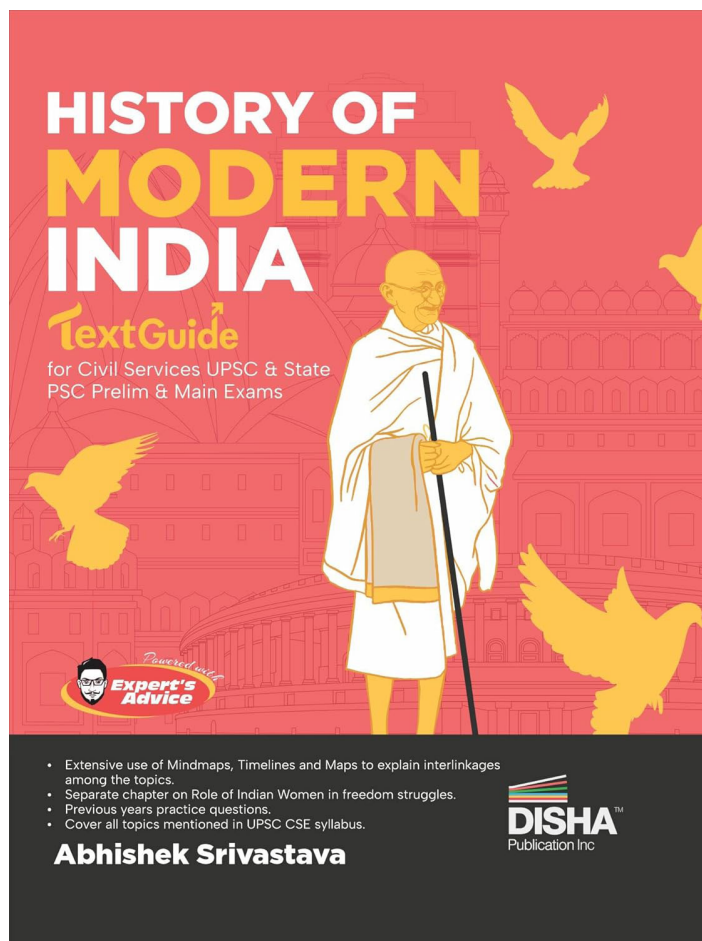




Post 1857 - Peasant Revolts & Tribal Revolts

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Chapter

18

Post 1857 - Peasant Revolts & Tribal Revolts



- Indigo rebellion
- Pabna Agrarian Leagues
- Deccan Riots
- No-tax campaign in Maharashtra and Gujarat
- Peasant Movement during 1920s
- Eka Movement 1921
- Mappila Revolt
- Bardoli Satyagraha 1928
- The Kisan Sabha Movement



Already we have covered these portions in brief during Revolt of 1857. But Peasant Movement is very important for our UPSC CSE Examination. Therefore, this chapter will separately deal with the Peasant movement. UPSC has asked questions from this topic very frequently.

Important topics-

- *Indigo rebellion*
- *Pabna Agrarian Leagues*
- *Deccan Riots*
- *Eka Movement 1921*
- *Mappila Revolt*
- *Bardoli Satyagraha 1928*
- *The Kisan Sabha Movement*

Indigo Revolt (1859-60)

- Indigo cultivation in Bengal dates back to 1777, when a Frenchman named Louis Bonnaud introduced it to the Indian subcontinent. He was the first indigo planter in Bengal, growing the crop in Taldanga and Goalpara near Hooghly.
- With the Nawabs of Bengal under Company control, indigo planting became increasingly commercially profitable due to Europe's demand for blue dye. It was made available in large parts of Burdwan, Bankura, Birbhum, North 24 Parganas, and Jessore (part of present-day Bangladesh).
- Indigo planters persuaded peasants to plant indigo rather than food crops on their own lands. They offered loans, known as dadon, at exorbitant interest rates.
- Once a farmer took out such loans, he was in debt for the rest of his life before passing it on to his heirs.
- The planters paid a pittance, only 2.5 percent of the market price. Growing indigo was not profitable for the farmers.
- The farmers were completely unprotected from the indigo planters, who threatened them with mortgages or property destruction if they refused to obey them. The planters benefited from government policies that favoured them.
- The planters were given a free hand in dealing with the peasants by an act passed in 1833. The zamindars, who stood to benefit from indigo cultivation as well, supported the planters. Farmers revolted in response to these conditions.

