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Resilience and Resistance: Birsa Munda's Legacy through the Lens of Coping Mechanisms, Spiritual Intelligence, and Self-Efficacy

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Abstract

Birsa Munda, one of the most revered tribal leaders of India, symbolizes the spirit of resistance and resilience against colonial exploitation and social injustice. His leadership during the Ulgulan (Great Tumult) not only protected tribal identity and rights, but also established the groundwork for contemporary tribal awareness. This paper explores the legacy of Birsa Munda by examining his psychological and social dimensions such as coping mechanisms, spiritual intelligence, and self-efficacy. The study analyzes tribal conflicts over land, forest, and water rights. The study demonstrates how faith, spiritual leadership, and adaptive coping mechanisms promote communal resilience. It also examines how Bandura's theory of self-efficacy interacts with the empowerment of tribal groups in their struggles for justice and self-governance. This study draws insights from contemporary policies such as the Forest Rights Act (2006), PESA (1996), and programs such as the Eklavya Model Residential Schools, and articulates Birsa Munda's perspectives in the context of contemporary challenges such as mining, displacement, and logging. By combining psychological concepts with the history of the political struggles, the research demonstrates how the teachings of Birsa Munda continue to inspire the tribal and other marginalized communities to be resilient, to gain their independence, and to become truly empowered.

Keywords: Birsa Munda, Coping Mechanisms, Spiritual Intelligence, Self-Efficacy, Tribal Rights, Resilience

Introduction

Blending ideas from psychological concepts with the history of the political struggles, the research demonstrates how the teachings of Birsa Munda continue to inspire the tribal and other marginalized communities to be resilient, to gain their independence, and to become truly empowered. Birsa Munda is oftentimes referred to as the father of the first tribal revolution in India. One of the things that is very hard to overlook is the mark he made. In the 19th century, he not only saw the writing on the wall but he also organized the tribal people of Chotanagpur to fight back against colonial rule and greedy landlords. The movement he led, which was called "Ulgulan" or the "Great Rebellion," was not only about politics or land; it was a powerful mix of social, political, and spiritual resistance. The Munda and Oraon tribes saw Birsa as "Dharti Abba" the Father of the Earth. Birsa was not intimidated by the missionaries whom the British had sent to convert his people and, with them, he led a resistance against. He rallied everyone around a simple but bold slogan: "Abua Raj Setar Jana, Maharani Raj Tundu Jana"—"May the queen's rule end, let our rule begin." Even today, you can see his

legacy alive in places like Jharkhand and Karnataka, where people celebrate his birthday every year on November 15th. To honor Birsa's legacy and the sacrifices of tribal freedom fighters across the country, Prime Minister Narendra Modi declared November 15th as "National Tribal Pride Day" in 2021, marking Birsa's 150th birthday and giving the day new meaning for millions. This day will be celebrated by organizing various cultural, social and educational programmes such as tribal music and dances, tableaux, etc. to honor the valuable contributions of the tribal community in India's struggle for freedom and its construction. The life of Birsa Munda gives courage to each oppressed individual to resist, fight for independence and uphold justice and equality in the society. Although most studies on Birsa Munda have focused on political and historical contributions, his leadership should be framed within the psychological orientation of coping, resilience, spiritual intelligence, and self-efficacy. These orientations not only help us understand how communities resisted oppression, but give us insights for contemporary tribal struggles against displacement, environmental degradation, and socio-economic marginalization.

This paper examines the legacy of Birsa Munda through three interrelated principles: coping strategies, spiritual intelligence, and self-efficacy.

Objectives of the study

1. To examine how tribal communities led by Birsa adopted coping strategies.
2. To explore the role of spiritual intelligence in building resilience.
3. To investigate how self-efficacy improved tribal empowerment and continues to influence modern tribal movements.

The research unites psychological insights with historical analysis and social political perspectives. The research demonstrates that Birsa Munda's ideas continue to guide society during the present day.

