

# Birsa Munda and Its Contribution Towards Our Country

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**Abstract** - Birsa Munda (1875–1900) was a revolutionary tribal leader and spiritual reformer who galvanized the Munda community in colonial India against British exploitation and feudal oppression. Born in Ulihatu in present-day Jharkhand, Birsa emerged as a charismatic figure during the late 19th century, leading the Ulgulan (Great Rebellion)—a socio-political and religious movement that challenged land alienation, forced labor, and missionary influence. Through his indigenous faith movement, Birsait, he revived tribal identity, promoted self-rule, and inspired collective resistance. Though his life was brief, Birsa’s legacy endures as a symbol of tribal empowerment, ecological justice, and anti-colonial struggle. His contributions are commemorated in Indian history as foundational to the tribal rights movement and continue to influence policy and cultural narratives today.

**Keywords** - Tribal freedom fighter, Indigenous rights, Anti-colonial resistance, Jharkhand hero, Birsait movement, Tribal empowerment, Martyrdom.

**Introduction** - Birsa Munda (1875–1900) stands as one of India’s most revered tribal freedom fighters and spiritual leaders, whose legacy continues to inspire movements for indigenous rights and social justice. Born in the village of Ulihatu in the Chotanagpur Plateau, Birsa rose from humble beginnings to lead the Ulgulan (Great Rebellion)—a powerful uprising against British colonial rule and feudal exploitation. His leadership was not only political but deeply spiritual, as he founded the Birsait movement, which sought to revive tribal identity, resist forced conversions, and promote self-rule rooted in indigenous values.

Despite his short life, Birsa Munda’s impact was profound. He challenged the alienation of tribal lands, opposed exploitative labor systems, and united diverse tribal communities under a shared vision of dignity and autonomy. His martyrdom at the age of 25 in Ranchi Jail transformed him into a symbol of resistance and a cultural icon for tribal empowerment. Today, Birsa Munda is celebrated across India, especially in Jharkhand, where his birth anniversary is observed as Jharkhand Foundation Day, honoring his enduring contributions to the nation’s freedom and the upliftment of marginalized communities.

**Objectives** – The main objectives of Birsa Munda are as given below.

1. Protect Tribal Land and Forest Rights.
2. Resist British Colonial Rule and Exploitation.
3. Revive Tribal Identity and Culture.
4. Unify Tribal Communities for Collective Action.
5. Empower Tribals Spiritually and Politically.

**Methodology** – By surveying the past history of Birsa

Munda.

**Contribution of Birsa Munda towards our country.**

**Leader of the Ulgulan (Rebellion)** – The Ulgulan (1899–1900) was a mass tribal uprising in the Chotanagpur plateau, led by Birsa Munda. It was aimed at overthrowing British rule and ending the exploitative zamindari system, which had displaced tribal communities from their ancestral lands. Mobilized the Munda tribe and other indigenous communities through powerful speeches and spiritual leadership. Declared himself a divine messenger, blending religious reform with political resistance. Called for “Abua Raj” (our rule) to replace “Queen’s Raj”, symbolizing tribal self-governance and freedom. Organized guerrilla-style attacks on British officials, police stations, and landlords. Encouraged non-payment of taxes, rejection of forced labor, and restoration of tribal land rights. Though the rebellion was eventually suppressed and Birsa was captured and died in jail in 1900, it led to significant reforms. The British enacted the Chotanagpur Tenancy Act (1908), which protected tribal land rights. Birsa became a folk hero and symbol of tribal pride, inspiring future movements for indigenous rights and autonomy.

**Champion of Tribal Land Rights** - Birsa Munda’s legacy as a champion of tribal land rights is one of the most impactful aspects of his short but powerful life. His resistance reshaped how tribal communities were treated under colonial rule and laid the foundation for legal protections that endure today. Under British rule, tribal lands were seized and handed over to zamindars (landlords) and moneylenders, displacing indigenous communities. The

Munda tribe, like many others, lost their ancestral lands and were forced into bonded labor and poverty. Birsa Munda mobilized tribal communities to reclaim their land and resist exploitation. He challenged the British-imposed feudal system, demanding restoration of tribal ownership and autonomy. His movement emphasized “Khuntkatti” rights—the traditional Munda system of joint land ownership by clan members. Birsa’s land rights advocacy continues to inspire tribal movements across India, including in Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, and Chhattisgarh. His name is invoked in land reform debates, forest rights campaigns, and indigenous empowerment efforts.

