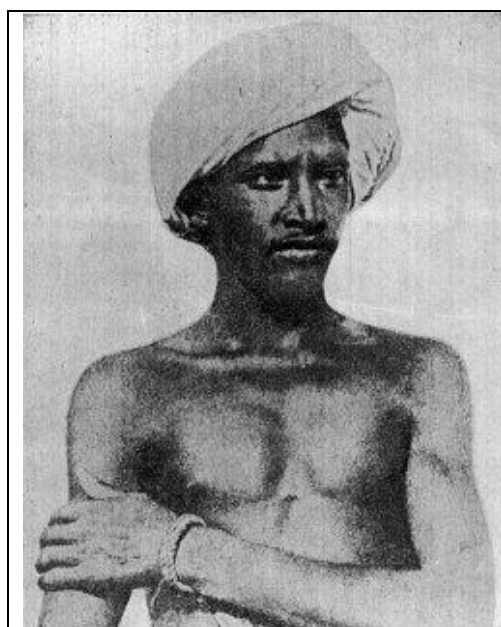


Educational initiatives highlighting the legacy of indigenous freedom fighters

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India gained independence on 15th August 1947, after 250 years of the British colonial rule. The path to freedom was far from easy; it was paved with the sacrifices of millions of people guided by selfless leaders. Our freedom movement was a movement that evolved over two centuries, marked by both violent uprisings and, ultimately, the triumph of non-violent resistance. The Government of India is celebrating the 150th Birth Anniversary of Bhagwan Birsa Munda as Jan Jatiya Gaurav Varsh Pakhwada 2025 (1-15 November 2025)². When I first heard about this celebration, I found myself quickly Googling “Who is Bhagwan Birsa Munda?” (Box 1). I tried to recall his name from my school’s history book and realized I couldn’t recall his name or that of any other indigenous freedom fighters.



Box 1: Bhagwan Birsa Munda (1875–1900)

Bhagwan Birsa Munda was an indigenous freedom fighter, social reformer, and folk hero who played a crucial role in the Indian freedom struggle during the late 19th century. He united the indigenous communities of the Chotanagpur plateau against colonial exploitative policies that threatened the traditional way of life. His efforts forced the colonial government to introduce the Chotanagpur Tenancy Act (1908), which provided some protection to indigenous land rights. Today, Birsa Munda is honoured as a folk deity (“Bhagwan Birsa”), and his birth anniversary, 15 November, is celebrated as “Janjatiya Gaurav Diwas” across India.

Photo Source: S.C. Roy Wikimedia commons

This blog highlights the ongoing efforts for highlighting indigenous freedom fighters and need for revisiting the history of freedom fighters through a decolonial lens. Indigenous freedom fighters like Bisra Munda, Alluri Seetha Ram Raju, Rani Gaidhinulu, Sidhu Murmu, Kannhu Murmu, Tilak Majhi, Gobind Guru, Tirot Singh, Telanga Kharia, Jatra Bhagat, Rajmohini Devi, Narayan Singh are a few among many freedom fighters from different corners of the Indian sub-continent, who fought for the freedom from the British colonial rule. India@75 years of independence (Azadi ka Amrit Mahostav) commemorated the stories of unsung heroes (<https://amritkaal.nic.in/unsung-heroes>). This is a positive step in highlighting the legacy of the

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² PIB (2025) Empowering Tribals, Transforming India.
<https://www.pib.gov.in/FeaturesDeatils.aspx?NoteId=151692>

indigenous freedom fighters and an inclusive approach towards narrating the history of the Indian freedom movement.

The ongoing Jan Jatiya Gaurav Varsh Pakhwada, a fortnight-long celebration, aims to educate people about the indigenous freedom fighters. As part of the Pakhwada, institutions are organizing exhibitions, debates, art workshops, and lectures to share the stories of indigenous heroes. This event offers us a unique chance to reconnect with the unsung heroes of India's freedom struggle. Such continuous efforts are needed to discuss the freedom struggle beyond political independence to fight for social justice, cultural survival and environmental stewardship.

The Government of India has also decided to establish museums to commemorate the contributions of indigenous freedom fighters. A total of eight museums are sanctioned in the states of Gujarat, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Kerala, Manipur, and Telangana³. The first digital museum, the Shaheed Veer Narayan Singh Memorial and Tribal Freedom Fighters Museum, Chhattisgarh was inaugurated by the Prime Minister of India on 1st November, 2025. These museums aim to preserve and showcase the contributions of indigenous communities to the Indian freedom movement through art, interactive displays and digital technology. These efforts mark a significant step towards narrating our collective history from the perspective of indigenous people.

As we continue to reflect on our freedom struggle, it is important to also view the history of our freedom movement through a decolonial lens; one that goes beyond the narratives of the people in power and foregrounds the voices of those who were marginalized and silenced. Our understanding of freedom movement should not be limited to a political milestone, but also include the struggles for identity and self-determination of the indigenous people. History, when told inclusively, not only teaches from where we came from, but also shapes who we become as a society.

³ PIB (2019). Museums for Tribal Freedom Fighters.
<https://www.pib.gov.in/Pressreleaseshare.aspx?PRID=1576031>