



**SRUJANI: Indian Journal of Innovative Research and Development (SIJIRD)**  
Volume-4 Issue 1, March-April 2025, Pp. 130-136  
Bi-Monthly, Peer-Reviewed, Open Access, Indexed Journal

ISSN: 2583-3510

**S I R D F**  
**J O U R N A L S**  
editor@srujani.in  
www.srujani.in

## **Revolt of 1857: Participation of Dalit and Tribal Communities**

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### **Abstract:**

*The Revolt of 1857 is a significant and much-debated event in the history of modern India. During this collective uprising against British rule, various social classes participated according to their circumstances and degrees of autonomy. Among them, the roles and experiences of Dalit and tribal communities reflected unique sensitivities and played an important part in the larger struggle. In recent historical scholarship, there has been a renewed effort to rethink and reassess their involvement. This article attempts to analyze the perspectives and roles of Dalit and tribal communities during the 1857 revolt within this evolving historiographical context.*

**Keywords:** Shaheed Baba, Avantibai, Pannadhyabai, Udayevi, Baders of Halagali.

### **Introduction**

The event of 1857 played a significant role in the history of modern India. This revolt was the prelude and motivational event for India's freedom movement. There are still those among us who debate the nature of this revolt against the British rule in India in 1857, which has been lightly identified by most historians as sepoys. Along with this, there are those who say that it is not against the British. There are those who argue that it is temporary, transitory and limited, against certain grievances. Nawabs, Rajas, Zamindars, Peasants, Sepoys who were soldiers of the East India Company, were

the soldiers of the East India Company in the prevalent feudal system that was infected by the British rule. Thus 1857 was a unique occasion when all sections of the society united against the British.

The Indian Army, popularly known as the Bengal Army, played an important role in the rise of British imperialism, and the same army inspired the fight against the British in 1857. In British colonial writings, it is a conspiracy of sepoys and Muslim rulers against the British. But the nationalist writings contradicted the colonialist writings and said that this revolt of 1857 was not a rebellion of

**Please cite this article as:** Narasimha Murthy T. S. (2025). Revolt of 1857: Participation of Dalit and Tribal Communities. *SRUJANI: Indian Journal of Innovative Research and Development*, 4(1), 130–136

sepoys, but was the first step of the freedom struggle. A contemporary thinker of the time, Karl Marx, described the sepoys as an incident in which Indians erupted in anger against colonial exploitation. In this Hindu-Muslim unity is praised by Karl Marx and Engels. Thus, Eric Stokes and the subaltern historian Tapathirai have not limited the rebellion of 1857 to only sepoys and native rulers. They argue that this revolt was a revolt of peasant masses. Badri Narayan Tiwari has authored a seminal article "Reactivating the Past: Dalits and Memories of 1857 (2007)" on Dalit women's participation in the 1857 revolt. On tribal resistances G.A. Analyzed by Biradar. A discussion of the 1857 struggle by Dennis Fernandes and "The 1857 conflict and subsequent political developments" by N. Jayaraja in "Various Dimensions of Pre modern History of the Indian Subcontinent" Volume-2 (2010) edited by Vijay Poonachcha Tambanda Translation: G. Mahadeva's articles were seriously discussed in 1857.

Ranjit Guha's work "Elementary Aspects of Peasants' Insurgency in Colonial India" (1983) analyzed colonial peasant revolts across India from 1783 to 1900. Although this work directly analyzes the 1857 revolt, the primary aspects of the peasant protests relate to the peasant communities that participated in the 1857 revolt. Guha questions the positions of colonialist, nationalist and Marxist "Eurocentric" historians on India's peasantry. (Murthy 2018: 227) argues

that the Indian peasantry not only formed its own rebellions but also had a keen political consciousness independent of the ruling British master. Peasant revolts have been analyzed through six factors. 1. Negativity, 2. Ambiguity, 3. Procedure, 4. Solidarity, 5. Spread of ideas, 6. border These elements are the elements found in peasant protests. Colonial agriculture was largely a system of landlords, tenants, sharecroppers, agricultural laborers and many middlemen. The position of zamindars was high in the rural society. In the rural society, the powerful zamindars combined with foreign power to exploit the peasants. Amindars served as agencies of the British. In this way the native authorities serving as British collaborators played an important role in controlling the peasant uprisings.

Badri Narayan Tiwari's article "Reactivating the Past: Dalits and Memories of 1857 (2007)" is an important article that discusses the participation of Dalits in the 1857 revolt and the role of Dalit heroines. Even before the rise of the Sepoys, reforms in the rural areas of Central India and Central East India had broken out in many ways. Beyond the context of this uprising, tens of millions of ordinary people waged various struggles until 1859. His anger was against the then landlords. Against those who were government officials, who were constantly exploiting them on behalf of Farangi. Taking advantage of the occasion when the sepoys rose, they continued to

persecute themselves and murdered government officials, new zamindars, representatives of the colonialists, Shanubhoga, Patel etc. Government offices were burnt, government files were destroyed. It became a race. This is definitely not a freedom struggle (Tiwari 2002: 1734-1736).

