

Tribes, Peasantry, and the Moral Economy of Resistance: Subaltern Agency in Angul and the Odisha Feudatory States (1836–1948)

SOUMYA RANJAN PRADHAN

Lecturer in History

Angul Mahila Mahavidyalaya, Angul (Odisha) India

ABSTRACT

This study examines the evolution of tribal and peasant resistance in Angul and the Odisha Feudatory States from 1836 to 1948 through the lens of moral economy and subaltern agency. It argues that resistance emerged from disruptions to customary rights over land and forests caused by colonial expansion and princely exactions. Tracing developments from early tribal uprisings and the Angul conflict of 1848 to the Prajamandal movements and radical mobilisation of the 1940s, the paper highlights the transformation of localised protest into organised political action. It emphasises the role of rural communities, village networks, and collective consciousness in shaping regional resistance and contributing to broader political change.

Keywords: Moral Economy, Subaltern Agency, Tribal–Peasant Resistance, Odisha, Feudatory States

INTRODUCTION

The history of resistance in the Odisha Feudatory States has often been narrated through the actions of rulers, political elites, and colonial administrators. While such approaches help reconstruct the political framework of opposition to colonial and princely authority, they frequently overlook the role of tribes and peasants who constituted the overwhelming majority of the population. In the forested and agrarian region of Angul and the neighbouring feudatory states of Talcher, Athmallick, and Pal-Lahara, resistance was deeply rooted in the lived experiences of rural society. From the confrontation between Raja Somanath Singh Jagadev and the British in 1848 to the Prajamandal movements of the twentieth century, tribal and peasant communities played a crucial role in sustaining resistance against colonial expansion and princely oppression.

Colonial records often depicted tribal revolts as disorder or criminality, while nationalist historiography tended to subsume them within the broader narrative of

the freedom struggle. Such interpretations obscured the autonomous political agency of subaltern groups. Yet the demographic and social structure of the region dominated by tribal communities such as the Kondhs, Sabaras, Bhuiyans, Gonds, and Juangs alongside agrarian groups like the Chasa cultivators ensured that resistance movements drew their strength from rural society. Colonial revenue policies, forest regulations, and princely exactions disrupted customary rights over land and forest resources, generating widespread resentment.

This study therefore examines the moral economy of resistance and the role of tribal and peasant communities in shaping political mobilisation in Angul and the Odisha Feudatory States between 1836 and 1948, tracing the transformation of local protest into organised popular movements.

Historiography and Theoretical Framework:

The historiography of tribal and peasant resistance in colonial India has evolved significantly across different intellectual traditions. Early colonial writings interpreted

such movements through the lens of administrative control and imperial authority. Tribal uprisings and agrarian disturbances were commonly portrayed as irrational, violent, or rooted in superstition, thereby legitimising colonial intervention in forested and frontier regions. In Odisha, for instance, revolts among the Khonds were often attributed to resistance against humanitarian measures such as the suppression of the Meriah sacrifice. Such interpretations obscured deeper structural causes, including disruptions to customary land systems, interference in indigenous religious practices, and the expansion of colonial administration.

Nationalist historiography in the mid-twentieth century reinterpreted these movements within the broader framework of India's anti-colonial struggle. It acknowledged the role of economic exploitation, excessive taxation, and administrative oppression in provoking resistance. However, it continued to privilege elite leadership and organised political institutions, often reducing tribal and peasant movements to spontaneous or secondary expressions of discontent. In Odisha, resistance in the Feudatory States was largely analysed in relation to Prajamandal movements and their links with the Indian National Congress, leaving earlier forms of mobilisation relatively neglected.

The historiography of Odisha reflects these broader shifts. Colonial records focused on maintaining order, while nationalist narratives subsumed regional struggles within the larger freedom movement. More recent regional studies, however, have foregrounded the Garhjat states—such as Angul, Talcher, Athmallick, and Pal-Lahara—and highlighted the central role of rural society in resisting both colonial expansion and feudal oppression. These studies establish that tribal and peasant communities formed the core of resistance in the region.