Features

- Bengal began cultivating indigo in 1777
- Indigo was extremely popular all over the world. Because of Europe's demand for blue dye, indigo trade was profitable.
- Indigo was forced to be grown instead of food crops by the cultivators.
- If a farmer refused to grow indigo and instead planted paddy, the planters resorted to illegal means such as looting and burning crops, kidnapping the farmer's family members, and so on to persuade the farmer to grow indigo.
- The Indigo Revolt was a peasant movement and subsequent uprising of indigo farmers against indigo planters that erupted in 1859 in Chaugacha village of Nadia, Bengal.

Causes

- Indigo planters persuaded peasants to plant indigo rather than food crops. They offered loans, known as dadon, at exorbitant interest rates.
- Once a farmer took out such loans, he was in debt for the rest of his life before passing it on to his heirs.
- The planters paid a pittance, only 2.5 percent of the market price. Growing indigo was not profitable for the farmers.
- The farmers were completely unprotected from the indigo planters, who threatened them with mortgages or property destruction if they refused to obey them.

- The planters benefited from government policies that favoured them. The planters were given a free hand in oppression by an act passed in 1833. Even the zamindars supported the planters.

Indigo Revolt - Spread of the Revolt

- The revolt began in the villages of Gobindapur and Chanugacha in Krishnanagar, Nadia district, where Bishnucharan Biswas and Digambar Biswas led the first rebellion against the planters in Bengal in 1859.
- It quickly spread through Murshidabad, Birbhum, Burdwan, Pabna, Khulna, and Narail. A public trial was held for some indigo planters, and they were executed.
- The indigo depots were destroyed by fire. Many planters fled to avoid being apprehended. The rebellious peasants also targeted the zamindars.

Overall, it was a success, and the government eventually announced that ryots could not be forced to grow Indigo, and planters closed all of their factories. It was a brave and wise example for future generations. Indigo cultivation was completely halted in 1917, thanks to Mahatma Gandhi's intervention in Champaran, where a peasant from Bihar persuaded Gandhi to visit them and see their plight.

Pabna Agrarian Leagues

- In larger parts of Eastern Bengal, landlords forcefully collected rents and land taxes, often enhanced for the poor peasants.
- The peasants were also prevented from acquiring Occupancy Right under Act X of 1859.
- In May 1873 an Agrarian League was formed in the Yusufshahi Pargana of Pabna district, Patna (East Bengal).
- Rent strikes were organised, funds were raised and the struggle spread throughout Patna and to other districts of East Bengal.
- The struggle was mainly legal resistance and little violence.
- The discontent continued till 1885 when the Government by the Bengal Tenancy Act of 1885 enhanced the occupancy rights.
- The struggle was supported by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, R.C. Dutt and the Indian Association under Surendranath Banerjea.

- Deccan Riots (1875)
 - The Deccan peasants uprising was directed mainly against the excesses of the Marwari and Gujarati money lenders.
 - The ryots suffered heavy taxation under the Ryotwari system. The land revenue was also raised by 50% in 1867.

Social Boycott: In 1874, the ryots organised a social boycott movement against the moneylenders.

- They refused to buy from the moneylenders' shops and cultivate their fields.
- The barbers, washermen, and shoemakers refused to serve them.
- This social boycott spread rapidly to the villages of Poona, Ahmednagar, Solapur and Satara and was transformed into agrarian riots with systematic attacks on the moneylenders' houses and shops.
- The Government succeeded in repressing the movement. As a conciliatory measure, the Deccan Agriculturists Relief Act was passed in 1879.

Peasant Movement during 1920s

Champaran Satyagraha (1917):

- The peasantry on the indigo plantations in the Champaran district of Bihar was excessively oppressed by the European planters and compelled to grow indigo on at least 3/20th of their land and sell it at prices fixed by the planters.
- In 1917, Mahatma Gandhi reached Champaran and began to conduct a detailed inquiry into the condition of the peasantry.
- He defied the orders of district officials for leaving Champaran.
- In June 1917, the Government appointed an enquiry committee with Gandhiji as one of the members.
 - The enactment of the Champaran Agrarian Act, 1918 freed the tenants from the special imposts levied by the indigo planters.