**Religious and Cultural Reformer** - Birsa Munda was not only a political rebel but also a visionary religious and cultural reformer who reshaped the spiritual identity of tribal communities in colonial India. His reforms were deeply rooted in the desire to restore dignity, unity, and moral strength among the Adivasis. Birsa introduced a monotheistic belief system, centered on a single god he called Singbonga (the Sun God), rejecting both British missionary Christianity and traditional animistic practices that he saw as corrupted. He positioned himself as a divine prophet or avatar, sent to liberate his people spiritually and socially. Urged his followers to abandon superstitions, witchcraft, animal sacrifice, and alcoholism, which he believed weakened tribal society. Promoted clean living, honesty, and discipline, creating a moral code that unified and uplifted the Munda community. Revived tribal customs and identity while purging exploitative or divisive elements. Encouraged the use of tribal language, dress, and rituals as symbols of pride and resistance. His movement became a cultural renaissance for the Adivasis, blending spiritual awakening with political consciousness. Opposed the Christian missionary efforts that often accompanied British colonialism, which he saw as tools of cultural erasure. His faith offered a spiritual alternative that preserved tribal identity while resisting foreign domination. Today, many tribal communities in Jharkhand and beyond still follow “Birsait” practices, honoring him as a saint and reformer. His teachings are passed down through oral traditions, songs, and festivals, keeping his spiritual legacy alive.

**Symbol of Indigenous Resistance** - Birsa Munda stands as a powerful symbol of indigenous resistance in India’s colonial history. His life and legacy represent the courage, dignity, and spiritual strength of tribal communities who fought against exploitation and cultural erasure. A tribal uprising in 1899–1900 that challenged British rule, feudal landlords, and missionary influence in the Chotanagpur region. Mobilized the Munda tribe and others around a shared vision of justice, land rights, and cultural pride. Declared himself a prophet and preached a new faith that rejected colonial religion and revived indigenous values. Celebrates his birth and honors tribal pride across India. From Birsa Munda Airport to universities and museums, his name is etched into India’s cultural landscape. Tribal

rights campaigns, forest protection efforts, and indigenous activism often invoke his legacy.

**Legacy and Recognition** - Birsa Munda’s legacy is honored as a symbol of tribal pride, resistance, and cultural resurgence, with national celebrations, legal reforms, and educational tributes marking his enduring impact. Here’s a structured overview of how Birsa Munda is recognized and remembered across India: Birsa Munda’s birth anniversary, is celebrated as Janjatiya Gaurav Divas (Tribal Pride Day) across India. Initiated by the Government of India to honor tribal freedom fighters and promote awareness of tribal heritage. The day also marks Jharkhand Foundation Day, linking his legacy to the state’s identity. In 2024, the Indian government released a commemorative coin and postal stamp to mark his 150th birth anniversary. Events across schools, colleges, and cultural institutions highlight his contributions to India’s freedom movement and tribal empowerment. Museums and memorials in Jharkhand and other tribal regions preserve his story and artifacts. Birsa is revered as “Dharti Aaba” (Father of the Earth) among tribal communities. His ideals live on through folk songs, oral traditions, and spiritual practices in Adivasi heartlands. The Birsait movement, inspired by his teachings, continues to influence tribal spirituality and social reform. In 2025, Gujarat declared it the “Tribal Pride Year” in honor of Birsa Munda’s 150th birth anniversary. The state launched a tribal-focused genome sequencing project, reflecting a commitment to tribal health and heritage.

**Discussion** - Born on 15 November 1875 in Ulihatu (present-day Jharkhand), Birsa Munda emerged as a tribal freedom fighter, spiritual leader, and social reformer. He belonged to the Munda tribe, one of the prominent Adivasi communities in eastern India. Despite limited formal education, Birsa’s exposure to missionary schools and tribal traditions shaped his worldview. He soon began questioning colonial rule, missionary influence, and social injustices faced by his people.

#### **Finding of Birsa Munda :**

1. Spiritual Awakening and Leadership.
2. Rise as a Revolutionary Leader.
3. Rediscovery and Legacy.

#### **Suggestion of Birsa Munda :**

1. Reclaim Your Roots
2. Stand Against Injustices
3. Live with Moral Clarity
4. Educate and Empower
5. Honor Indigenous Wisdom

**Conclusion** - Birsa Munda’s life, though tragically brief, left an indelible mark on India’s history and the consciousness of its tribal communities. As a visionary leader, he challenged colonial exploitation, revived indigenous identity, and united tribal voices in a powerful call for justice and autonomy. His movement was not merely political—it was spiritual, ecological, and deeply cultural, rooted in the lived realities of his people. Today, Birsa Munda

is celebrated not only as a freedom fighter but as a symbol of resilience, dignity, and indigenous pride. His legacy continues to inspire tribal rights movements, environmental activism, and cultural revival across India. In honoring Birsa Munda, we recognize the power of grassroots leadership

and the enduring strength of communities that fight for their land, their culture, and their future.

**Reference:-**

1. Birsa Munda Biography, Role In Freedom Struggle, Death And Legacy

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