fellow muttadars who often tried to attack on muttadars. These rivalries were responsible for raising serious revolts by muttadars which have shaken the roots of British administration.

ECONOMIC CONDITIONS:

The Economic conditions in tribal areas are deteriorating day by day. The tribal people have carried out their lives by depending upon the forest products. They have collected forest products and used to sell them for their survival. The tribals do not produce the goods but to consume the available natural resources in the forests or on the hill tops. They have considered that the conjunction of forest products is their right. But the British government unnecessarily interfered with the economic life of tribes and imposed unwanted taxes on the consumption of forest products. The tribes were accustomed to adopt the podu cultivation by which they burn the area after the cutting of the crops and they migrate to other places to continue the same podu cultivation. The British Government tried to stop the podu cultivation which destroys the nature of hill tracts. Due to the burning of timber, the hill areas could experience deforestation. The deforestation would cause the fury of floods which destroys the tribal economy.

The tribals mainly consumed the cereal obtained from their fields. Minor forest produce also played a considerable role in the economy of the tribals. They collected them and exchanged them for their necessities like cloth, salt, kerosene, onions, chillies, and other items in the weekly markets or shandies. These shandies were regarded as the meeting place of both tribal traders and non-tribal traders. The Non-tribal traders would collect the forest products from the tribes by giving some commodities which are in badly need. No money could play its role in the trading activities carried out between tribe and non-tribal traders. Only the barter system has been prevailed till the emergence of British.

Cruickshank, the Principal Assistant Collector, Vizagapatam, reported vividly the exploitation of tribals in the Addatigala shandy: "When going through the fair, one of the first things I observed was a Komati (a trader) cheating a hill man. They were exchanging tamarinds for sweet potatoes weight for weight. I allowed the Komati to finish his weighing and give the potatoes to the hill man and then I asked him to give me the scales. The scales were so bad that I cannot understand how anyone could

not have seen that they were false. The Komati seeing that he was found out, and then threw some potatoes into the hill man's cloth, but even these did not make the weight of the potatoes equal that of the tamarinds. There was another hill man sitting by who had evidently made a similar bargain. So I had his sweet potatoes weighed against the tamarinds he gave and I found he had been cheating in the same way. I saw measures also which I suspected were not what they should have been". Under the barter system, Brinjaries, a set of migrant traders who traveled to the Nagpur area, passed through the hills with their pack bullocks and with them the hill men used to exchange the goods like lac, gallnuts, wax, tamarind and honey for salt, gingelly, pulses, wheat and other produce.

In this way, the tribals were exploited by the people of plain area and the British officers. The Colonial economic system has ruined the lives and culture of the people of hill area. They have no option except to adopt the revolutionary tendencies. The tribals enjoyed pleasant life during the dictatorship of the kings or the zamindars. They did not want to touch the tribes but they were enlisted in the army during the war like situation. Most of the rulers were elevated to the high position with the help of tribes. But the East India Company and the British Crown has disturbed the life style of hill men.

BRITISH POLICY TOWARDS HILL TRIBES:

The British government and its officers have adopted suppressive policy towards the tribes living in forests and on hills. The Forest products were robbed of by the British and they sold the same for getting huge profits. Generally, the collection of minor products is the duty of the tribes who carry on their life by selling them in weekly fairs or in plain areas. Most of the hill men are kidnapped and they were robbed. Finally, they were put to death. The innocent hill men do not aware of the cruel policies of the British. The pregnant ladies were put in service without giving them any kind of protection. Some of the British officers have committed rape on innocent tribal women. Their men compatriots were happened to be killed whenever they came to ask about the atrocities committed on their women folk. The British have imposed taxes on each palm tree for getting toddy from that tree by tribes. The British government have destroyed the huts of the tribes whoever failed to pay the tax as demanded by the British government. The people resorted violence against British for their cruel policies. Hence the British officers have suggested some changes in the administration. The Madras Government has passed series of Acts to introduce several changes in the administration setup in tribal areas. The India Act XIV of 1874 (The Scheduled District Act) and the India Act XV 1874 (The Local Laws Act) specified the agency in their schedules. With the extension of the Acts to the Madras Presidency, the agency came to be called a scheduled tract. No justice has been done to the cause of hill men. Their cases are pending before the court for a long time and they kept in prison without having a trial. The British Judicial Officers were corrupt and provide justice to the people those who pay the money as demanded by them.

Before the emergency of British administration, the village councils would conduct an enquiry and impose fines on the offenders who have committed offences against the tribal communities. The tribes would be punished who have violated the customary rules of the tribal community. Petty amounts would be collected as fine from the offenders. With the advent of the British, the tribals were exposed to the cumbersome judicial process. The hill men were exposed to enormous legal litigation and were exploited by their more advanced brethren. The Lacuna in the judicial process could be found in sending summons to the tribes. Summons may not be reached in right time as it is very difficult for court employees to reach hill area or the forest areas. Meanwhile ex parte judgments would be pronounced in case of the non-appearance of the tribal offenders who fail to receive the summons in time. The Civil Procedure Code has not been extended to the tribal areas as the people could not understand the trial procedure adopted by CPC.

The judicial system, corrupt police administration, oppressive tax policies, inhuman treatment of British and insult meted out towards the tribes are responsible for them to raise their arms against the British government. Most of the uprisings occurred in tribal areas against the British to protect them from the injustice done towards them. The Communication gap between British and tribes is a main cause for the misunderstanding created between these two parties.

CONCLUSION:

The British tried to exploit the resources available in the tribal areas. They have employed the labour from tribal communities to exploit the resources. No wages are paid to the tribal labour. Even pregnant women are pressed in service. Severe disciplinary action was employed against the community. Their leaders were killed with high handed. Several tribal leaders were kidnapped and employed cruel method to kill them. Their lands were occupied and sold to the people living in plain areas. They have hatched conspiracy which led to clashes between tribal communities and people living in plain areas. Many leaders came from plain areas to rescue the tribal community from the cruel hands of the British. One of such leaders was Alluri Sita Ramaraju. The tribal leader has given their able support to the heroes coming from plain area to protect their own people from the clutches of the British. All these issues are highlighted in this article.

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