Kheda Satyagraha (1918):

- It was chiefly directed against the Government.
- In 1918, the crops failed in the Kheda district of Gujarat but the government refused to remit land revenue and insisted on its full collection.
- Gandhiji along with Sardar Vallabhai Patel supported the peasants and advised them to

withhold payment of revenues till their demand for its remission was met.

- The satyagraha lasted till June 1918. The Government conceded the demands of the peasants.

Moplah Rebellion (1921):

- The Moplahs were the Muslim tenants inhabiting the Malabar region where most of the landlords were Hindus.
- Their grievances centred around lack of security of tenure, high rents, renewal fees and other oppressive exactions.
- The Moplah movement merged with the ongoing Khilafat agitation.
 - Mahatma Gandhi, Shaikat Ali and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad addressed Moplah meetings.
 - Many Hindus were seen by the Moplahs to be helping the British authorities. The anti-government and anti-landlord movement acquired communal overtones.
 - Communalisation isolated the Moplah from the Khilafat & Non-Cooperation Movement.
 - The movement was called off by December 1921.

Bardoli Satyagraha (1928):

- Enhancement of land revenue by 30% in the Bardoli district of Gujarat by the British government led to the organisation of a 'No-Revenue Campaign' by the Bardoli peasants under the leadership of Vallabhai Patel.
- A woman in Bardoli gave Vallabhai Patel the title of 'Sardar'.
- Unsuccessful attempts of the British to suppress the movement by large scale attachment of cattle and land resulted in the appointment of an enquiry committee.
- The enquiry came to the conclusion that the increase had been unjustified and reduced the enhancement to 6.03%.

Kisan Sabha Movement (1857)

- The Awadh taluqdars reclaimed their lands following the 1857 revolt. This strengthened the taluqdars' or big landlords' grip on the province's agrarian society.

- The vast majority of cultivators faced high rents, summary evictions (bedakhali), illegal levies, renewal fees, or nazrana.
- Food and other necessities had become more expensive as a result of the First World War. This exacerbated the plight of the UP peasants.
- The districts of Rai Bareilly, Faizabad, and Sultanpur were the main hubs of activity.
- The movement faded quickly, owing in part to government repression and in part to the passage of the Awadh Rent (Amendment) Act.

Causes

- Following the annexation of Avadh in 1856, the taluqdars, or big landlords, strengthened their grip on the province's agrarian society in the second half of the nineteenth century.
- Exorbitant rents, illegal levies, renewal fees or nazrana, and arbitrary evictions or bedakhli had resulted, making life miserable for the majority of cultivators.
- The high cost of food and other necessities that accompanied and followed World War I exacerbated the oppression, and the tenants of Avadh were primed for a message of resistance.

Farmers have often agitated for their demands even during colonial rule. The presence of kisans from both the upper and lower castes was a distinguishing feature of the Kisan Sabha movement. The Kisan Sabha Movement died out quickly, owing to government repression. The passage of the Awadh Rent (Amendment) Act also suppressed the movement.

Eka Movement (1921)

The Eka Movement is a peasant movement that began in Lucknow and quickly spread to Hardoi, Unnao, and Sitapur districts, becoming a powerful force. The movement began in November 1921 and lasted until April 1922. The Eka movement was part of a wave of peasant uprisings that erupted in colonial India following World War I.

- The Eka Movement, also known as the Unity Movement, is a peasant movement that began in Hardoi, Bahraich, and Sitapur at the end of 1921.
- It was founded by Congress and the Khilafat movement and was later led by Madari Pasi. The main reason for the move was high rent,

which in some areas was more than 50% of the recorded rent.

- Oppression of thekedars entrusted with collecting rent, as well as the practise of share rent, aided this movement.
- The Eka meetings were marked by a religious ritual in which a hole representing the Ganga was dug in the ground and filled with water, a priest was brought in to preside, and the assembled peasants vowed that they would pay only recorded rent but pay it on time, would not leave when ejected, would refuse to do forced labour, would not help criminals and would abide by Panchayat decisions, they would not pay revenue without receipt, and they would remain united under any circumstances.
- This movement included small zamindars who were dissatisfied with the British government due to high land revenue demands.
- Soon after, the Movement's leadership shifted from Congress to Madari Pasi, a low caste leader who was not willing to accept nonviolence. As a result, the movement lost contact with the nationalist class. Because the national leader in this case was Mahatma Gandhi, whose ideology was based on nonviolence.
- The Eka Movement came to an end in March 1922 as a result of severe repression by authorities.