Monuments and small temples are found in many areas of Uttar Pradesh. This 1857 incident is the basis for the witnesses who still commemorate and worship Dalit heroes in these temples. In the rebellion of 1857, Dalit castes such as Japar, Pasi, Dhobi, Mali etc. participated in the struggle and sacrificed their lives in an area called 'Majawa' in Azamphad district of Uttar Pradesh. The main person who is worshiped and known as "Shaheed Baba" by the people of this village took part in the rebellion. Along with him, four Dalits of this village sacrificed their lives. The man who participated in the rebellion of 1857 and fought against the British was Shaheed Baba whose original name was Rajit Baba (Tiwari 2002: 1734-1738).

Writings about the kings and feudal lords who participated in the 1857 rebellion were limited. Meanwhile, Rajit Baba is the only person who speaks about the feelings of the lower castes in the struggle and about the contribution of Dalits in 1857. This Rajit Baba is originally from Shahabad in Agra district. He was serving in the East India Company as a guard, a low-level soldier. He took part in the Danapur Mutiny when the seeds of the 1857 revolt against the British

were hatched. At that time leaders named Babu Kubar, Simphand Babu, Amarasingh had assumed the important leadership of the struggle. Then the sepoys of Delhi were in revolt. By this an attempt was made to expel the British. It moved to Kansur, Awath, Azamphad, Gorakhpur, Sitapur, Ghazipur and Sultanpur and finally to Bengal. Different types of grievances were brought together in this rebellion. He received widespread public support across Bihar. Villages were attacked to control this widespread revolt. Rebels captured in this attack were hanged (Tiwari 2002: 1738).

Dalit women have an emotional connection with the 1857 revolt. The role of Dalit women in this struggle is important. In this rebellion, Jalnaribai, There are details of Dalit women named Avantibai, Pannadhyabai, Udayevi and Mahaviridevi participating in the struggle. Dalit women joined men and fought against colonialism. M. Ramamurthy's work "Revolution 1857(1947)" is a remarkable fact about the death and inspiration of the Dalits for the 1857 revolt. This incident takes place between a Brahmin soldier and Jadamali in Rakspur. Jadamali asked the Brahmin for water. Then the Brahmin refuses. Then Jadamali proceeded to touch the Brahmin. At that time the Brahmin says, "Don't touch me." Don't touch back said right. To which Jadamali said, "If you lick the fat of the cow, will it not become a mile?" Said that. This worried the Brahmin soldiers there and Mangalapande who was

there. By this he records that the Dalits' sensibility was inspired to confront the British in the incident of 1857 (Ramamurthy 1947: 2).

Much studies have been done on the incident of 1857 especially from the point of view that it was a revolt led by sepoys, peasants and feudal class. But the 1857 Mutiny does not find mention of the tribe in this way. Coll in the 19th century. Bhumiz, Santal, Bhils or Khonds are the tribal communities found in the rebellion (Singh 1998: 76). Tribes have their own diversity. When their livelihoods are disrupted, they stage large-scale protests by identifying their adversary. The rebellion of 1857, when the tribals spontaneously protested against colonialism. In the battle of Palama a warrior named Babu Kunwarsingh joined hands with his Shahabad force taking shelter in the tribal jungles. He died fighting the British with the support of tribal people (Singh 1998: 79).

Halagali is a village in present-day Mudhola taluk of Bagalkote district. At that time it was a village belonging to Mudhola kingdom. Inspired by the four priests Hanama, Bala, Jadaga and Rama in this village, the Beders fought against the British. The Bedu have taken up hunting as a profession. Also, they depended on agriculture for their livelihood. These forest dwellers are expert hunters. They participated as camp workers and soldiers of the state. Manjunath Bevinakatti is of the opinion that after seeing the hunting skills of this community, the kings took

part in the wars and then engaged in agriculture. Apart from that, weapons are seen as part of religion by Bede community. The British passed the Disarmament Act on 11 September 1857. According to this act, Indians have to obtain company government license for their weapons. Ordered to make it a crime to possess weapons without a permit. The plan of the British was to disarm the Indians by obtaining arms and participating in the struggle without disturbing the British government. It applied not only to domestic kings but also represented the working class. Farmers and tribal communities used to keep weapons with them for agriculture, hunting and self-defense. Due to this act, they were left empty-handed.

