

Social Unrest and Bhil Resistance in Nandurbar

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Abstract: This paper aims to examine how political crises of early 19th century became the major reason for confrontation and resistance among the Bhils. These resistances were mainly between indigenous people of villages of various tribal group of Nandurbar in Khandesh against the Britishers. The collective unrest against the colonizers formed the basis for voices for a territorial and cultural sovereignty for the Bhil communities. Before the nationalist movement for India the peoples of Bhil communities resisted against the British administration and asserted to formulate their own regional autonomy. The result of this struggle was division of Khandesh into two separate region one East-Khandesh and other West Khandesh in 1906.

Keywords: *Bhil, Chieftains, Maharashtra, Mulniwasi, Nandurbar*

I-INTRODUCTION: *Defining tribes and their movements and social unrest in Nandurbar*

The effectiveness of a movement for any social change is the pathway to understand it, for that movement is created to bring about progressive change in the society. It is not easy to access such of such movements of social change, and there occurs critical causal analysis which are required for the same. Societies which are struggling against atrocities unite to protest often against elite or those in power. When in a movement of common people unite and struggle against the established regime then the histories are made. Transformation could be defined as the situation when the uneasy situations in societies are created for commoners and they seek freedom from such a regime to create society based on their convenience and their set of suitable norms. The histories of tribal revolts are stories of such struggles.

The tribal societies in India, have their own unique perspectives for society and so does their struggle against systems in different times of history have their own shares of history to share:

(1) In India, although tribal communities are small in number, yet they have retained their autonomous cultural institutions within the diverse Indian society. The Bhil tribal societies have

kept their existence since the prehistoric times to the present. They are living with their traditional and natural life and now in post-colonial times struggling to retain it.

(2) Development is for human welfare in various capacities and to nurture progress as their vitality through education. However, there are minor glimpse of progress in the history of tribals as large part of their livelihood and history is resistance against aggression of the oppressors. Against the mainstream oppressions of the tribal the tribal started the struggle against institutions and systems. According to sources of mainstream cultures there was no information of civil culture due to which the people of the Ancient tribes of tribal people who lived on the Indus culture, various scholars and policy makers like Verrier Elvin, and Jawaharlal Nehru have endorsed this point of view. Scholars like Verrier Elvin, Gibson, Ghurye have called the tribals 'Bhils' as ancient or native inhabitants of India, the British anthropologists have used the word as tribal. After getting the independence of the country, according to Article 342 (1) of the Indian constitution, the social groups declared by the President of India and Constitution of India are called 'Scheduled tribes'.

The Bhil tribes of Dhule, Jalgaon and Nandurbar districts are nestled in the scenic hills of Satpuda. Social, economic, religious, cultural, political traditions are living their lives in the traditional patterns. The tribal regions were ruled forced to be ruled as per the British norms by the beginning of the 19th century and Christian missionaries began to convert the tribals to different religions. However, the tribals faced difficulties in their traditional rights. So, the tribesmen started attacking these new systems of governance and religious domination.

Movement is an effective means of social transformation and what happens in that society is not easy or spontaneous but there are some reasons behind it. When the struggles of the society reach its climax and huge challenges were faced by the people, great movements are born. When unequal problems arise in the society, assembly organizations come together to create a society based on equality of member interests to bring about change. Looking at the history of the tribals in India, it is clear that in almost all the divisions of India, they had large and small independent institutions. This tribal society has survived since time immemorial. He is living his traditional natural life. All human development takes place through various abilities and personality development through education. But the history of the tribals is basically the history of their resistance against the invasion. The tribals started the resistance and struggle against the colonialists.