Causes

- The main reason for the move was high rent, which in some areas was more than 50% of the recorded rent.
- Oppression of thekedars entrusted with collecting rent, as well as the practise of share rent, aided this movement.
- The reasons for the revolt were rooted in the Awadh region's deeply exploitative agrarian structure, which was dominated by Taluqdars (aristocratic hereditary owners of large tracts of land and villages) and zamindars, who were typically 'upper' caste Hindus or Muslims.
- They leased land to tenant farmers and charged them exorbitant rents and other fees in order to collect land revenue for the colonial state.
- Tenants hired agricultural labourers to work in the fields, but they had no ownership rights to

the land they cultivated and were evicted by the zamindars if they did not pay the rent.

Objectives

- Refusal to pay more than the recorded rent.
- Demanding receipts for rents paid.
- They refused to pay nazrana or do begar (forced labour).

Outcome

- The failure of the Eka movement can be attributed to a lack of proper organisation and leadership.
- Nonetheless, it served the purpose of bringing the government's attention to the gravity of the agrarian situation.
- The government quickly passed the Oudh Rent (Amendment) Act of 1921, which went into effect in November 1921 and was intended to quell agrarian unrest and address some immediate peasant grievances.
- Due to increased government repression, a few peasants left the movement, and few were satisfied with the benefits provided by the Oudh Rent (Amendment) Act of 1921.

The Eka movement, which began in the fall of 1921, reached its apex in the first quarter of 1922, and was later met with a massive police crackdown that included large bodies of mounted and armed police, as well as a squadron of cavalry. Because of the severity of the state's repression, several of its leaders, including Madari Pasi, were forced to flee.

Peasant Movements In The 1930'S and 40'S

The great depression had affected the price of the produce which was reduced by nearly 50% but other factors like taxes and rent were still the same. This caused lot of stress on the farmer. The civil disobedience movement was launched and the farmers were asked to not pay rent or only pay 50% of it. The government repression was harsh on them. The young militant people were developed here. They were influenced by the leftist ideology by Nehru and Bose and the communist, socialist group. After the movement was withdrawn these people were looking for an outlet to their anger. **The kisan** leaders then formed All India Kisan Sabha as an

answer. The kisan manifesto was made and given to the congress. This was important to the influencing of agrarian program of the congress.

Faizpur session was the first session of congress in a rural area. It was presided over by Jawaharlal Nehru. Sane guruji worked hard to make in a success. The resolutions passed were related to peasant welfare, minimum wage for landless agriculture labor.

The main activities of kisan Sabha were to educate and organize the peasants. Exhort them to attend meetings, pass resolutions on key demands. Agitate to get rights. Organize cultural shows to create awakening. The main demands of kisan like rent relief, no forcible eviction and no illegal duties were taken up by the kisan sabhas. A march to the district headquarters was arranged to present demands to the authorities.

Tebhanga Movement

- Tebhaga movement (1946–1947) was significant peasant agitation, initiated in Bengal by the All India Kisan Sabha of peasant front, of the Communist Party of India.
- It was an intense peasant movement in the history of India. It was a fierce peasant uprising on the eve of India's independence and the partition of Bengal.
- Tebhaga, simply put, meant that two-thirds of the crops, tilled by the bargadars and adhiars would have to go to them.
- Bargadar was a person, who under the system generally known as adhi, barga or bhag cultivated the land of another person, on condition of delivering a share of the produce of such land to that person.
- The link between the zamindars and the British government was that zamindars would pay a yearly tax fixed by the government depending on the quantity and quality of the lands owned by the zamindars.
 - Below them was the class of jotedars to whom the zamindars distributed lands through a system called Pattani.
 - The jotedars class was directly connected with lands and cultivation.
- Jotedars fixed the total yield from land, to be shared equally between the cultivator and the owner of the land i.e. jotedar. This system

of cultivation of land was commonly known as Adhiary Pratha (half-half system), mostly prevalent in north Bengal.