A major shift occurred with the emergence of the Subaltern Studies school in the 1980s, which challenged elite-centric interpretations and emphasised the autonomous political agency of marginalised groups. This perspective views rural insurgency as a distinct form of political action shaped by lived experiences, cultural practices, and collective consciousness. Building on this approach, the concept of the moral economy provides a useful analytical framework. It suggests that resistance often arises from perceived violations of customary norms of justice and reciprocity. In the Odisha Feudatory States, colonial policies and princely exactions disrupted traditional rights over land and forests, provoking

resistance. Movements such as the Angul conflict of 1848 and later uprisings thus reflected efforts to defend customary rights, dignity, and local autonomy, underscoring the active agency of tribal and peasant communities in regional history.

Socio-Economic Structure of Angul and the Feudatory States:

A proper understanding of resistance movements in Angul and the neighbouring Feudatory States requires close attention to the region's socio-economic structure. During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, resistance was deeply rooted in a predominantly rural society composed largely of tribal communities and cultivating peasants. The forested terrain, dispersed settlements, and minimal urbanisation in areas such as Angul, Talcher, Athmallick, and Pal-Lahara created a social environment in which agrarian and tribal groups dominated demographic and economic life. Consequently, opposition to colonial and princely authority emerged primarily from the lived experiences of rural communities rather than from urban elites.

Demographically, the region was characterised by sparsely populated villages situated within forest and hill tracts. Census data from 1872 record Angul's population at 130,184¹, with similar patterns evident in neighbouring states, where population growth between 1891 and 1941 was accompanied by agricultural expansion but limited urban development². Tribal groups such as the Kondhs, Sabaras, Bhuiyans, Juangs, and Gonds inhabited upland and forested zones, while agrarian communities—especially the Chasa cultivators—formed the backbone of the rural economy in plains and valleys. This demographic composition ensured that resistance movements were largely driven by rural society.

The agrarian structure was organised around village-based cultivation supported by customary land relations. The Chasas, as the principal cultivating community, played a central role in agricultural production and local governance³. Village administration operated through intermediaries such as the Padhan, Goantia, Sabarkar, or Ganjhan, who facilitated revenue collection and maintained local order. These officials were often compensated with rent-free land (Bhogra), reinforcing their intermediary status⁴. While such institutions contributed to local cohesion, they also served as channels for enforcing princely demands, including taxation and labour obligations. Increasing pressure on land, rising

revenue demands, and coercive practices gradually intensified peasant discontent and fostered collective resistance.

Alongside the agrarian system existed a substantial tribal population whose livelihoods depended on forests and shifting cultivation. Tribal communities viewed land as a communal resource governed by customary norms. However, colonial interventions—particularly forest regulations, revenue settlements, and administrative expansion—undermined these systems. Restrictions on shifting cultivation and growing control over forest resources disrupted subsistence patterns and threatened both economic security and cultural autonomy. In response, tribal groups became active participants in resistance movements, often offering logistical support and utilising their knowledge of terrain. Their defence of customary rights over land and forests formed a crucial component of the broader moral economy that underpinned resistance in the region.

Colonial Expansion and Transformation of Rural Society:

The expansion of colonial authority in eastern India during the nineteenth century brought profound changes to the socio-economic and political structure of Angul and the neighbouring Feudatory States. Colonial intervention did not simply introduce new administrative mechanisms; it disrupted long-established systems of land use, forest management, and village governance that had previously regulated relations among tribal communities, peasants, and local authorities. As colonial policies of taxation, governance, and forest control deepened, the existing social balance of rural life began to erode, generating widespread resentment among populations dependent on customary rights over land and forest resources. These transformations created the structural basis for recurring resistance movements in the region.

British authority in the hill tracts of Odisha expanded gradually during the early nineteenth century, often in response to perceived frontier instability and tribal unrest. Although many areas remained under indirect rule through the Feudatory States, colonial officials increasingly intervened in local administration under the pretext of maintaining order. The establishment of specialised arrangements such as the Agency of the Hill Tracts of Orissa marked a significant step toward direct control⁵. These administrative structures concentrated judicial, executive, and military powers in the hands of colonial

administrator, thereby extending state authority into regions that had previously enjoyed relative autonomy. Such interventions frequently undermined indigenous political systems and created tensions between colonial authorities, princely rulers, and local communities.