Bhil as Tribal 'Indigenous communities of of Satpuda mountain range : Different interpretations of their identities, and culture

Verrier Elwin and Jawaharlal Nehru referred to the tribals as aborigines.¹ Dr. Govind Gare called the tribals natives as indigenous people of India.² Sociological thinkers like Risley and Martin have even called them as natives. The British used the word tribal. After the country

¹ Khodewad Devidas, (2018) *Tribal Social Life in Maharashtra*, Aurangabad, Vidya Books, First Edition P. 14

² G.B. Shah (2004) *Contributions of Dhule and Nandurbar Districts to the Freedom Movement*, Dhule, Vitrang Prakashan P. 17

gained independence, the social groups declared by the President were treated as Scheduled Tribes under Article 342 (1) of the Constitution of India.³

‘Satpuda Pradesh’ is mainly known as ‘Bhil Pradesh’. These include the Rajasthan, Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh mountain ranges, and parts of the Aravali mountains, the Nandpurbar, Dhule, Jalgaon, Amravati and Satpuda and Ajanta mountain ranges in the Aurangabad district of Maharashtra.⁴

Although many rivers, large and small, originate in the Satpuda Hills, this region is mainly known as the tributary of the Tapi and Narmada rivers. The region between these two rivers is known as 'Bhilwad'. Bhilwad in history. It extends from Satpuda to Vidhya, the Aravalli Range, to Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, and Rajasthan.⁵ When Lord Ramachandra was punished, he met a Bhil woman named Sabari. At that time the people living in this region were known as Shabar, Kirat, Nishad.⁶

While studying the Bhils in Dhule, Nandurbar and Jalgaon districts of Khandesh, the chief has to consider the sub-branch of Bhils. To understand the social and cultural life of the Bhils, one has to first think of the Bhur tribe in Nandurbar Dhule and then in the Jalgaon district.

There are many branches of Bhil tribe in Nandurbar district. It also includes regional groups. Vadavi, Vasave, Padvi, Naik etc. Gaviti, Mavchi, Pavara, Dhanka, Tadvi Bhil are the major branches and there are also some regional groups. It mainly includes Katle Bhil, Mathwadi Bhil, Mewasi Bhil, Ladhya Bhil, Ted Bhil, Bande Gawal, Naide Bhil etc. Includes local and regional groups. Among the Bhil tribes of Nandurbar district are Valvi, Vasave, Padvi, Naik, Gaviti, Mavshi, many clans. Bamne, Thackeray, Jangde, Ankat, Tadvi, Pawar, Patalya, More, Gosavi, Rahse, Pavara, Kokani, Dhar Pawar, Mavchi, Thackeray are some of the last names of his family.⁷

Bhil culture is characteristic. Cultures are constantly experiencing the changing colors of the seasons in the environment that are associated with their traditional traditions, festivals, and the life around them. The direct and indirect deep impressions of all of them seem to have had an impact on their socio-religious festival life. The festivals and rituals of the Bhil community are public and collective in nature. Nature's Neeli Chari, Nawai, Gavhan Pooja, Indal Pooja, Konsari Pooja, Diwali Pooja, Bhongartya Bazaar, Holi Pooja etc.⁸

³ Gare Govind, (2012) *Tribes of Maharashtra*, Pune, Continental Publications, 3rd Edition, P. 2

⁴ Govind Gare (2019) *Adivasi Veer Purush* (In Marathi) Pune, Srividya Prakashan, 4th Edition, P. 1

⁵ Govind Gare (2013), *Historical and Social Traces of Bhils in Satpuda*, (In Marathi) Pune, Continental Publications P. 1

⁶ Nikam Gautam, (2015) *Bhil Adivasi Adivasi*, (In Marathi) Chalisgaon, Vimalkirti Prakashan, 3rd Edition, P. 33

⁷ SAYSING K. PADVI, (2020) "History of Bhil Tribes in Nandurbar District (1820-1947)", M. Phil Dissertation, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Marathwada University, Aurangabad, P. 28

⁸ Gaviti Maheshwari, (2015) "Tribal Folk Tradition" Chinmay Prakashan Aurangabad, P. 55

II- BHIL RESISTANCE IN NANDURABAR: *'Historic accounts of Bhil revolts against British'*

There are 47 tribal tribes in Maharashtra. The Bhils staged several uprisings against Britishers during these times. Khajya Naik, Bhima Naik, Bhagoji Naik, Mewasha Naik, Kalu Baba, Daulat Padvi, Kanha, Tantya Bhil revolutionaries are leading this uprising. The British government seems to have taken steps against the Bhil uprising in 1818. Capt. John Briggs traced many of the villain's leaders. The movement of the Bhils was restricted and their footsteps were guarded by the British troops on the mountain steps. Attempts were made to win over some of the Bhils by giving allowances and pensions to the soldiers as well as the guards. This was done with the intention that it would be better for the British to rule the villas through their local chiefs and to protect their interests.