- Jotedars used to exploit the labour of a cultivator in various forms, the poor bargadar becoming almost a slave of the landowner.
- There was always a constant threat that, if he did not obey the jotedar he would take away the land and the bargadar would have to starve. This was a system of exploitation
- The grievances of peasants grew as the economic situation in the country worsened in the post War period that immediately followed a terrible famine (1942) throughout Bengal.
- The economic situation, political unrest, and unbearable social conditions of the peasants led to the movement later known as Tebhaga Andolan (Movement).

The Movement

- The Communist leaders and Krishak Samity leaders took full advantage of the unrest, prevailing among the poor peasants and landless agricultural laborers.
 - The movement sparked off in an area under PS Chirirbandar in the district of Dinajpur.
 - The assembled farmers refused to give fifty per cent; instead, they offered thirty-three per cent out of the total yield.
 - A serious quarrel flared up between the jotedars' armed men and the adamant peasants causing injuries to both parties
 - However, Police took control of the region, by arresting the supporters and leaders.
- Further, after the Bengal famine in 1943, the Bengal Provincial Kishan Sabha, which was guided by the Communist Party, called for a mass movement among sharecroppers in September 1946 to keep Tebhaga (two-thirds) of the harvested crops.
 - This demand had figured since the thirties in the programmes of the Kishan Sabha, and had also been recognized as just by the Flood Commission, which in 1939-1940 had reviewed the miserable state of Bengal's agriculture.

- The Flood Commission, a land revenue commission established by the Govt. of Bengal in 1938, had exposed the maladies in the prevailing system which obliged sharecroppers to relinquish half of their harvest as rent, and on top of that, they had to pay scores of illegal cesses.
 - Communists went out to the countryside to organize peasants to take the harvested crop to their own threshing floor and make the two-thirds' share a reality.
 - The slogan, "adhi noy, tebhaga chai" (we want two-thirds to share not 1/2) reverberated.
 - They started taking harvested crops to their own yards.
 - They offered only 1/3 crop share to jotedars.
 - This led to innumerable clashes and subsequent arrest, lathi charges and firing.
 - Further, in late 1946, the sharecroppers (bargadars, bhagchasis or adhiar) of Bengal began to assert, that they would pay not a half share of their crop to the jotedars, but only one-third and that before the division of the crop, it would be stored in their own khamars (godowns) and not that of the jotedars.
 - In September 1946, Bengal Provincial Kishan Sabha gave a call to implement through mass struggle the Flood Commission recommendation of tebhaga.
 - Communist cadres, including many students from the urban areas, went out into the countryside to organize bargadars, who had become a major and growing section of the rural population.
 - Later, the movement received a boost in January 1947, when the Muslim League Ministry led by Suhrawarddi published the Bengal Bargadars Temporary Legislation Bill, in the Calcutta Gazette on 22 January 1947.
 - The jotedars appealed to the Government, and the police attempted to suppress the peasants.
 - But other political developments handicapped the government to get the Barga Bill enacted into a law.
 - The Partition of Bengal and the promises of the new government led to the suspension of the movement.
 - Further, the movement continued till 1950, when the Bargadari Act was enacted.
 - The Act recognised the right of the sharecropper to two-thirds of the produce when he provided the inputs.
 - Although the Bargadari Act of 1950 recognised the rights of bargadars to a higher share of crops from the land that they tilled, it was not implemented.
 - Large tracts, beyond the prescribed limit of land ceiling, remained with the rich landlords.
 - In 1967, West Bengal witnessed peasant uprising, against non-implementation of land reforms legislation.
 - From 1977 onwards major land reforms took place in West Bengal under the Left Front government.
 - Land in excess of land ceiling was acquired and distributed amongst the peasants.
 - Subsequently, "Operation Barga" began that was aimed at securing tenancy rights for the peasants.
- On the whole, the **movement reflected** the development of the **political consciousness** of the poor peasants and **tribal sharecroppers**, and it may **safely be opined** that it marked a **turning point** in the history of agrarian movements in India. Hence, the **Tebhaga movement** is probably the **greatest peasant movement** in the history of India.

The Telengana Movement

The peasant insurrection of 1946-51 in the Telengana region of the erstwhile Hyderabad state was a pivotal moment in Indian history because of its impact on the future of the communist movement in India and its highlighting of the condition of the Indian peasantry. It brought the struggles of the peasantry to the forefront and serves as a reminder of the sacrifices made by the people of this region in fighting against the autocratic rule of the Nizam of Hyderabad and the feudal regime that concentrated power and land in the hands of a few.