A major consequence of colonial expansion was the transformation of traditional relationships between tribal communities and forest resources. For tribes such as the Khonds, Bhuiyans, Juangs, and Sabaras, forests were central to subsistence, providing land for shifting cultivation as well as access to hunting and forest produce. Colonial policies increasingly sought to regulate these resources, restricting customary practices and bringing forests under state control. The curtailment of shifting cultivation and the imposition of forest laws disrupted established patterns of livelihood and weakened communal systems of landholding. This process effectively dispossessed tribal communities of their customary rights, generating deep resentment and contributing to organised resistance⁶.

At the same time, colonial administrative expansion reshaped the agrarian structure. Revenue settlements and fiscal policies imposed new and often arbitrary demands on cultivating communities. Peasants faced rising assessments, illegal cesses, and compulsory labour obligations, either directly under colonial administration or through princely states operating within the framework of British paramountcy⁷. These demands were frequently unrelated to agricultural productivity and placed heavy pressure on subsistence economies. Combined with increasing population and competition for land, these changes intensified rural distress. The cumulative impact of forest restrictions and agrarian pressures undermined economic stability and transformed local grievances into broader resistance against both colonial and princely authority.

Early Phases of Resistance (Mid-Nineteenth Century):

The earliest phases of resistance in Angul and the neighbouring Feudatory States must be understood within the broader context of tribal unrest and political transformation that accompanied the expansion of colonial authority in eastern India during the nineteenth century. The hill tracts of Odisha were inhabited predominantly by tribal communities whose social organisation, land use patterns, and religious practices differed significantly from those of the agrarian plains. Colonial attempts to regulate these regions through administrative intervention, revenue

demands, and cultural reform disrupted established systems of authority and generated widespread discontent. Within this context, resistance movements emerged in various forms—ranging from tribal revolts against colonial intrusion to conflicts involving indigenous rulers who sought to defend their autonomy and customary relationships with tribal society.

Tribal Resistance and the Khond Rebellion:

Among the earliest and most significant expressions of resistance in the region were the uprisings of the Khond tribes inhabiting the hill tracts of Odisha. The Khonds possessed a distinctive socio-economic system based on shifting cultivation, communal landholding, and ritual practices closely tied to their religious worldview. British attempts to intervene in tribal society, particularly through the campaign to suppress the Meriah sacrifice⁸ brought colonial officials into direct confrontation with Khond communities during the 1830s and 1840s⁹. While the colonial state justified these interventions as humanitarian reforms, they involved repeated military expeditions into tribal territories and intrusive interference in indigenous religious institutions. These measures disrupted the cultural and social order of tribal society and provoked organised resistance under leaders such as Dora Bisoye and later Chakra Bisoye¹⁰.

The Khond rebellion therefore represented more than a reaction to a single policy; it was a broader defence of tribal autonomy and customary rights against colonial intrusion. The persistence of these revolts demonstrated that British authority remained fragile in the hill tracts, where tribal communities continued to challenge attempts to impose new administrative structures and cultural reforms. The rebellion also created a wider atmosphere of instability that influenced political developments in neighbouring princely states, including Angul.

Angul Resistance and Indigenous Kingship:

The resistance associated with Angul in 1848 must be viewed within this larger landscape of tribal unrest and colonial expansion. The confrontation between Raja Somanath Singh Jagadev and the British administration did not arise merely from a dispute between a princely ruler and colonial officials; it reflected the complex relationship between indigenous kingship and tribal society in the region. In Angul, the authority of the Raja rested partly on his ability to maintain reciprocal relations with the tribal communities inhabiting the surrounding forests

and hills¹¹. These communities often regarded the ruler as a mediator who respected their customs and defended their interests against external interference.

During the period of the Khond rebellion, colonial authorities increasingly suspected that neighbouring rulers were providing support to tribal insurgents¹². Raja Somanath Singh Jagadev came under particular scrutiny because of his proximity to the disturbed regions and his influence among tribal leaders. Although he initially cooperated with colonial officials—assisting in the capture of the rebel leader Dora Bisoye—his later attempts to mediate between the British administration and Khond leaders created suspicion within the colonial establishment. British officials accused the Raja of secretly aiding tribal insurgents and encouraging disturbances in neighbouring territories¹³.

