



Original Article

# From Tradition to Transformation: Gandhian Movements and Tribal Communities in Maharashtra

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## Abstract

*The history of tribal communities in India demonstrates a transition from localized struggles for natural resources to Active participation in the National Freedom Movement. Tribals were initially resisted exploitation by land owners, moneylenders and colonial forest law during the Moderate and Extremist phases of the National Freedom Struggle. Their resistance remained localized. However, The Gandhian era transformed their participation by connecting tribal community's grievances to the National Freedom Movement. Gandhi's visits to tribal districts in Maharashtra during Non-Cooperation movement created bridge between tribal society & mainstream. The Civil Disobedience Movement witnessed large scale forest satyagrahas in Tribal districts in Maharashtra. The Quit India Movement of 1942 marked turning point of freedom struggle, where tribal communities were guided by Gandhian ideal and local leadership. They had challenged colonial authority through Forest Satyagraha, Protests, Martyrdom & sabotage. This study highlights how tribal resistance in Maharashtra evolved from traditional localized, isolated protests into transformative participation in Indian Freedom Struggle. From moderate phase to Gandhian phase Tribal communities' protest transform from individual to broad national movement. The study explores how tribal communities in Maharashtra were influenced by Gandhian Non-violence thoughts. Before Gandhian era tribal lived in isolation because their culture are deeply rooted in nature but in Gandhian era they were join the national struggle for freedom and social reform. In Maharashtra there were many tribal people join Gandhian Movement like Non-Cooperation, Civil Disobedient, Quit India movement and various Satyagrahas. In Maharashtra, Tribes were involved in various forest Satyagrahas. Tribal communities were started to follow Gandhian Ideals like non-violence, self-reliance, and satyagrahas.*

**Keywords:** Gandhian Movement, Tribal Communities, Maharashtra, Non-cooperation Movement, Civil Disobedience Movement, Quit India Movement, Forest Satyagraha.

"No one who hopes to construct Swaraj on the foundation on Non- Violence can afford to neglect even the least of India's son. Adivasis are too numerous to be counted among the least"

-M. K. Gandhi

(M.K.Gandhi, Adivasis, 1942) (M.K.Gandhi, The Collected Wroks of Mahatma Gandhi, 1994)

## Introduction

The history of tribal communities in India reflects a long struggle from Tradition to Transformation. Tribal communities are deeply rooted with nature & their culture. In the moderate phase 1885-1905 of Freedom Movement tribals were already resisting exploitation of moneylenders, Forest & Land restrictions of British policies. Their struggle remains localized. After that in Extremist phase 1905-1919 they were started to challenging forest policies of British. But their struggle remains against British officials, Landlords & exploitative moneylenders. In Gandhian Phase 1920-1947, Gandhi introduced new dimension of resistance that extended beyond mainstream. Gandhi's leadership transformed the national Movement into Mass Movement. Tribals started to participate Non-Cooperation Movement, Civil Disobedient, Quiet India Movement & adopted Gandhian ideals. The tribes transitioned from traditional modes of protest to a broader engagement with the National freedom struggle.

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## Methodology

### 1. Research Design:

- Historical & Qualitative approach
- It focus on tribal participation in Gandhian Movements in Maharashtra
- 2 Objectives:
  - To understand tribal participation in Gandhian Movements in Maharashtra
  - To Study how Tribal were influenced by Gandhian thoughts and Ideals
  - To find impact of Gandhian philosophy in tribal areas of Maharashtra
- 3 Data Sources:
  - Primary Sources:
    - Government reports, Online Archival documents, district gazetteers
    - Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi
    - Books written by Mahatma Gandhi
    - Magazines like Harijan & Young India
  - Secondary Sources:
    - Articles and various research papers
- Study Area:
  - Nandurbar, Dhule, Nashik, Jalgaon, Thane, Chandrapur Etc.
- Data collection method:
  - Document Study of archival and published primary & secondary sources

### Tribal Communities in Maharashtra & Gandhian Movement:

According to 2011 Census, Maharashtra state hold second rank in total tribal population in India. There are 36 Districts in Maharashtra. Scheduled areas of Maharashtra are spread over 13 Districts-. It covers 50 tehsils and 5809 villages. (The Administration of Scheduled area in Maharashtra state, 2016-17) That's why Maharashtra state played significant role in the Gandhian Movement in accordance with tribes.