Before Indian independence, Hyderabad state was a princely state within the territory of British India, comprised of three linguistic regions: the Telugu-speaking Telengana area (including the capital city,

Hyderabad), the Marathi-speaking Marathwada area, and a small Kannada-speaking area. Telengana occupied 50% of the state's area. The ruling elites, including the Nizam, were Muslims, while the majority were Hindus.

The nature of land ownership in the region was extremely exploitative. Forty percent of the land was either directly owned by the Nizam or given by the Nizam to elites in the form of jagirs (special tenures). The remaining sixty percent was under the government's land revenue system, which relied on powerful landlords and gave no legal rights or security from eviction to the people actually cultivating the land. Other exploitative practices were widespread. The vetti (forced labour) system consisted of work performed by lower castes at the will of the landlord. For example, each so-called "untouchable" family was required to send one man everyday to do household labour and other jobs for the landlord. Another practice was "the prevalence of keeping girls as 'slaves' in landlords' houses... used by landlords as concubines".

The large landowners had taken over significant tracts of land, either through forced occupation or debt-sales. A small number of prominent landlords owned lands in the range of 30,000 to 100,000 acres, and 550 landlords owned land above 500 acres, amounting to about 60-70% of the cultivable land. The exaction from the peasants was immense, as "110 of them [landlords] used to collect 100,000,000 rupees every year," while the official revenue income of the whole Hyderabad state was no more than 80,000,000 rupees.

The Spark

Tensions mounted when Visnur Ramachandra Reddy, a hereditary tax collector, attempted to forcibly take land belonging to a member of a village sangham. He sent a group of 100 goons and 100 servants to forcibly gather the harvest. They were resisted by the local village sangham leaders and volunteers. The next day, six leaders of the sangham were arrested at the call of the landlord. On July 4, 1946, a procession was organised by the villagers protesting the violence and terrorism of the landlord's goons. As they approached the landlord's house, some of the goons opened fire on the procession, leading to the death of Doddi Komarayya, the sangham leader.

News spread to the nearby villages. People came with hay and fuel to burn down the landlord's house. At this point, the landlord's son arrived with 200 goons. Sixty policemen also arrived on the scene, assuring the people that strict action would be taken against the goons. The crowd dispersed, and – despite the police assurances – the goons were handed back to the landlord, and cases were filed against the sangham leaders.

The death of Komarayya enraged the people, sparking a massive revolt amongst the Telengana peasantry, with people from neighboring villages marching, holding meetings in front of the landlords house, declaring: "Sangham is organised here. No more vetti, no more illegal exactions, no evictions". By the end of July, the movement had spread to about 300-400 villages across three districts. Several landlords and officials hurriedly left the villages. Volunteer groups were organised to defend peasants from attacks; their weapons were sticks and stones.

In response, the police, with the help of landlords, conducted a series of search operations, leading villagers to arm themselves. In October 1946, the Nizam's government banned the AMS, and a spurt of arrests and military raids took place. Under these conditions of martial rule, some landlords began returning. The agitated masses, in one case, beat up a landlord who had insulted one of the women in the sangham, and this news spread like wildfire. The villagers also used leaflets that threatened severe action against the police if they indulged in violent activities.

During this first phase of the movement, the people were able, in several areas, to "put an end to vetti, illegal exactions, compulsory grain levies, and... reoccupy the lands seized earlier by the landlords" while also "resisting the landlords' armed goondas [goons]" and facing "the armed police and the military forces of the Nizam

The Telengana movement represents the culmination of efforts by communist and socialist parties in the first few decades of the communist movement. The untiring efforts organising and mobilising the peasantry against grave injustices represented a break away from traditionally more moderate reformist movements within the peasantry. Although the exact significance and value of the Telengana movement is fiercely debated, one cannot deny the

role of the movement in bringing the question of the peasantry to the fore of the communist movement; in actively organising people against caste injustices; and in radically redefining the need for strong organisational structure, which was a key factor in the growth of the movement.

Rampa Rebellion

- The Rampa Rebellion of 1922, also known as the Manyam Rebellion, was a tribal uprising led by Alluri Sitarama Raju in Godavari Agency of Madras Presidency, British India.
- It began in August 1922 and lasted until the capture and killing of Raju in May 1924.
- This Rebellion had no connection with the Rampa Rebellion of 1879.

