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**TITLE: ROLE OF TRIBAL FREEDOM FIGHTERS DURING INDIAN
INDEPENDENCE**

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Role of tribal freedom fighters during Indian Independence

India's fight for freedom from British colonial rule is a tale of numerous acts of bravery, selflessness, and resilience. The diverse Indian tribes contributed in different ways to the greater story of independence and were instrumental in the struggle against British empire. The purpose of this article is to highlight the unsung heroes and their contributions to the Indian independence struggle.

Tribal Heroes of Indian Independence

One of the earliest leaders to this freedom struggle was Tilka Manjhi. People in Santhal Pargana were starving to death and suffering from severe drought around 1770. Instead of giving the populace food and relief, the ruling British East India Company began taking advantage of the indigenous groups. In 1772, Tilka Manjhi led the Adivasis in an uprising against British rule. By using the divide and conquer strategy and excusing the revenue of a few local tribal chiefs, Lord Clive was able to put an end to the revolution. However, Tilka Manjhi saw through their ruse and brought the tribal clans together under a single, armed banner to resist British oppression and exploitation. He turned the uprising into a mass movement by spreading the words “We must be united” inscribed on Sal leaves.

The name of Tirot Singh stands out as one of the first Khasi leaders to lead a rebellion against the British rule. He was among the fiercest leaders of Anglo-Khasi war which was fought from 1823-1833. In order to avoid weeks of travel, the British sought to build a road through this region to connect Guwahati with Sylhet. U Tirot Sing called a Durbar and ordered the British to leave Nongkhlaw when word reached him that the British were reinforcing forces in Assam. When the British did not respond, the Khasis attacked the British garrison and in retaliation the British attacked the Khasi. Due to lack of modern weapons, the Khasis turned to guerrilla warfare. Eventually, Tirot Singh was captured by the British and in Meghalaya, the anniversary of his death is observed as a state holiday in Meghalaya.

One of the most prominent tribal freedom fighters in Odisha was Veer Surendra Sai. He was one of the descendants of ruling clan in Sambalpur but after the death of Raja Maharaja Sai his claims to the throne were rejected by the British Government. Under the Doctrine of Lapse the British acquired Sambalpur. As the upper castes and the British colonial authorities attempted to use the

tribal people of Sambalpur as a means of establishing their political dominance in the area, Sai advocated the cause of these oppressed people by promoting their language and culture. At the age of eighteen, he started demonstrating against the British. He was first detained in 1840 and taken to Hazaribagh Prison. During the 1857 uprising, the fighters managed to free him from Hazaribagh prison. After shifting his base of operations to Odisha's hilly regions, he persisted in his fight until his capitulation in 1862.

Govind Guru was one of the most prominent tribal leaders in Rajasthan. The indigenous people of Mangarh, were led by a rebel named Govind Guru. With his voice, Guru brought hundreds of tribal people together and was regarded as a living legend among the Bhil and Garasiya tribal communities. Govind Guru was a key figure in the Indian Renaissance movement prior to rising to prominence in the country's independence endeavors. The Bhils, under his leadership vowed to proclaim independence from British authority and rejected the British attempts to pacify them. They also refused to vacate Mangarh Hill. The Bhagat Movement was the name given to this. Subsequently, the Bhils were requested by the British to vacate Mangarh Hill by November 15, 1913. Nevertheless, that did not occur, and on November 17, 1913, the British Indian Army opened fire on Bhil demonstrators without warning. It is estimated that more than 1,500 people, including women and children, were killed in the catastrophe.

Birsa Munda is a legend who, despite his short life of twenty-five years, had a lasting influence on India's resistance against the British. In the latter part of the 1880s, Munda started to comprehend the extent of the British exploitation of the indigenous tribes. The livelihood of these tribal people was significantly disrupted by British agricultural policy, upsetting their customary way of life. Their war against the British was fueled by Christian missionaries' aggressive religious and cultural agendas, as well as by British economic and political policies that denigrated the indigenous people and their culture. He declared a revolt against the Zamindari system. He gathered attention of the masses and convinced them not to pay taxes to British. He also built a strong tribal army and started attacking churches and police stations. He was captured by the British and died in the year 1900. The state of Madhya Pradesh has declared "Birsa Munda Jyanti" as a state holiday.

The Tana Bhagat movement is one of the tribal uprisings that occurred in several parts of India during the colonial era for regional causes. The Tana Bhagat movement, led by Jatra Bhagat, was founded to resist the Jamindars' policies that directly exploited the Oraon people and to put an end

to the wicked practices that were occurring in the Chotanagpur Oraon community. Subsequently, this movement embraced the truth and non-violence and later, Tana Bhagat movement adherents also participated in national movements opposing British rule.

Conclusion

The Indian struggle for independence from British colonial rule is a saga of bravery and sacrifice with diverse tribal communities playing a crucial and often overlooked role. The tribal freedom fighters played a pivotal role in India's struggle for independence, resisting British oppression, exploitation, and cultural hegemony. Their contributions, marked by resilience and sacrifice, are integral to the broader narrative of India's fight for freedom. Recognizing and honoring these unsung heroes is essential to understanding the diverse tapestry of the Indian independence movement.