The Non-Cooperation Movement was turning point in the history of the Indian national struggle. Mahatma Gandhi travelled across the India to promote non-cooperation movement & its goal of self-rule that is "Swaraj". Gandhi started to collecting fund- 'Tilak Swaraj Fund' & set a goal of collecting 1 crore by 30 June 1921. (Speech by Mahatma Gandhi, 1921) On February 12, 1921 Gandhi reached Sindkheda in Dhule & greeting with 500Rs. Then he visited Shahada in Nandurbar where around 2000 people gathered to listen his speech. He urged people to live with harmony, use of Khadi & maintain Brotherhood. Total 1000 Rs fund was collected then he moved to Dondaicha for night. During a same week, he toured East Khandesh with his wife, Vasudev Vittal Dasatane of Bhusavwal & others. Where he collected 21,000Rs Fund. His main aim was encourage donation. If there were no contributions he moved forward without stopping. On 15 to 19 February Gandhi addressed around 2000 people in Malegaon in Nashik & he received 500 Rs funding. He encouraged more collections. At Nandgaon in Nashik he collected 500Rs fund.

At Nashik itself he opened Khadi shop and received 1387Rs including meeting in Sinner where 300 people are gathered for Khadi shop opening. He left Nashik on 16 February for Sangamner in Ahemdnagar. He spoke around 1000 peoples and collecting 450Rs through Khadi sales & donations. He gave speeches at the Vishram Baug, Bagade Theater and Nehru Maidan in Ahemdnagar and collected 5000Rs through donation & khadi sales. (Mahatma Gandhi 1922-1929) According to this Gandhi visited tribal Districts in Maharashtra for fund collection but he used to interact with tribal people. Gandhi created a bridge between Tribal society & National freedom movement.

Gandhi says Non-cooperation & Civil Disobedience are different but Branches of same tree that is Satyagraha. (M.K.Gandhi, Young India, 1924) Tribals were participated in Civil Disobedience movement 1930-1934 in various ways like Forest Satyagrahas, Boycott Liquor & use of Khadi- Self-reliance. There were several forest satyagrahas instance in Scheduled area in Maharashtra. Forest satyagrahas campaign in Maharashtra started on 22 July 1930 in Ahemdnagar. (Bombay Congress Bulletin, 1930) (K.K., Civil Disobedience Movement, Apr-Sept 1930, 1930) In Nasik district, Sitaramdas Shastri led Forest Satyagrahas; But He was arrested at Nampur village and arrested for six months. On 23 June 1930, volunteer camp was started at Nampur village in Satana taluka where 10,000 people gathered to hoist the National flag. Largest Satyagraha occurred at Mangi Tungi Hilly region On 5 August, 1930 where 100000 people were joined. (Bombay Presidency Police Abstract of Intelligence, Poona no 34, 23 August 1930) (K.K., Civil Disobedience Movement Apr-Sept., 1930) Forest satyagrahas was also occurred in Khandesh on 27 August in Dhulia. Leaders were Jawadekar, Kapadana & Daulat Patti. Second satyagrahas in Khandesh occurred at Shahada in Nandurbar district, around 6,090 persons had gathered for Satyagraha. (Bombay Presidency Police Abstract of Intelligence, Poona No. 34, August 1930) (K.K., Civil Disobedience Movement Apr-Sept. 1930, 1930, p. 851)

On 1930 at Chandrapur Forest Satyagraha saw mass meetings and protests. On 8 August, 3,000-4,000 people gathered at Lohara. At Brahmapuri, 8 volunteers broke forest laws and were arrested for five months with 100 Rs fine for each. A meeting at Chandrapur on 9 August, 1930 honored them. (Bombay Presidency Police Abstract of Intelligence, Poona no 34, 23 August 1930) (K.K., Civil Disobedience Movement Apr-Sept. 1930, 1930, p. 1014) In Yeotmal working committee was formed under M.S.Ane and Dr. B.M. Tembe with other local leaders for forest Satyagraha. Speakers urged people to oppose the forest laws and government policies. Women volunteers were trained as nurses and congress Ambulance Association was set up in Yeotmal. (Bombay Presidency Police Abstract of Intelligence, Poona No. 34, August 1930) (K.K., Civil Disobedience Movement Apr-Sept. 1930, 1930) (K.K., Civil Disobedience Movement Apr-Sept. 1930, 1930, pp. 963-971) In this way, Gandhians and local leaders played crucial role in involvement of the tribal communities. Tribals Societies are deeply connected with nature that is Jal, Jangle, and

Jamin that's why they were involved in Forest Satyagrahas against British policies.

