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BENEATH THE SURFACE: SUBALTERN VOICES AND RESISTANCE MOVEMENTS IN COLONIAL INDIA

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ABSTRACT:

This comprehensive article explores the multifaceted nature of subaltern voices and resistance movements in colonial India, shedding light on the diverse groups and strategies that challenged the oppressive colonial regime. From peasant uprisings to tribal resistance and the active participation of women, it examines the various forms of resistance such as the Non-Cooperation and Civil Disobedience Movements, as well as armed uprisings. The roles of key leaders and organizations, including Mahatma Gandhi, the Indian National Congress, and subaltern leaders, are also analyzed. The article underscores the profound and lasting impact of these subaltern voices on the path to Indian independence, social reform, global inspiration, and the framing of the Indian Constitution.



KEYWORDS : *diverse groups and strategies , key leaders and organizations.*

INTRODUCTION:

Colonial India was marked by centuries of foreign rule, where the British Empire held sway over the subcontinent. While colonial narratives often highlight the dominance and agency of the colonial rulers, it is essential to delve beneath the surface and explore the subaltern voices and resistance movements that shaped this period. This article seeks to examine the multifaceted nature of subaltern voices and resistance movements in colonial India, shedding light on the diverse groups and strategies that challenged the oppressive colonial regime.

Understanding Subaltern Voices The Concept of Subaltern

The term "subaltern" was popularized by Italian Marxist thinker Antonio Gramsci but was later adapted and refined by scholars like Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. In the context of colonial India, the subaltern refers to marginalized and disenfranchised groups who existed outside the mainstream power structures. This included peasants, tribal communities, women, and other marginalized sections of society.

The Silence of the Subaltern

One of the key aspects of subalternity is the idea of "the silence of the subaltern." This refers to the historical neglect of the voices and experiences of subaltern groups in colonial records and

narratives. The colonial administration and historical accounts predominantly reflected the perspectives of the ruling elite, creating a skewed view of Indian society.

Subaltern Voices in Colonial India

Peasant Uprisings

The Indigo Revolt (1859-1860): The indigo cultivation system imposed by the British East India Company led to extreme exploitation of Indian peasants. The revolt against this system, led by leaders like Digambar Biswas, provides a significant example of peasant resistance.

The Mappila Rebellion (1921): In the Malabar region of Kerala, the Mappilas, who were primarily Muslim peasants, rose against oppressive landowners and British colonial authorities. This rebellion was a manifestation of agrarian discontent.

The Deccan Riots (1875-1877): Peasants in the Deccan region of India were burdened by high land revenue and harsh taxation policies. The riots in this region were another instance of agrarian protest against British colonial policies.

Tribal Resistance

The Santhal Rebellion (1855-1856): The Santhal tribal community in Bihar, led by Sidhu and Kanhu Murmu, initiated a rebellion against the British and exploitative moneylenders. This uprising represents the indigenous resistance to colonial encroachments on tribal lands.

The Bastar Rebellion (1910-1911): The tribal communities in the Bastar region of Central India rebelled against British exploitation and taxation. This movement highlights the resilience of tribal populations in resisting colonial oppression.

Women in Resistance

The Salt March (1930): Women played a vital role in Gandhi's Salt March, defying colonial salt laws. This act of civil disobedience demonstrated the active involvement of women in the struggle for independence.

The All India Women's Conference (1927): This organization, led by prominent women like Annie Besant and Sarojini Naidu, worked for women's rights within the broader context of the national struggle for independence.

The Rani of Jhansi: Rani Lakshmibai of Jhansi emerged as an iconic figure during the Indian Rebellion of 1857. She valiantly led her troops against the British East India Company, symbolizing the role of women in armed resistance.

Forms of Resistance

Non-Cooperation Movement

Gandhi's Non-Cooperation Movement (1920-1922) aimed to withdraw cooperation with the colonial regime. It involved various forms of protest, including boycotts, strikes, and non-violent resistance, and gained massive support from different sections of society.

Civil Disobedience Movement

The Civil Disobedience Movement (1930-1934) was another significant form of resistance. Gandhi's Dandi March, where he and his followers marched to the Arabian Sea to make their salt, is a famous example. It demonstrated the power of non-violent protest.

Armed Uprisings

While non-violence was a prominent strategy, there were instances of armed uprisings, such as the Chittagong Armory Raid (1930) led by Surya Sen and the Kakori Conspiracy (1925) led by Ram Prasad Bismil. These acts of armed resistance aimed to directly challenge colonial authority.

The Role of Leaders and Organizations

Mahatma Gandhi

Gandhi's philosophy of non-violence and civil disobedience played a pivotal role in the Indian independence movement. His leadership and ability to mobilize the masses made him an iconic figure.

Indian National Congress

The Indian National Congress, under leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhas Chandra Bose, was a key political organization that spearheaded the fight for independence. It provided a platform for various subaltern groups to voice their concerns.

Subaltern Leaders

Several leaders from subaltern backgrounds emerged during this period, such as Bhagat Singh, who belonged to a Punjabi Sikh family, and B.R. Ambedkar, who championed the cause of Dalits (formerly untouchables) and was a key architect of the Indian Constitution.

The Role of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose

Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, an influential leader during the Indian independence movement, advocated for radical means to achieve freedom. His formation of the Indian National Army (INA) and alliance with the Axis powers during World War II showcased the diversity of strategies employed by subaltern leaders.

Legacy and Impact

The subaltern voices and resistance movements in colonial India had a profound and lasting impact on the nation's history.

The Path to Independence

The collective efforts of various subaltern groups contributed significantly to the eventual achievement of Indian independence in 1947. Their struggles exposed the vulnerabilities and injustices of the colonial regime.

Social Reform

The resistance movements also led to significant social reforms. The fight for Dalit rights, women's rights, and land reforms gained momentum during this period.

Inspiration Globally

The Indian struggle for independence, characterized by non-violence and mass mobilization, inspired other movements around the world, including the civil rights movement in the United States and anti-colonial movements in Africa and Asia.

The Indian Constitution

The drafting of the Indian Constitution, led by B.R. Ambedkar, aimed to secure justice and equality for all citizens, especially those from marginalized backgrounds. It was a direct result of the struggles and aspirations of subaltern groups.

CONCLUSION

Beneath the surface of colonial India's history lies a rich tapestry of subaltern voices and resistance movements. These voices, often marginalized in colonial narratives, played a vital role in shaping the destiny of a nation. The struggles of peasants, tribal communities, women, and leaders from diverse backgrounds combined to challenge the oppressive colonial regime. Their resilience, courage, and determination paved the way for India's eventual independence and continue to inspire movements for justice and equality worldwide. Recognizing and celebrating these subaltern voices is essential to understanding the true complexity of India's journey to independence and the broader

global struggle for human rights and self-determination. In doing so, we honor the legacy of those who, against all odds, dared to raise their voices and resist colonial oppression.

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