

NATIONAL LAW UNIVERSITY ODISHA



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**TITLE: BIRSA MUNDA'S CONTRIBUTION IN THE FREEDOM
STRUGGLE AND AUGUST KRANTI**

SUBMITTED BY:

TANISTHA MANGARAJ

21BA110

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BIRSA MUNDA'S CONTRIBUTION IN THE FREEDOM STRUGGLE AND AUGUST KRANTI

The use of the name Birsa in Jharkhand politics was a case of controversy and that when the name was first used during the time of August Kranti the Christian Adivasi's threatened to secede from the Adivasi Mahasabha during the Jharkhand Politics. Birsa Munda was not only regarded as a revolutionary but by the tribal people in Jharkhand he was regarded a messiah who could save them from the attacks by the outsiders(dikus). The British authorities issued a number of legislative rules (1859, 1869, 1879, 1903, 1908) that regulated the tribal population's eviction from land, but they were unable to stop the tribe's continued land loss. Tribal upheavals resulted from this, with the peasantry staging many uprisings against the dikus and the colonial authorities.¹ These outbreaks were regional and sporadic, but they had agrarian roots at their root. Folk songs were a common way for the inhabitants to express their grievances. They sang the following in one of the Birsite traditional songs:

“Birsa Bhagwan is our leader. He has come down to us in the land ... Let us get ready with quiver, arrow and sword, we shall assemble on the Damodar hill. The father of the earth speaks up there. We shall not be afraid of monkeys, we shall not leave the zamindars, moneylenders and shopkeepers. They occupied our land. We shall not give up our khuntkatti rights. From leopards and snakes, we reclaimed our land. The happy land was seized by the enemies.”

According to K S Singh, "the transformation of the Mundari agrarian system into non-communal, feudal, zamindari or individual tenures was the key to agrarian disorders that climaxed in religious-political movements of Birsa" (1966:1). "Tribals gradually lost their land to non-tribal moneylenders and landlords in numerous villages in various tribal areas in Bihar, Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, and Maharashtra, lowering their status to that of renters or workers. Certain tribal leaders converted to Hinduism and extended invitations to non-tribal peasants to relocate within their territories. Seasoned farmers, took the land away from the aboriginal people and hired them as labourers.

When reading Singh's chapter on "The Religious Movement of Birsa and the Birsaite," anyone familiar with the nineteenth-century Bengal renaissance would see a striking parallel between the two patterns of cultural creativity. Take, for example, the Brahmo Samaj movement led by Rammohun Roy in Calcutta, which rejected modern Hindu practises and beliefs while reinterpreting Hindu history, rediscovering Vedantic monotheism, and upholding an uncompromising puritanical ethic. Birsa also opposed "the Asur bongas and their priesthood" (p. 153) as well as the modern Munda "religion centering round the sacrificial grove, Sarnaism." Birsa rediscovered "the concept of fatherhood of God or Aba... who will protect his votaries and be the sole object of the sacrifice" as a result of missionary interaction.

The celebration of Janajatiya Gaurav Diwas therefore marks as an important time in Jharkhand politics and throws light on the contribution of Birsa Munda towards tribal uprising during the British rule in India.