The situation deteriorated further when colonial officers violated assurances given to tribal leaders who had been encouraged to surrender through the Raja's mediation. Such incidents undermined trust between the Raja and the colonial administration and eventually led to the annexation of Angul in 1848. The removal of the ruler was justified by the British as a necessary measure to restore order in the hill tracts¹⁴. In reality, the annexation reflected colonial anxieties about the potential alliance between indigenous rulers and tribal communities resisting colonial authority. The fall of Angul thus marked the dismantling of a political arrangement in which indigenous kingship had served as a mediator between tribal society and external power.

The Athmallick Uprising of 1863:

The Athmallick uprising of 1863 represented another important phase in the evolution of resistance movements in the Garhjat region. Unlike the earlier conflict in Angul, which centred on the confrontation between a ruler and the colonial administration, the Athmallick disturbance reflected the growing participation of tribal and peasant communities in organised resistance against socio-economic oppression¹⁵. The roots of the uprising lay in the transformation of the agrarian structure of the state during the nineteenth century.

Historically, much of the land in Athmallick had been reclaimed and cultivated by tribal communities such as the Khonds and Gonds, whose relationship with land was embedded in customary systems of collective tenure. As the state sought to expand cultivation and increase revenue, new agricultural settlers—particularly cultivating

castes such as the Chasas and Kurmis—were encouraged to occupy land. While this policy expanded agricultural production, it also contributed to the displacement of tribal cultivators from their traditional lands and altered the balance of the rural economy. At the same time, the state imposed new rents and cesses, and revenue officials exercised increasing authority in enforcing fiscal demands.

Within this environment of growing agrarian pressure, the conflict involving Bala Biswal, a Surbrakar who refused to comply with enhanced revenue demands, acted as the immediate catalyst for rebellion. When Biswal was banished from the state, his dispute with the ruling authority quickly assumed wider political significance. Tribal leaders and village functionaries rallied around him, transforming the conflict into a broader uprising against administrative injustice. Tribal communities provided logistical support and refuge for the rebels, while their knowledge of forest terrain enabled them to resist government forces for a considerable period.

Although the uprising was eventually suppressed through the combined efforts of princely and colonial authorities, its significance lay in demonstrating the capacity of tribal and peasant communities to mobilise collectively against oppressive conditions. The Athmallick disturbance thus represented a crucial link in the continuum of resistance that connected earlier tribal rebellions with the more organised political movements that emerged in the Feudatory States during the twentieth century¹⁶.

Feudatory Governance and the Political Economy of Oppression:

The socio-economic and political conditions of the Feudatory States of Odisha provided the essential context for the emergence of resistance among tribal and agrarian communities in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. States such as Talcher, Athmallick, and Pal-Lahara functioned under hereditary monarchies within the framework of British paramountcy. While rulers exercised control over internal administration, their authority depended on colonial recognition, creating a system of dual domination in which princely autocracy operated under imperial oversight. Within this structure, tribal and agrarian populations—forming the majority—remained politically excluded and economically exploited¹⁷.

The administrative system was characterised by

personal rule and hereditary succession. Kings wielded extensive, often unchecked authority, legitimised by ideological notions of divine kingship. In the absence of codified laws or representative institutions, governance relied on royal orders implemented through officials and intermediaries¹⁸. Judicial practices were frequently informal, and administrative positions were often filled through patronage rather than merit. This concentration of power encouraged arbitrariness, limited accountability, and restricted access to justice for the rural population¹⁹.

The fiscal system imposed heavy burdens on cultivators. Taxation lacked uniformity, allowing rulers considerable discretion in imposing or increasing levies. Alongside formal taxes—such as forest, education, and wealth cesses—numerous additional exactions were frequently imposed. Land revenue demands often ignored actual productivity, while villagers were also required to contribute to royal ceremonies and administrative activities. These cumulative pressures strained subsistence economies, leading to widespread poverty and indebtedness²⁰.

Forced labour was another central feature of this exploitative system. Practices such as *Bethi* and *Begari* compelled villagers to provide unpaid labour for state purposes, including infrastructure work, ceremonial functions, and transport services²¹. These obligations disrupted agricultural cycles and imposed further economic hardship. Additional demands for provisions and resources under systems such as *Rasad* and *Magan* intensified the burden on rural households.

