

# Resistance and British Colonialism: A Critique of Voices of Resistance during Colonial Domination in India

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## ABSTRACT

India in the 18th century failed to make progress economically, socially or culturally at an adequate pace. The increasing revenue demands for the state, the oppressions of the officials, greed and rapacity of the nobles, revenue-farmers and zamindars, and the depredations of the numerous adventurers roaming the land made life of the people quite wretched. Extreme poverty existed side by side with extreme riches and luxuries. Indian agriculture was technically backward and stagnant. The second half of the nineteenth century, however, witnessed the full flowering of national political consciousness and the growth of an organised national movement in India. Basically modern Indian nationalism arose to meet the challenges of foreign domination. The agony took form of political resistance like the revolts that include the Paharia resistance 1765-1782, the Kol Resistance 1832-1833, the Santal Hul of 1855-1856, the Sepoy Mutiny, resistance and challenges of Sanyasis and Fakirs of Bengal, the Chuar rebellions, the Moplah revolts, the Munda tribals' revolt, the Ulgulan (Great Tumult) of Birsa Munda, and the Jagdalpur region rising. The ferment of ideas gave an expansion touch to Indian culture. Raja Ram Mohan Roy debated religious points with the missionaries. The vernacular works like Hindoo Patriot, Rast Goftar, Indian Mirror, Sudharak and many others worked as a catalyst for resisting the British ideas. The theories of Dadabhai Naraoji through his Poverty and Un-British rule in India sparked the exploitative policies of the British.

**Keyword: Resistance, British raj, exaction, colonial, revolt.**

## Introduction:

India's freedom movement against the British was a historical witness to an overwhelming participation of people throughout the country. From Kashmir to Kanyakumari, Assam to Gujarat, thousands of men and women fought together against atrocities of the British Raj. Every class, every section of Indian society gradually discovered that the interests were suffering at the hands of the foreign rulers. Whenever the peasants struggled against landlord and moneylenders, the police and the army suppressed them in the name of law and order. Later in the 20th century, the worker in modern factories, mines and plantations found that in spite of lip sympathy the government sided with the capitalists. Other sections of Indian society were no less dissatisfied.

As a result of the spread of modern Western education and thought during the 19th century, a large number of Indians imbibed a modern rational, secular,

democratic, and nationalist political outlook. They began to study, admire, emulate the contemporary nationalists' movements of European Nations. Rousseau, Paine, John Stuart Mill and other western thinkers became their political guide, while Mazzini, Garibaldi and Irish nationalist leaders became their political heroes. From Dadabhai Naraoji, Syed Ahmed Khan and Justice Ranade to Tilak and Gandhiji, they agitated for a bigger role for the Indian languages in the educational system.

A large number of nationalists' newspapers like Hindoo Patriot, Kesari, Maratha and Rast Goftar made their appearance to present the British Raj policies that were not in the favour of Indians. Bankim Chandra Chatterjee and Rabindranath Tagore in Bengali, Lakshmana Bezbarua in Assamese, Vishnu Shastri Chiplunkar in Marathi, Subramanian Bharathi in Tamil, Bharatendu Harishchandra in Hindi and Altaf

Hussain Hali in Urdu were some of the prominent nationalist writers of the period.

Raja Ram Mohan Roy was the first Indian leader to start an agitation for political reforms in India. In 1866, Dadabhai Naoroji organised the East India Association in London to discuss the Indians question and to influence British public officials to promote Indian welfare. In his writings on economics he showed that the basis of cause of India's poverty lay in the British exploitation of India and the drain of its wealth.

### **Purpose and Motivation**

The purpose of this research article is to explore the diverse voices of resistance during the colonial era in India. It aims to highlight the role of individuals, communities, and movements that challenged colonial exploitation. The motivation behind this study is to shed light on the untold stories of resistance that shaped India's struggle for independence, offering a nuanced understanding of the colonial period and inspiring contemporary discussions.

### **Methodology**

The study is mainly based on historical analysis of secondary sources, including colonial records, autobiographies, letters, and newspapers. It examines the key figures and movements, highlighting their strategies, ideologies, and impact on India's resistance to British rule focusing on both violent and non-violent forms of protest.

### **Review of Literature**

"The Discovery of India" by Jawaharlal Nehru explores the history of Indian civilization and its struggle under British rule. "The Indian War of Independence 1857-1859" by Vinayak Damodar Savarkar is a seminal work that presents the revolt of 1857 as India's first war of independence, highlighting the resistance against British oppression. "Subaltern Studies", a series of books edited by Ranajit Guha, critically examines the role of marginalized communities, such as peasants and tribals, in resisting colonial rule. "Peasants and Non-Violence" by Bipan Chandra analyzes the role of rural uprisings in the freedom struggle. "Gandhi's Hind Swaraj" offers a

critique of colonialism and proposes a vision of self-reliance. However, these works do not cover the voices of entire India during the colonial hegemony, the proposed study therefore, focus on voices and evaluates it in national perspective with an intention to reveal its historical significance.