In 1819, the revolutionaries from Satpuda and Nandurbar, Dhule and Jalgaon revolted against the Bhils and imposed restrictions on their livelihood. And plundered his followers on the plateau. The British seem to have taken steps against Bhil. Some of the hills in the hilly areas were captured by the British. Then came the prevention. Bhilla was told to step up. But they did not appreciate it. In all the three districts of Khandesh, Nandurbar, Dhule and Jalgaon, there was chaos.⁹

The British government seems to have taken strong steps against the uprising of the Bhils in Khandesh in 1818. Captain Briggs discovered several heads of villas. The British troops patrolled the footpaths of the hills to check the movement of the Bhils and to weigh their supplies. Along with these military apparatuses, attempts were made to increase some of the Bhils by giving them allowances and pensions to work as guards. In 1819, the Bhils revolted on all sides and the hill station was captured by the rebels. And sent his followers to plunder the plateau. The government took steps against the rebels. Some of these hill stations were captured by the British. New leaders emerged from the Bhils to resist them. The Bhils were asked to surrender but they did not respond.

Khajja Naik had been doing without the British since 1851. His work was also satisfactory. He was the head of a police patrol patrolling the road from Sand to Shirpur. In 1851, he killed a Bhil criminal, in which he died. Khajja Naik could not escape the language charge. He was sentenced to ten years. In 1855, he was released.

In the meantime, he kept a close eye on events and movements in North and Central India. In 1847, Bhima Naik attacked Lieutenant Kennedy. In Khandesh, Khajja Naik's detachment revolted against the British government.¹⁰

In order to control the Bhils in Khandesh, Captain Outram, a soldier of the rebellious youth among them, was appointed. Built in 1831. They were raised in the battalion and included their troops. The famous Khandesh *Paltan* or well known as 'Western Khandesh Bhil Corps'. Captain Outram's behavior made it a strong and regiment in a noticeably short time. Bhil *Paltan* was a

⁹ Gare Govind, (2019) P. 8

¹⁰ Kamadi Budha Lava, (2017) "Information Literacy Booklet for Tribals" P. 1

very capable, disciplined, and combative battalion. When peace prevailed in the Bhil region, In 1871, the regiment was transformed into a police force.¹¹

III- APPRAISAL OF BHIL RESISTANCE IN WESTERN INDIA: *Bhil revolutionaries*

Bhilla Vir Thanedar Ditya Padvi was one of them. Thanedar Ditya Padvi was working as a caretaker in Valheri area of Talode taluka. He had a lot of fear in Kukurmunda, Navapur and Bhamer. Ditya Padvi was imprisoned in Dhule Jail for looting many villages in the area with the help of his accomplices and forcing some British troops to join him. It has been smelling for generations. Hence the struggle against aliens¹²

Gumaansingh Naik: Guman Singh Naik is the father of Khajja Naik, who rose to prominence in the 1857 War of Independence. Who was a heavyweight Bhil hero in Khandesh during 1818. Gumansingh Naik was one of them. He had a lot of fear in Saundhwa Palasner and Thalner areas. Appointed by Holkar, he was a traditional guard in Saundhwa Ghat. He had 470 Bhils and cavalry under his control, and he was in awe of all the Bhil chiefs in the area. The English have described him as A formitable beast of Satpuda. After the fall of the Peshwa, an agreement was reached after the battle of Mahidpur. At that time, Kukarmunda was a Thane with a lot of pressure from the Bhils. So, John Briggs was first assigned to Kukermunda. He studied the situation of the Bhils in Khandesh in detail. And he had a constructive attitude towards the Bhil villages from the beginning. He had a hard time managing these uncontrolled Bhil heroes in Khandesh, so he consulted with the then Bombay Presidency Governor Mount Stuart Elphinstone and tried to control the Bhils in Khandesh and to rehabilitate them. Capt. John Briggs From 1818 to 1823 he was the Collector and Political Agent of Khandesh. After realizing that the Bhil heroes could not be subdued by using a lot of force, they seem to have entrusted them with the task of taking care of the people by entrusting them, rewarding them with some villages or fixing annual salaries.¹³