Literature Review

Birsa Munda: Spiritual Resistance and Tribal Identity

Birsa Munda (1875–1900) united spiritual renewal with political activism through his unique approach to leadership. During the Ulgulan or Great Tumult of 1899–1900 Birsa Munda fought against colonial land theft and exploitative landlord practices. Through his leadership Birsa restored tribal traditions by revitalizing their religious practices and cultural heritage. Through his declaration that sacred land and tribal traditions held importance Birsa provided his community with both a fighting purpose and enhanced life meaning. The scholars agree that Birsa's movement exceeded simple rebellion because it triggered a cultural transformation which preserved tribal heritage and self-respect (Banaras Hindu University, 2025; Precious Kashmir, 2024).

Coping Mechanism and Community Resilience

Coping mechanisms are just ways people and groups deal with stress or tough times. For many tribal communities, coping isn't a solo thing. It's about sticking together, sharing stories, and keeping old rituals alive—things that help everyone feel connected and grounded. When they do this, they build resilience, the kind that lets them keep going even when facing oppression. Recent studies show that when tribal adolescents in India get support and empowerment, their resilience and sense of control over their lives go up (Sarkar et al., 2017). Birsa's movement was a real example of this. Through spiritual rituals and community action, his people found ways to cope—sometimes by tackling problems head-on, sometimes by finding emotional strength.

Spiritual Intelligence as a Source of Meaning

Spiritual intelligence is really about finding meaning, moral direction, and inner strength through sacred beliefs. When life gets rough, it helps people stay steady and hopeful. Research

points out that this kind of insight doesn't just make it easier to handle emotions—it also boosts motivation, mental toughness, and confidence in yourself (Kaur, 2023). For Birsa, turning back to ancestral Munda traditions instead of accepting outside dogmas showed deep spirit awareness. He saw himself as chosen by the divine, giving people both identity and shared mission. So his message didn't just comfort – it turned hardship into fueled defiance rooted in faith (Banaras Hindu University, 2025).

Self-Efficacy and Empowerment

Bandura's idea about self-belief shows how trusting your skills helps beat tough situations. In tribal settings, this trust usually grows within the group instead of just inside one person. Studies on village and indigenous progress suggest local initiatives – like support circles – boost people's sense of control and strength when they've been left behind (Mahoto & Jha, 2024). Birsa led in a way that lifted entire communities' confidence; because he showed standing up could work, excluded folks started seeing themselves as strong enough to challenge unfair systems.

Synthesis

The mix of endurance, inner wisdom, and personal strength helps make sense of Birsa Munda's impact. Because of his deep beliefs, people found purpose and connection to tradition – this is spiritual insight at work. While facing colonial pressure, he led with tactics that shifted as needed – not just resisting but adapting along the way. Since he made others believe change was possible, communities stood stronger together through shared confidence. Together, these pieces show why he still stands out in talks about tribal defiance and staying power. For today's conversations around native justice and autonomy, his example keeps shaping opinions.

Theoretical Framework

The study applies three key theories:

1. Stress and Coping Theory (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984): Explains tribal resistance was characterized by a dual coping mechanism approach consisting of problem-focused coping (e.g., direct rebellion, land reclamation) and emotion-focused coping (e.g., religious practices/rituals/songs, faith, solidarity).
2. Spiritual Intelligence Theory (Emmons, 2000): Demonstrates how Birsa's ability to provide tribal peoples with an understanding of their purpose in life and to give them hope provided them with a moral and spiritual obligation to resist the oppressive nature of colonialism and landlordism.
3. Self-Efficacy Theory (Bandura, 1997): Reflects how Birsa provided tribal people with confidence to stand up against oppressors providing a foundation for many of today's empowerment movements.

Conceptual Model:

Birsa's Leadership → Spiritual Intelligence → Collective Coping → Self-Efficacy
→ Resilience & Social Justice.