The Quit India Movement of 1942 marked a crucial phase in Indian Freedom Struggle. Gandhi had given mantra to the people "Do or Die; We shall either free India or die in the attempt. We shall not live to see the endurance of our slavery." (Gandhiji's address before the A.I.C.C at Bombay, 1942) In Maharashtra along with student agitations & urban protests, the movement witnessed significant participation of tribal communities. Especially in districts like Nandurbar, Dhule, and Thane & Chandrapur. Tribal communities influenced by Gandhian ideals and guided by local leaders, challenged British authority by cutting communication lines, refusing forest law, attacking symbols of British power. Their participation reflected their growing political consciousness. The Quit India movement became a platform where tribal community's resistance merged with Indian struggle for Independence.

Tribal communities in Maharashtra are guided by local leaders. For instance G.H. Deshpande addressed gatherings in Khandesh and Ahemdnagar Districts, where he criticized America & England for supporting to fascist power and exploitation of weaker nations. He argued that India's administration should be transferred to Indians so they could extend help Russia and China. In East Khandesh, D.L.Joshi delivered speech and advising people to withhold any form of support to World war efforts. At Nashik W.G.Yardi & V.N.Naik made objectionable speeches saying that they had no faith in the British rule which collapse in the future. At Ahemdnagar A.S.Patwardhan while addressing a people, he said that, he learnt from soldier about discrimination between Indian & British, Indian soldiers were sent to the front without sufficient protection. (A.S, 2014) In that way Tribal communities were influenced by local leaders. And they were actively participated in Indian Freedom Struggle.

After the session of All India Congress Committee at Bombay, immediately M.K. Gandhi & members of congress working committee arrested under Government orders. Aftermath students & other groups launched large scale protests by violence; these included deliberately destroy of telephone and telegraph lines, obstructing traffic, arson public property & assaults on the police. The demonstration spread rapidly across several districts, including Nashik, East Khandesh. (A.S, 2014, p. 783) Haratal & Prabhat Feries taken out by students in various Districts against Government. On 9 September 1942, At Nandurbar Shirish Kumar Mehata was leading a protest against the Government. He carried the Tiranga & raised slogan of "Vande Mataram". The police started Lathi charge on protesters. They started to open fire when their Lathi charge could not work; Shirishkumar killed on the spot with him Dhansukhalal Wani, Ghanshyam Das, Shashidhar Ketakar & Laldas died. ([nandurbar.gov.in](http://nandurbar.gov.in)) Mob of 1000 people at Nandurbar threw stones at the police and resident magistrate, one sub-inspector, 2 policemen were injured by stones. The police had open fire on mob where 4 were killed & 15 were injured. (A.S, 2014, p. 631) On August 26, At Pachora in East Khandesh Supadu Bhaodu Patil arrested by police, when the mob overpowered police & try to snatch

revolver of sub-inspector as a result of which two were killed and 7 were injured. (A.S, 2014, p. 627) Accordance with this incident we consider that tribals were actively participated in the Quit India movement 1942.

#### Conclusion:

The evidence drew from Gandhi's tours, police intelligence reports, and the 1942 Quit India Movement records shows that tribal communities in Maharashtra were active participants in the freedom struggle. Their involvement in the Non-Cooperation, Civil Disobedience, and Quit India Movements shows a gradual transformation from localized protests against forest law and land restrictions to engagement with Gandhian nationalistic ideals of Swaraj, Khadi, and Satyagraha. The Gandhian leadership provided tribals a unifying framework that merged their struggle for Nature that is "Jal, Jangle, Jamin" with the broader demand for independence. The role of tribal communities in Maharashtra reflects the broader path of India's freedom movement—from tradition to transformation.

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#### Conflicts of interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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