Jadganna did not understand anything when the matters of revenue were explained. After fighting with the British, he left the town and was in the forest. Although formerly under the rule of the Mudhol kingdom, the Beders lived a peaceful life. All these British acts were new to Bader. Because of all the reasons he decided to fight against the British. Its leadership was assumed by Bala Jadaga and Rama, but knowing about the British rule, Bedu sought the support of the king of Surpur. In time Venkatappanayaka, king of Surpur, was organizing an army against the British. He was confident that our struggle would also get support. Because in the fight of Sangolli Rayanna in 1828, the kings of Surpur sent 500 Bedars with Rayanna. Attacked many

British offices with 500 Bedos and created fear. Because of this Beda became the ruler of the community and started to fight with the British. The Baders of Halagali politely rejected the Disarmament Act at first. Around this time, the British seized a large number of swords from the people in important towns like Bagalkote and Hubli. In return, the British suspected that Mundaragi Bhimaraya was gathering weapons and people on the pretext of a fair in the area near Venkatappanayaka Dambala in Surpur, in the areas near Badami (Diwakara 1960:157). Venkatappanayaka did not give weapons to many village Bedis. He encouraged to fight against the British. Motivated by this, the villagers of Halagali opposed the British Disarmament Act. The main reason why the people of Surpur resisted the British was the high revenue. Even though the Surapura state was doing well economically, the Nizam was unable to repay its loans and levied high taxes, leaving the peasantry weak to pay taxes (Pujarahalli 2009: 86). As the Bedars opposed this act, Mudhola king Balwantrao Raje Ghorpade appointed Mudhola Jamadar Rama Rao Bhujanga on 11 November 1857 to inform the Bedars to surrender their arms to the British in peace. The British first took a man named Gudagia of the Bedra chief of Kundargi village.

He was summoned and tasked with bringing weapons and handing them over to Bader to inform him about this act. But Bedu did not listen to his teachings

(Sharma 1957: 97). Then Ram Rao of Mudhola came to the village of Halagali and said to all the Sannadis, 'All of you come with your weapons and register'. But the Beda people said that they would not obey this command and scared Rama Rao away. Halagali called a Beda leader and spoke to those close to Bedi saying that if Bedi was convinced about this, Bedi would bring the weapons and hand them over. Then Bader said that instead of being on the side of our community, he was supporting the British, and that he was not ready to issue a license for arms. On November 22, 1857, Mudhola Karabhari Bhimrao, Naro who was in favor of the British, Ramchandra Potnus etc. tried to negotiate with Halgali Beda. After Ramchandra and Bhima Raya came to Halagali, Bedra's leader Balya joined hundred people of Bedra and protested against the pro-Britishers. All of them fled from the attack. On November 23, 1857, King Arakeri of Mudhol sent an ambassador to Halagali. But this was of no use. In the end, Bedarus tried to come to a peaceful settlement with the British by winning the trust of Bantanur hero Hanumanayaka, ruler of Mudhol. But Bedu did not allow Hanumanayaka to enter the village. In this way, despite the steadfastness of Halagali Beda, a contest of agreements took place between the Mudhola Karbharis who were in favor of the British. Mudhola Karabhari Rama Rao told all these things to Lt. Col. Malcolm. In this way, it came to know that Beders from villages like Buddi,

Mantur, Alagundi etc. have joined this struggle.

An array was formed to fight against the British. Among this group, Bede Jadagappa of Halagali laid the foundation of the anti-British struggle. As he waited for revenge against the British, he was joined by Jadagappa's nephew Balappa, Manamappa Pujera and Bhimappa Chikkanna. In this fight Bhimappa's uncle was helping him in spying to know the movements of the British. Ramavva, the wife of Balappa of Halagali, played an important role in this struggle. The pro-British Raja of Mudhola made several attempts to negotiate agreements with the Beda of Halagali till the end of November, but to no avail. This led the British to attack the village of Halagali (Murthy 2011: 60-67).

When British Constable Seton wrote to Lt. Col. Malcolm on 30 November 1857 about the incident, a force of the 28th from Bagalkot came to help and joined the British force. The Beders of Halagali waited for the Surapura army to come to their aid but that army did not come (Kamat 1973: 273). Because Venkatappanayaka was busy organizing an army against the British in Belgaum, the Surpur army did not come to the aid of Halagali village at the last moment. The second day's fighting was fierce. Bedus fought continuously with the British. During the raid, British soldiers attacked Beda, who was hiding in a hut, causing a lot of casualties. Bader was hiding in the hut and making a counter attack.

Knowing the secret of this attack, Setanka set fire to Beda's huts (Murthy 2022: 91). As a result, they fired at Bader who came out. In this case, 290 people were arrested. Many died on the battlefield and in the huts. 19 of those arrested were tried. 13 people were hanged at Mudhol on 11 December 1857. The remaining six were then hanged at Halagali on 14 December 1857 (Sharma 1957: 100). The Beds who escaped this attack went to Surpur and took refuge (Sharma 1957: 100), (Diwakara 1960: 157).

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