### **Resistance by the Indian**

The restrictions imposed on visits to holy places and strangled the sanyasis. The sanyasis with a tradition of fighting against oppression, aroused the popular cause and organised raids on the companies, factories, state treasuries and valiantly fought against the companies armed forces. Famine, enhanced land revenue demands and economic distress goaded the Chuar aboriginal tribesmen of Mindapur district to take up arms. The rajas of Dhalbhum, Kailapala, Dholka and Barabhum organiser revolt in 1768 and followed a scorched earth policy. The Munda tribesman of Chotanagpur and Singhbhum had their own scores to settle. The Kols of Chota Nagpur resented the transfer of land from Kol headman to outsiders like Sikh and Muslim farmers. The Santals of Rajmahal Hills resented the ill treatment at the hands of revenue officials, landlords and moneylenders. The Santals rebelled in 1855 under the Leadership of Sido and Kanhu, declared the end of the Company's rule and declared themselves independent. Extensive military operations brought the situation under control in December 1856. The government pacified the Santals by creating a separate district of Santal Paraganas.

The Ahom nobility in Assam accused the company's authorities of non fulfilment of pleasures of withdrawal from their territory after the conclusion of the Burman war. The attempt of the English to incorporate the Ahom's territory in the company's dominance sparked of a rebellion. In 1828 Ahoms proclaimed Gomdhar Konwar as their king and planned a March to Rangpur. The superior military power of the company aborted the move. A second revolt was planned in 1830. The company followed a Pacific policy and in 1833 handed over upper Assam to Maharaja Purandar Singh Narendra and apart of the Kingdom was resorted to the Assamese Raja.

Dangerous of Okha Mandal resented the imposition of foreign rule from the very beginning. The exactions of the Gaekwad of Baroda supported by the British government compelled the Waghera chief to take up arms, who carried on inroads into British territory during 1818-19. The rising of salt duty from 50 paise to ₹1 and 1844, in Surat, caused great discontent among the people. Some Europeans were attacked. Faced with a popular movement the government withdrew the additional salt levy. Similarly in 1848 the government's decision to introduce Bengal standard weights and measures had to be withdrawn against the people's determined bid to resort to boycott and passive resistance.

The East India company acted in a very high handed manner after acquisition of the northern Sarkars in 1765. Veerapandiya Kattabomman was a Palayakarrar or Polygar from Panchalankurichi, Thoothukudi District (then Tirunelveli area) in Tamil Nadu. The Polygars collected taxes from the peasants and in time, they almost acted as independent chieftains. When the Company started wresting control of the region, they came in conflict with the polygars on the question of who should collect taxes. Kattabomman refused to bow down to the British and waged a war against them. This is often called the First Polygar War of 1799.

### **Fearless writers who resisted the British Raj**

Before Mahatma Gandhi, there was Bal Gangadhar Tilak. He is widely seen as the first leader of the Independence movement and was in charge of two publications—Kesari in Marathi, and Mahratta in English. The papers were started along with Gopal Agarkar and Vishnushastri Chiplunkar, who were both noted figures in the freedom movement. Both papers regularly published nationalist articles, criticising the British on several occasions.

Eventually, the British arrested Bal Gangadhar Tilak on the charge of sedition, after an especially scathing report in which he supported revolutionaries who had tried to assassinate Douglas Kingsford, the then Chief Presidency Magistrate, and called for immediate "Swarajya".

Brothers Sisir Kumar and Motilal started the

Amrita Bazar Patrika, a daily which was published originally in Bengali and later in English.

The articles published in the Patrika were openly critical of the British regime and were instrumental in facilitating the freedom struggle. The Patrika journalists went through Lord Lansdowne's trash to piece together a torn up letter detailing plans to annexe Kashmir. When the article was published, the Maharaja of Kashmir went to London to lobby for his independence. When Tilak was arrested for sedition in 1897, a ruthless editorial was published against the judge who declared the sentence. Sisir Kumar also advocated the need for Indians to be involved in administration through his articles, seeking to release Indians from economic exploitation.

The paper was involved in several altercations with Lord Curzon, who was then a Viceroy, describing him as, "Young and a little foppish, and without previous training but invested with unlimited powers."

While Madan Mohan Malaviya is more popularly known as the founder of the Banaras Hindu University, his contributions to journalism during the freedom struggle are noteworthy. When the British government passed the Press Act and Newspaper Act, in 1908, Malaviya started an English daily, titled 'The Leader', in 1909, along with Motilal Nehru. The publication remained politically oriented, publishing several of Mahatma Gandhi's works, and remains a cornerstone of the writing of that era.