Jhunjar Naik Chikhli: Jhunjar Naik Veer Purush Jahagirdar, original person Jhunjar Naik There were two institutions in Khandesh; one was Chikhali Gangatha at Chikhali and a resident Jahagirdar, and the second Shahada Chikhali was an institution called Naik Jahagirdar. After the Rajput kings from Central India conquered their kingdom, they descended from the hills and established their small, small kingdoms at the foot of Satpuda. Hatti Chhabda was a small kingdom at the foot of Satpuda. However, they continued to fight against those who took away their kingdoms.

¹¹ Govind Gare (2019) *Adivasi Veer Purush*, (In Marathi) P. 14

¹² Gautam Nikam (2017) *Krantikari Adivasi Jananayak*, (In Marathi) Vimalkirti Prakashan Chalisgaon, 3rd Edition P. 32

¹³ C. Rathwa (1999) "*Shur Amu Adivasi*" *Diwali Issue*, (In Marathi) Nandurbar, Adivasi Sahitya Sanskritik Parishad P. 22

Kuversingh Vasava: In the pre-British period also, Akkalkuwa taluka area was inhabited by Bhils. Kuversingh Vasava, son of Gangatha Jahagirdar Jiva Vasava of these Mewasi kingdoms, had established his own kingdom by breaking up some hilly areas in Rajpipla, Akkalkuwa area.¹⁴

Tantya Bhil: Tantya Bhil was born in Nimad Pokhar Yag village in Madhya Pradesh. Was dutiful since childhood. In order to monitor the atrocities taking place, Tantya Bhils started revolting against the British government and moneylenders. His farm was grabbed by moneylenders. Later, after the death of his parents, Shivaji Patil was a farmer from the village. All his land was not provoked by Shivaji Patil or Vatekar. He imposed it on them and sent them to jail. Tantya returned after serving his sentence in prison. But the landowners did not allow him to live happily ever after. People started slandering him. He finally left the village. Since Tantya Bhil is a brave man, the police started harassing him for stealing. He was again sentenced to 3 months in prison for police brutality. After serving his sentence, however, he decided not to remain within the borders of the British. He left the border with the British and went to live in the village of Sevare within their borders. But they called him a thief. From 1879 to 1889, Tantya Bhil's struggle with the English was loud. Due to their courage and fighting spirit, the British came to understand Tantya Bhils as Robinhood.

He raised the banner of rebellion against moneylenders, landlords, Englishmen and moneylenders. He gathered many companions. Formed a platoon of young soldiers. But he led this revolt for ten years and his name came to prominence in vertical India. In 1880, Shafa Rusun was captured by the British on the Tantya Bhil detachment due to a feud. He was punished in that he was kept in the waves of Jabalpur after which he revolted. The Bhils in Khandesh of Tantya Bhils have always been supported by the poor congregations. People began to recognize him as a friend of the poor. Those who report on the actions of the Tantya police and the poor may be heartened by the policies and the donations received from the looting. Many stories about Shreya and her treatment of women are still prevalent today. After many years of fighting with the police, one day he was injured by a police bat and his condition deteriorated. One day, while his sister was on Rakshabandhan, Tantya Bhilla was captured by the British and taken to a police station. He was sentenced to death in 1889 by a court order. The tribals staged a sit-in and appealed to Commissioner Karta not to hang Tantya Bhil. But to no avail. Finally, in 1889, Robinhood was hanged as a champion of the tribal people of Tantya Bhil.¹⁵

Khajja Naik and Bhima Naik: Khajja Naik served the British for twenty years from 1831 to 1851. He was working to protect traders and passengers traveling through the Sandhwa Ghat area on the north-south Mumbai-Agra road. Cotton cannabis was being transported from here. Khajja Naik was the head of the police squad guarding hundreds of bullock carts passing through Sandhwa Ghat. A captured robber was killed by Khajja Naik. He was sentenced to ten years in prison. He was released in 1855. Khajja Naik and requested to be hired again. But the British authorities ignored his request. In the year 1857, the atmosphere was getting hot. Then Khajja Naik came to mind. Seeing the situation, the British were ready to hire him again. He was