The enforcement of these exactions depended on a network of intermediaries, including Pradhans, Beheras, Nayaks, Bisois, and Dandapats, as well as village headmen such as Padhans and Goantias. While these officials facilitated administrative control, they also enabled coercion and abuse, often imposing extra demands on villagers. The combined effects of arbitrary administration, heavy taxation, and forced labour created conditions of economic distress and social subordination, which ultimately contributed to the emergence of organised resistance in the region.

Emergence of Peasant–Tribal Political Consciousness:

By the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the cumulative effects of economic exploitation, administrative oppression, and social humiliation fostered a more articulated political consciousness among tribal

and agrarian communities in Angul and the neighbouring Feudatory States. Earlier uprisings—such as the Angul conflict of 1848 and the Athmallick disturbance of 1863—had exposed deep structural tensions within the regional order. Over time, these experiences generated a collective memory of resistance, encouraging rural communities to question the legitimacy of both princely authority and colonial domination. The emergence of organised movements in the twentieth century thus represented the culmination of a longer historical process in which everyday experiences of exploitation were transformed into conscious political mobilisation.

This transition was closely linked to the deteriorating economic and social conditions of rural society. Excessive taxation, forced labour, restrictions on forest access, and arbitrary administrative practices imposed severe burdens on communities dependent on subsistence agriculture and forest resources. Repeated exposure to such exploitation gradually fostered an awareness that these hardships were systemic rather than incidental. Consequently, sporadic acts of resistance evolved into more organised and sustained forms of protest aimed at challenging the structural foundations of princely governance. This marked a significant shift from isolated expressions of discontent to collective movements demanding reform, justice, and accountability.

Village communities played a central role in sustaining this process of mobilisation. In a predominantly rural setting, social organisation was structured around kinship ties, customary institutions, and networks of local leadership. These frameworks facilitated communication, coordination, and collective action across dispersed settlements. Village leaders and functionaries often acted as intermediaries, articulating local grievances and organising petitions, meetings, and protests. Through these networks, resistance spread across regions, linking tribal and peasant communities in a shared struggle against oppressive rule.

Social and cultural institutions further reinforced the growth of political consciousness. Village assemblies, customary councils, and religious gatherings provided spaces for discussing grievances and planning collective action. Oral traditions, folk narratives, and shared memories of past struggles preserved and transmitted a sense of identity and resistance across generations. These cultural practices strengthened solidarity and helped translate the moral economy of rural society—rooted in notions of justice, reciprocity, and customary rights—into

organised political mobilisation. In this way, the convergence of economic pressures, social networks, and cultural traditions played a decisive role in shaping the emergence of collective resistance in the region.

Rise of Organised Movements in the Twentieth Century:

By the early twentieth century, the cumulative effects of socio-economic exploitation, administrative arbitrariness, and political exclusion in the Feudatory States of Odisha ushered in a new phase of resistance. While earlier uprisings—such as the Angul resistance (1848) and the Athmallick disturbance (1863)—had exposed structural tensions within the regional order, the movements of this period displayed greater organisation, political consciousness, and mass participation. In states such as Talcher, Athmallick, and Pal-Lahara, tribal and peasant communities increasingly transformed economic grievances into sustained political agitation, marking the emergence of organised peasant-tribal politics in the Garhjat region.

Talcher emerged as a major centre of early peasant mobilisation. Heavy taxation, illegal cesses, and forced labour imposed severe burdens on the agrarian population. The agitation of 1912, triggered by an additional tax of seven annas per rupee of land revenue, generated widespread protest. Leaders such as Purandar Pani, Banmali Paramguru, and Sudarsan Dhar organised tenants to petition against these measures. However, the princely administration responded with repression, including fines and the imposition of security bonds. Subsequent protests in 1922²² and 1930–32 further highlighted growing resistance to forced labour practices such as *Bethi* and other arbitrary exactions²³.

An important development during this period was the emergence of organised associations that articulated rural grievances. The Sobhagya Samiti, founded in Talcher in 1925 by members of the Chasa community, sought to promote education and social reform. Its suppression by the princely state—through bans, dismissal of associated employees, and confiscation of funds—reflected official hostility toward organised rural initiatives²⁴.