### **The Indian Women who resisted British Raj**

Matangini Hazra (1869 -1942) was a revolutionary in the Indian independence movement who fought for upholding Gandhian principles. Actively involved in the Quit India Movement, she led a procession of revolutionaries to seize Tamluk Police Station in West Bengal on September 29, 1942.

An active member of the revolutionary group "Naujawan Bharat Sabha", Durgawati Devi, after the assassination of British official JP Saunders, assisted in the escape of Bhagat Singh and Rajguru via train. As revenge for the hanging of Bhagat Singh, Devi tried to assassinate Lord Hailey, the former Governor of Punjab.

Born in Manipur, Rani Gaidinliu in 1932, was declared as a 'terrorist' for her involvement in the war against them. She was arrested the same year and sentenced to life imprisonment. She was released only after India got her independence, after which she continued to work for uplift of her people.

Pritilata Waddadar was a prominent leader of the anti-British movement in Chittagong. As a member of Surya Sen's revolutionary group, she \*led the armed attack\* on Pahartali European Club on September 23, 1932. One person died and several others were injured in this attack. To avoid arrest, she consumed cyanide and embraced death.

### **Resistance of the Prominent Leaders**

Popularly known as 'Master da', Surya Sen was actively involved in the Non-cooperation Movement. He is well-renowned for his leading role in the 1930 Chittagong armoury raid where he led a group of revolutionaries to raid the police armoury.

Apart from being a freedom activist and one of the founders of the Hindustan Republican Association Ram Prasad Bismil is renowned as a patriotic poet who wrote poems using pen names Ram, Agyat and Bismil. He was actively involved in the Mainpur conspiracy and the Kakori conspiracy in UP.

Bir Tikendrajit Singh was the prince of the independent kingdom of Manipur and the commander of Manipuri army. The Anglo-Manipur war took place under his leadership. On March 31, 1891, the British government sent military force against Manipur from Kohima, Silchar and Tamu. The Manipuri army fought bravely against the British under the leadership of Bir Tikendrajit Singh but eventually lost.

Bagha Jatin (1879-1915), with a dream of saving his motherland from the clutches of British rule, the revolutionary led the Jugantar party in Bengal. On September 10, 1915, he died after being critically injured in a gunfight with the British police. Inspired by Swami Vivekananda's ideals, one of the bold statements made by Bagha Jatin was: "We shall die to awaken the nation".

Born at Medinipur in West Bengal, Khudiram Bose was among the youngest martyrs of India's

freedom struggle against the British. At just 15, he had joined Anushilan Samiti and took part in several revolutionary activities. He along with Prafulla Chaki attempted to kill British Chief Magistrate Douglas Kingsford at Muzaffarpur in 1908. However, their attempt was unsuccessful and it accidentally led to the death of two British women. This led to Khudiram's arrest and subsequent death sentence. On August 11, 1908, at the age of 18, he was hanged to death.

After the Chauri Chaura incident in 1922 when Mahatma Gandhi decided to withdraw the movement, Ashfaqulla Khan along with his friends, decided to form an organisation named Hindustan Republican Association. He was later arrested for his involvement in Kakori Train Robbery and sentenced to death.

Through the 1882 Madras Forest Act, when the British imposed its restrictions on the free movement of tribal people in the forest, Alluri Sitarama Raju led the Rampa Rebellion of 1922 against the British Raj. This rebellion which continued till 1924, only came to an end when he was shot dead by the British forces.

### **Conclusion:**

The voices of resistance during the colonial era in India were pivotal in challenging British imperial rule and inspiring the movement for independence. These voices came from various sectors of society, ranging from political leaders and intellectuals to peasants and workers. Leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Subhas Chandra Bose, and Bhagat Singh mobilized masses through non-violent protests, armed struggle, and revolutionary ideologies. Gandhi's principle of non-violent civil disobedience, particularly through movements like the Salt March and Quit India Movement, galvanized millions in their fight for independence.

Alongside political leaders, writers and intellectuals such as Rabindranath Tagore, Lala Lajpat Rai, and Bipin Chandra Pal used literature and speeches to awaken national consciousness and critique colonial policies. The resistance also took the form of cultural revival, with efforts to revive



indigenous practices, arts, and languages as a rejection of colonial cultural dominance.

Furthermore, rural and marginalized communities, such as in the Chotanagpur and Santal Parganas, and through labour strikes, voiced their discontent against exploitation. The resistance of women across the country was no less challenging to the foreign rule. Even tribal women played an important role through the ages. These multiple forms of resistance created a powerful, unified force that eventually led to India's independence in 1947. The voices of resistance during the colonial era not only contributed to political freedom but also laid the foundation for the ongoing struggle for social and economic justice in post-colonial India.

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