¹⁴ Vasave Kumar, (2017) *Tribal Special*, (Adivasi Visheshank, in Marathi) P. 21

¹⁵ P.C. Jhambhade (2019) *Pioneer tribal leaders in the Freedom struggle (raashtravaadi chalvaditil addya krantikari*, In Marathi) Part-2, First Edition, Thane, Sahyadri Prakashan, P. 25

not prepared for the injustice done to the tribals by the Khajja Naiks. In the meantime, he had not recovered. Khajja Naik, Bhima Naik, Mewasa Naik and Ananda gathered a group of Bhils with their companions and started looting villages. The British army was challenged. Some Bhils used to inform the British about intelligence. This is what Khajja Naik started to know. The British attacked the fort and destroyed the goods of the British government. Bhil started coming from all parts of Khandesh in Shirpur, Dhule, Nandurbar, Dhadgaon, Khetya and joined the army in unity. And created panic in almost all areas and began to levy taxes on passing bullock carts capturing Sendhwa Ghat.

The British took all possible measures to suppress the uprising. The number of troops in the district was increased. Several British officers were appointed to the area, giving them the power to take strict action. At Dharangaon, Malegaon, Dhule, Shahala, Sakri, Nandurbar, Kukarmunda, Akkalkuwa, Dang, Rajpipala, new battalions were formed for Bhilan. He tried to reduce his strength by encircling the Bhils in various places and fought with his comrades. When Major Evans reached Badwani, he repeatedly asked about Khajja Naik and Bhima Naik in the village of Bhila, but he did not give him any address. But the British had learned that a large army of Bhils was hiding in the Ambapur house. As soon as the British troops got the information, they moved around and surrounded the Bhils with weapons. The Bhil revolutionaries were caught and some were punished and some were hanged. Some died in it.¹⁶

‘The Bhil Raja’ Princely states or villages of Bhil chiefs during British colonial era

Dhule, Nandurbar district had special Mewasi and Akkalkuwa division had small states of Bhils. These include Nala, Raisingpur, Kathi, Gangatha, Nawalpur, Sagbara, Hojandai, Bhangrapani, Amoda, Moramba. Before the arrival of the British, the independent colonists of Bhils were ruling in this area. In Khandesh, after the establishment of British rule, the British gave the book Chiptons to the kings of the tribal states. And transformed their state into an estate. The kings were allowed to manage the estate and collect the revenue. Each king had his own police sway. There were killers, ammunition. The Chiptens built beautiful palaces to testify to their glory. Independence was achieved and the monarchy came to an end. After the dismissal of the status quo, the concerned chippons were given land and some cash as compensation. The land was later divided over several years. The footsteps of the monarchy came to an end. The Chiptens collected the government with their weapons. Now his heirs have only one or two tools required for worship during Dussehra. Throne, old things, they have nothing left.¹⁷

- 1) Kathi belonged to the Sansthan Padvi family. Raghuveer Singh was the king of this institutions.
- 2) Fateh Singh Padvi, heir of Nala
- 3) Savarsingh Padvi of the State of Singapore,
- 4) The king of Raisingpur Sansthan Raising Valavi
- 5) Gulab Singh Fatehsingh should be the king of Gangatha
- 6) Kuvarsingh Vasava, the king of Chikhali

¹⁶ V.K. Chaudhary (Edited) (1994) *Maharashtra State Gazetteer Jalgaon District*, P. 236

¹⁷ Sarjerao Bhamre (2015) *Tribal Uprising*, (In Marathi) Pune, Aparant Publication, 1st Edition, P. 63

Details of these states are profusely written in British records and these chief and their kinsmen continue to live in their respective villages or territories.¹⁸

There were some posts in the tribal administration to ensure smooth running of the administration. The place is still known by this name, according to the tradition of the Kothari, the treasurer, the smoky chief, the baron, the responsible village chief, the pawnbroker, the horseman and the former who looked after the army. In the Bhil tribal states, the Diwans appointed by the colonists were called Karbhari and the Diwans appointed by the British were called Residents. States were states, not states. They were given according to the agreement made with the British. Therefore, it is their duty to manage this estate and they seem to have been given their rights to that extent.