Birsa Munda's Legacy and Tribal Resistance

Birsa Munda, through the Ulgulan Movement (1899 – 1900) successfully mobilized tribal populations against colonial policies and the exploitative actions of landlords; he advocated for the restoration of tribal lands, for the protection of tribal forests, and for the right of tribal peoples to assert their own identities. Thus, his advocacy demonstrated resistance as well as resilience. Birsa's Birsa faith movement created a common spiritual identity among tribal populations, which strengthened tribal pride and ultimately provided tribal populations with additional psychological strength.

Birsa Munda used two types of coping strategies; the first being problem-focused coping (collective rebellion) and the second being emotion-focused coping (reliance on faith, rituals, and songs). Birsa Munda's leadership was unique because it combined cultural identity with

political struggle and utilized spirituality as a tool of resistance.

Contemporary Relevance

- Birsa's legacy continues to be important for society. The present-day tribal movements demonstrate his legacy through their actions.
- The Niyamgiri movement serves as an example of how people fight against forced relocation. The community members use court battles alongside their cultural preservation and collective unity to resist bauxite mining operations.
- Tribal youth members actively participate in social movements instead of observing from a distance. The youth members of today actively work to establish better educational systems and fight for environmental protection and social justice. The young people today believe they possess the power to create positive change which creates a positive impact throughout their community.
- Women actively participate in all aspects of tribal society. Women from Jharkhand lead successful forest protection movements which demonstrate remarkable endurance. The women demonstrate practical strength through their spiritual connection and their ability to work together as a team.
- Digital activism has become a new tool for social change. Through social media tribal communities can now spread their messages to wider audiences while uniting traditional spiritual practices with contemporary activism methods.

Policy Perspectives

The current policy landscape shows its progress. The PESA (1996) law works to enhance local self-governance yet its implementation remains challenging. The FRA (2006) law exists to protect land ownership yet its implementation process takes extended periods of time. The NEP 2020 initiative works to create educational opportunities for all students through its Eklavya and Ashram schools which provide better learning environments for tribal students. CSR programs provide educational and employment opportunities yet their success depends on organizations maintaining respect for indigenous cultural practices. The core message of Birsa's vision shows that resource distribution through policies alone is insufficient. The development of spiritual power and cultural strength and psychological resilience stands equally important to resource distribution. The path to genuine advancement requires this approach. These government policies further Birsa's Principle of "Swaraj and Swabhiman".

Discussion

Birsa Munda's leadership can be viewed as a comprehensive model integrating both sociopolitical resistance and psychological empowerment. Through the use of coping mechanisms Birsa Munda helped sustain tribal communities during periods of crisis. Through the development of spiritual intelligence Birsa Munda provided a sense of meaning and unity to tribal peoples. Finally, through the development of self-efficacy Birsa Munda developed a sustainable source of resilience in tribal communities. Ultimately, the integration of these three theoretical models illustrates that social justice for tribal communities is more than just ensuring legal rights to tribal communities. Social justice for tribal communities will require developing tribal community members' psychological empowerment and preserving their cultural identity. Therefore, Birsa Munda's teachings have timeless relevance for addressing the current challenges facing tribal communities including displacement, marginalization, and identity loss.

Conclusion

Birsa Munda's legacy represents resistance and resilience. This paper has illustrated that Birsa Munda's leadership empowered tribal populations both politically and psychosocially/spiritually. As such, Birsa Munda's legacy continues to remain relevant for contemporary social justice policy and social movements, emphasizing that social justice for tribal communities must continue to foster tribal community members' resilience through tribal

culture identity, spiritual strength, and self-belief. Birsa Munda's life teaches us that true freedom begins with inner strength (means mental and spiritual empowerment). Through coping, spiritual intelligence and self-efficacy, Birsa Munda built a model of resilient leadership that continues to inspire India's tribal and environmental movements today. His message still reminds us that only through faith, culture and unity can justice and equality be achieved in society.

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