The 1930s witnessed a significant expansion of political mobilisation with the rise of Prajamandal organisations across the Feudatory States. These organisations aimed to challenge princely misrule, demand civil liberties, and abolish forced labour. Influenced by

the wider nationalist movement, they provided an institutional framework for transforming local grievances into organised political action.

Prajamandal activities deepened political awareness across rural society. Through meetings, petitions, and campaigns, they linked everyday concerns with broader ideals of civil rights, representative governance, and social justice. This process transformed isolated protests into coordinated movements marked by mass participation, refusal to perform forced labour, and collective opposition to arbitrary taxation.

These developments marked a decisive stage in the political evolution of the region, laying the foundation for the more radical mass movements of the late 1930s and early 1940s, which directly challenged the legitimacy of princely authority.

Radicalisation of Resistance:

By the late 1930s, resistance movements in the Feudatory States of Odisha entered a more radical phase marked by mass mobilisation, organised protest, and direct confrontation with princely authority. Earlier developments—particularly peasant agitations and the formation of Prajamandal organisations—had already laid the groundwork for collective political action among tribal and agrarian communities. Intensifying repression by princely administrations, combined with the growing influence of nationalist politics, further deepened political consciousness. Consequently, resistance assumed more assertive forms, including mass migration, civil disobedience, and the creation of alternative structures of governance.

A striking example of this phase was the Talcher Exodus Movement (1938–39)²⁵, which emerged in response to oppressive taxation, forced labour, and the denial of civil liberties under the Talcher princely administration. As Prajamandal leaders escalated demands for reform, the state responded with repression, targeting activists and rural populations. In protest, thousands of villagers migrated *en-masse* to neighbouring British-administered areas, particularly Angul. This act of collective non-violent resistance exposed the coercive nature of princely rule, attracted nationalist attention, and underscored the organisational capacity of rural society, while revealing the growing legitimacy crisis of princely authority.

The radicalisation of resistance intensified in the early 1940s with the emergence of the Chasi–Mulia

movement, which signified a broad-based alliance between cultivators and agricultural labourers²⁶. Moving beyond protest, activists in several regions sought to establish parallel structures of governance, organising village administration, resolving disputes, and resisting state-imposed taxes and labour obligations. This marked a significant shift toward the assertion of autonomous political authority by rural communities²⁷.

The Quit India Movement of 1942 further accelerated these developments by linking regional struggles with the wider anti-colonial movement. Peasants, tribal groups, students, and local leaders participated in protests, tax refusal, and underground activities. By the mid-1940s, sustained popular mobilisation and nationalist pressure had substantially eroded the legitimacy of princely rule, ultimately facilitating the integration of the Feudatory States into Odisha in 1948²⁸.

Leadership and Subaltern Mobilisation:

Resistance movements in Angul and the neighbouring Feudatory States were sustained not only by structural grievances but also by diverse and evolving forms of leadership. Leadership extended beyond formal elites and operated at multiple levels—from indigenous rulers and regional figures to village activists and local organisers. This interaction between leadership and popular participation played a crucial role in transforming scattered protests into organised movements among tribal and agrarian communities.

In the early phases, indigenous kingship often served as a focal point for mobilisation. In regions such as Angul, rulers were traditionally associated with the protection of local customs and reciprocal relations with tribal society. The conflict between Raja Somanath Singh Jagadev and the British in 1848 illustrates how rulers could become symbols of resistance when colonial intervention threatened established political and social structures. Support for such figures reflected not merely loyalty to monarchy but broader concerns regarding the defence of customary rights and local autonomy.

Over time, leadership increasingly emerged from within tribal and agrarian communities themselves. In movements such as the Athmallick uprising of 1863 and later agrarian agitations in Talcher, local leaders articulated rural grievances and organised collective resistance against oppressive taxation and administrative injustice. This development signalled a growing political consciousness among peasants and tribal groups and

demonstrated that resistance was not dependent solely on elite leadership.