Background

- The Rampa administrative area, situated in the hills of the present Godavari districts of Andhra Pradesh, comprised around 700 square miles, and comprised mostly of Tribal population.
- They had traditionally supported their food requirements, through the use, in particular, of the Podu system, whereby each year some areas of jungle forest were burned to clear land for cultivation.
- The British wanted to take control of the forest land for building railways and ships.
 - Also, the British authorities wanted to improve the economic usefulness of lands in Godavari Agency, an area that was noted for the prevalence of malaria and blackwater fever.
 - This commercial exploitation had a great impact on the local tribal people, as they lost their land to traditional cultivation activities.
 - Thus, the revolt was mainly against the passing of Madras Forest Act, 1882 which put restrictions on the free movement of tribal communities in the forest land and prevented them from engaging in their traditional Podu agricultural system.
- Further, the tribal people of the forested hills, who now faced starvation, had long felt that the legal system favoured the zamindars and merchants of the plains areas, which had also resulted in the earlier Rampa Rebellion of 1879.

– As a result, the tribal people objected the British laws.

- Simultaneously, there was discontent among the muttadars, who had been hereditary tax collectors and de facto rulers in the hills prior to the arrival of the British.
 - They had acted on behalf of the rajas, the actual rulers who lived on the plains.
 - Later, the British subsumed them into the colonial administration, leaving them as bureaucrats with no substantive power
 - Hence, the tribal and Muttadars had a common foe.

The Revolt

- Alluri Sitarama Raju, a sanyasi, a person of justice and strong will power, raised his voice against the unlawful British Policy.
 - He harnessed the discontent of the tribal people to support his anti-colonial zeal, whilst also accommodating the grievances of those Muttadars who were sympathetic to his aim.
- Tribal people were the victims of the colonial rulers' greed and Raju wanted justice for them.
 - So, Raju headed the Rampa Rebellion along with the band of tribal people and other followers.
 - Alluri Raju also used guerrilla warfare to fight against the British. He raided many police stations like Dammanapalli, Krishna Devi Petra and Annavaram.
- The revolt started in August 1922 and ended in May 1924 after the capturing and killing of Raju.
- However, there was no commission of enquiry placed on the problems faced by the tribes and the reason for rebellion.
- According to the British, "It was the prevalent diseases through which the tribal people had acquired tolerance, which hindered the British suppression of the rebellion".

Tribal Uprisings during British rule

Many of the various tribal groups in India revolted against the forceful and devastating intrusions into their life and region by the British. The tribals had been living peacefully and in harmony with nature

for hundreds of years in their own forests prior to the arrival of the colonial powers. The British came and introduced many changes in their way of life and also introduced outsiders into their turf. This reduced them to the status of labourers and debtors from masters of their own land. The uprisings were basically against this unwelcome intrusion and a fight for their independence.

In accordance with the geographic area occupied, tribal movements are further split into two kinds.

1. **Non-Frontier Tribe:** These tribes make up 89% of the overall tribal population. The non-frontier tribes were mostly restricted to Andhra, West-Central India, and central India. Khonds, Savara, Santhal, Munda, Oraon, Koya, Kol, Gond and Bhil were a few of the tribes that took part in the movements. These tribes' uprisings were quite violent and included several significant uprisings.
2. **Frontier Tribes:** These are the inhabitants of Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Assam, Manipur, Mizoram, and Tripura, seven of the frontier states in the northeast.

Bhil Uprising (1818-1831)

- Bhils belonged to the Khandesh region of Maharashtra.
- In 1818, the British made their way into the area and began encroaching on the Bhil territories.
- The native Bhil Tribe was in no way prepared to accept any British changes made on their land.
- As a result they revolted against the foreigners on the land.
- The reason for the uprising was the brutal treatment of the Bhils at the hands of the East India Company who denied them their traditional forest rights and exploited them.
- The British responded by sending a force to suppress the rebellion.
- But the revolt was not in vain, as the British gave concessions to various taxes and returned forest rights as part of the peace settlement.

Ramosi Uprising (1822- 1829)

- Ramosis were hill tribes of the western ghats.
- They resented the British policy of annexation and rose against the Britishers under the leadership of Chittur Singh.