Akkalkuwa taluka was formed in 1999 after gaining independence. The institutions of Bhils which existed before Swarajya merged with India. Institutions in Akkalkuwa taluka of Khandesh and some villages went to Gujarat state. In the year 1947, all the laws applicable to West Khandesh were applied to Khandesh division. The Land Revenue and Bombay Tenancy and Agriculture Land Act came into force for this department. As a result, the task of fortifying the farm came to the government.

The Clan Act came into existence in 1956. And all the landlords were made guarantors and the farmers were made clans. According to this law, the price of land here was fixed at 80% of the total area. Accordingly, considering the situation of the Bhil tribes, a new law was passed in 1961 and the amount was reduced by 20% to only six times as much.

The Rayat Bhil region of Bhil region was considered to be a feudal state. The precedent of the Bhil Sansthan was theirs and the restricted freedom to govern them independently, then Brick and thereby nurtured them, and with whom the sentiments were tied to the back and the situation, a group of people in Bhil could represent Sir Damdar's ideas.¹⁹

Assessment of Bhil Movements in colonial era

Different scholars of various historiographic schools have interpreted Bhil revolts of Western India, especially that of Satpuda region of Nandurbar in various narratives. Their approaches varie from colonial supremacy to orientalists to that of the nationalits and marxists interpretations. However, each of these schools some distances itself from the indigenous or the actual Bhils perspective.

- a) According to J.R. Gusfield, communal demands for change in the established social structure are a form of social movement.
- b) According to Killian, the transformation that is driven by social change is called the social movement, the continuous collective effort of the whole society or the social group that has been proven.
- c) According to Ghanshyam Shah, it is a revolution that brings about social movement, rebellion, rebellion, reform movement and change in the political arena.

¹⁸ N.D. Bhamre (2015) *Cultural History of Tribal Tribes in Akkalkuwa Area, 1520 to 2000*, Dhule, Arth Publications, P. 31

¹⁹ Govind Gare, *Bhil Itihas in Satpuda*, (In Marathi) P. 136

- d) According to Dr. Govind Gare, the struggle of the tribals was against injustice and oppression of the society and for the sake of water, forest, and land.
- e) According to sociologist Anthony, the heart is powerful. The district was a faithful honest compassionate wise. This led to the formation of an independent faithful compassionate revolutionary in the district who started a movement against the British government in that place.

A social movement is a concerted and planned effort to bring about change in the structure or an element of a society. Social movements that bring about social reform or change are of a very broad nature. Tribals in some Bhils or places in India and Maharashtra revolted against the established system. Tribal societies had waged struggles and struggles for their survival in order to break the shackles of religious movements, social movements and injustices on their communities.²⁰ The struggle of the tribals for their survival and for the survival of the tribals living on a daily basis from the jungles of the forest forest forest and forest laws imposed farm taxes and the tribals could not afford to pay cash brought restrictions on the lives of the tribals. Consequently, the tribals struggled against all such atrocities.

IV: CONCLUSION

While tracing the Bhil history of Khandesh, it is important to remember the times of the Bhil adivasis or the indigenous communities of the Satpuda regions of Dhule, Nandurbar and Jalgaon districts of present politico-geographic territories. The history of the Bhil tribes or adivasis and their struggle against British atrocities which contributed immensely to the nationalist movement of India should be brought to the fore front once again. In the presented research paper research scholar has tried to bring out certain aspects of the Bhil warriors and revolutionaries struggle against the colonial order. The purpose of this research is not only to add to the academic debate but also to contribute to public domain. In order to inspire the tribal youth, to make them aware of the history of the Bhils of Khandesh and to inculcate among them the spirit of self-respect and with histories of honor and courage about the society.

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²⁰ Sudhakar L. Jadhav (2012) *Tribal Society in India*, Aurangabad, Chinmay Prakashan, P. 160

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