At the grassroots level, village activists and local organisers played a vital role in sustaining mobilisation. Rural society, structured through kinship ties and customary institutions, enabled effective communication and coordination across dispersed settlements. Village leaders acted as intermediaries, organising meetings, petitions, and protests against forced labour, excessive taxation, and other forms of exploitation.

Together, these layered forms of leadership created a dynamic structure of subaltern politics in which ordinary villagers actively shaped the course of resistance, ensuring both its continuity and expansion across the Feudatory States.

Subaltern Politics and Regional Freedom Struggle:

The resistance movements that emerged in Angul and the neighbouring Feudatory States were not isolated local disturbances but formed an integral part of the broader political transformation that accompanied India's struggle against colonial rule. Although these movements initially arose from specific regional grievances—such as excessive taxation, forced labour, and administrative oppression—they gradually developed connections with the wider currents of Indian nationalism. The growth of Prajamandal organisations, the spread of political awareness among rural communities, and the influence of national movements created an environment in which local struggles against princely misrule became increasingly intertwined with the broader demand for political freedom and democratic governance.

The relationship between local resistance and Indian nationalism was particularly evident during the twentieth century, when political activists in the Feudatory States drew inspiration from nationalist campaigns across British India. Movements such as the Prajamandal agitations and the Talcher Exodus were shaped by ideas of civil rights, representative government, and social justice that resonated with the broader nationalist discourse. At the same time, these regional struggles retained a distinct character rooted in the specific socio-economic conditions of the Garhjat states. While nationalist leaders emphasised the end of colonial rule, tribal and peasant communities in these regions were equally concerned with the abolition of feudal oppression and the restoration of customary rights over land and forest resources.

The contribution of tribal and peasant struggles to

political transformation in the region was therefore significant. By mobilising large sections of rural society, these movements challenged both colonial authority and the legitimacy of princely rule. Collective actions such as mass protests, refusal to perform forced labour, and organised political agitation gradually weakened the foundations of the feudal order that had dominated the Feudatory States for generations. Moreover, the participation of peasants and tribal communities broadened the social base of the freedom struggle, transforming it from an elite political movement into a mass struggle rooted in rural society.

Ultimately, the persistent mobilisation of subaltern groups in the Feudatory States contributed to the growing demand for political integration and democratic governance in the region. The pressures generated by these movements played an important role in the eventual dissolution of princely authority and the integration of the Garhjat states into the province of Odisha in 1948. In this sense, the resistance movements of Angul and the neighbouring states represent a crucial regional dimension of India's freedom struggle, demonstrating how tribal and peasant activism helped reshape the political landscape of eastern India.

Conclusion:

The resistance movements in Angul and the neighbouring Feudatory States from the nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century reflect a complex interplay between colonial expansion, princely authority, and the socio-economic conditions of rural society. This study demonstrates that uprisings—from the Khond rebellions and the Angul conflict of 1848 to the Athmallick disturbance and Prajamandal agitations—were not isolated events but part of a continuous historical process shaped by structural exploitation and the defence of customary rights. Colonial administrative expansion, forest restrictions, heavy taxation, and forced labour disrupted traditional rural life, generating widespread discontent. Over time, resistance evolved from sporadic revolts into more organised political movements that challenged both colonial and feudal power.

A key contribution of this study is its emphasis on tribal and peasant agency. These communities were not passive participants but active agents who mobilised through village networks, customary institutions, and emerging political platforms. Their resistance was grounded in a moral economy that stressed justice,

reciprocity, and the protection of customary rights over land and forest resources. Through sustained participation in both local protests and broader political movements, they played a crucial role in expanding the social base of resistance in the Feudatory States.

Historiographically, the experience of Angul and the Garhjat states deepens our understanding of subaltern politics in colonial India. It shows how localised struggles rooted in everyday rural experiences could develop into significant political challenges to established authority. By foregrounding the agency of tribal and peasant communities, this study highlights the importance of regional movements in shaping the wider trajectory of India's freedom struggle and contributes to a more inclusive understanding of popular politics in colonial eastern India.

REFERENCES

- O'Malley, L. S. S. *Bengal District Gazetteers: Angul*. Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Press, 1908, 33–45.
- Bell, R. C. S. *Census of India, 1941*. Vol. XI: Orissa. Delhi: Government of India Press, 1942, 8.
- Cobden-Ramsay, L. E. B. *Feudatory States of Orissa*. Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat Press, 1910.
- Rath, Bijay Chandra. "The System of Headmanship in the Princely States of Orissa." *Journal of Orissa History* 9 (1989): 131–133.
- Campbell, John. *Thirteen Years' Service amongst the Wild Tribes of Khondistan*. Calcutta: Bengal Military Orphan Press, 1856, 32.
- Proceedings of the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal (Political). Progress No. 24. R. N. Shore to Secretary to the Government of Bengal, May 22, 1863, 14–16.
- Mohanty, Manoranjan. "Caste, Class and Domination in a Backward State: Orissa." In *Dominance and State Power in Modern India*, edited by Francine R. Frankel and M. S. A. Rao, 332–336. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990.
- Campbell, John. *Thirteen Years' Service amongst the Wild Tribes of Khondistan*. Calcutta: Bengal Military Orphan Press, 1856, 32.
- Das, M. N. *Studies in the Economic and Social Development of Modern India*. Calcutta: Firma KLM, 1959, 386.
- Hobsbawm, E. J. *Primitive Rebels*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1959, 13.
- Board of Revenue Record Room (BRRR), Loose Records (LR). Raja's *urzee* to the Superintendent of Tributary Mahals, December 25, 1846.
- Board of Revenue Record Room (BRRR), Loose Records (LR), No. 1. Macpherson to McKean, March 3, 1847; Board of Political Records (BPR), Vol. 97, No. 177. Macpherson to Mills, October 20, 1846; India Home Consultations (IHC), Vol. 187/14. Macpherson's Report, December 27, 1846.
- Board of Revenue Record Room (BRRR), Loose Records (LR), No. 1837. Mills to Government of Bengal, December 26, 1846; Board of Political Records (BPR), Vol. 133, No. 1980. Mills to Government of Bengal, December 30, 1846.
- Dalhousie Papers, Vol. I, letters to Tucker, January 22, February 8 and 21, 1848; Board of Revenue Record Room (BRRR), Loose Records (LR), Nos. 349–350, Resolution of the Governor-General in Council, September 16, 1848; India Home Department, No. XIV, February 28, 1856.
- Proceedings of the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal (Political). Progress No. 24. R. N. Shore to Secretary to the Government of Bengal, May 22, 1863, 14–16.
- Proceedings of the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal (Political). Progress No. 46. Under Secretary to Government of Bengal to R. N. Shore, June 17, 1863; Proceedings of June 1863, 25.
- Sahu, Bhairabi Prasad. "The Orissan Society: Past Trends and Present Manifestations." In *Caste and Class in India*, edited by K. L. Sharma, 118–119. New Delhi: Rawat Publications, 1994.
- Baliarsingh, S. *Ranpur Bidroha* (in Odia). Cuttack, 1987, 46.
- Ramadhyani, R. K. *Report on Land Tenures & the Revenue System of the Orissa and Chhattisgarh States: The Individual States*. India: Indian Law Publication Press, 1948, Vol. I, 6.
- Das, M. N., ed. *Sidelights on History and Culture of Orissa*. Cuttack, 1977, 280.
- Mohanty, Manoranjan. "Caste, Class and Domination in a Backward State: Orissa." In *Dominance and State Power in Modern India*, edited by Francine R. Frankel and M. S. A. Rao, 332–336. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990.
- Pradhan, P. M. *Muktapathe Sainika* (in Odia). Part I. Cuttack, 1979, 51.
- Mishra, Ananta. *Talcher Andolana* (in Odia). Cuttack: Satyabadi Press, 1934, 16.
- Report of the Orissa States' Enquiry Committee*. Cuttack, 1939, 103.

25. *Amrita Bazar Patrika*. Independence Number, 1947, 108. *District Gazetteers: Dhenkanal*. Cuttack: Orissa Government Press, 1972, 70.
26. Talcher Prajamandal Itihas Committee. *Talcher Prajamandal Itihas*. Cuttack, 1950, 25.
27. Senapati, Nilamani, and Premananda Tripathy, eds. *Orissa*
28. Pradhan, P. M. *Multipathe Sainika* (in Odia). Part I. Cuttack, 1979, 140–141.