- The new British Administration system, which the tribal people thought to be extremely unfair to them and left them with no other option than to rise against the Britishers for, was the primary cause of this insurrection.
- They plundered the regions around the Satara.
- The revolt continued till 1829, after which the British restored order in the region.
- Britishers followed a pacifist policy towards the Ramosis and some of them were recruited in the hill police.

Kol Rebellion (1832)

- Kol uprising is one of the most well-known revolutions against the British government.
- The Kols were one of the tribes inhabiting the Chhotanagpur area. They lived in complete autonomy under their traditional chiefs but this changed when the British came.
- Along with the British came the outsiders. The colonial government also introduced the concept of non-tribal moneylenders, zamindars and traders.
- The Kols then lost their lands to farmers from outside and also had to pay huge amounts of money in taxes. This led to many becoming bonded labourers.
- To this the British judicial policies also caused resentment among the Kols.
- There was an insurrection in 1831-32 which saw the Kols organise themselves under Buddho Bhagat and revolt against the British and the moneylenders.
- They killed many outsiders and burned houses. This armed resistance went on for two years after which it was brutally suppressed by the British with their superior weaponry.
- The Kol Rebellion was so intense that troops had to be called in from Calcutta and Benares to crush it.

Santhal Rebellion (1855-56)

Santhals were the agricultural people settled in Rajmahal Hills of Bihar. British turned to them for the expansion of the revenue through agriculture. Santhals agreed to clear forests to practice settled agriculture. In 1832, a large number of areas were demarcated as Damin-i-Koh or Santal Pargana.

However, gradually the exploitation started from the British side and to such an extent, that it gave rise to Santhal Rebellion.

- The Santhals are the largest tribal group in India today as per the population figures. They are native to the Indian states of predominantly Jharkhand, West Bengal and Odisha.
- Until the 19th century, they lived their lives in harmony with nature and practised shifting agriculture and hunting. They lived in the hilly regions of Birbhum, Barabhum, Manbhum, Palamau and Chhotanagpur.
- These areas came under the Bengal Presidency whose rule passed onto the British after the Battle of Plassey in 1757. The Santhal life was disrupted by the onslaught of the Zamindari system that they introduced. They were rendered landless bonded labourers in their own homes.
- The local landlords occupied the Santhal lands and exploited them.
- The tribals engaged in commercial activity by the barter system. When currency was introduced because of the colonial intervention, they began to rely on the moneylenders. These moneylenders exploited them and reduced them to abject poverty. They were weighed down by heavy debts which kept mounting amidst the poverty and the humiliation of being landless in what was traditionally their turf.
- On 30th June 1855, two years before the Great Revolt of 1857, two Santhal brothers Sidhu and Kanhu Murmu organised 10,000 Santhals and proclaimed a rebellion against the British. The tribals took an oath to drive away from the British from their homeland. The Murmu brothers' sisters Phulo and Jhano also played an active part in the rebellion.
- When the police came to arrest the brothers, the villagers killed the policemen. They were able to capture large parts of land including the Rajmahal Hills, Bhagalpur district and Birbhum.
- Although the rebellion took the government by surprise, they crushed it with a heavy hand. The British firepower was no match for the tribal methods of warfare composed of spears and arrows. About 15000 Santhal villagers including the Murmu brothers were killed and their villages destroyed.

- The landlords supported the government whereas the local people including the milkmen and the blacksmiths supported the Santhals.
- The Santhals were fierce fighters but they were honourable. According to some British observers of the time, the Santhals used poisoned arrows for hunting but did not use poisoned arrows against their enemies in war. It is ironical that the British came to 'civilise' the natives.
- Martial law was declared on 10th November 1855 and it lasted till 3rd January 1856.
- The British passed the Santhal Parganas Tenancy Act in 1876 which offered some protection for the tribals against exploitation.
- The Santhal rebellion was overshadowed by the revolt of 1857 but it remains a watershed in the evolution of the modern Santhali identity. It played an important role in the creation of the state of Jharkhand in 2000.

The Uprising of Santhals

The Santhal Revolt took place in 1855-56. Santhals are a tribal group concentrated in the state of Jharkhand. This was the first peasant revolt that occurred in India. The revolt can be attributed to the introduction of the Permanent Land Settlement of 1793.

The aforesaid settlement pattern by the British snatched lands that the Santhals had been cultivating for centuries from them. The zamindars, moneylenders, Europeans and the British government officials raised the land tax and exploited farmers. They were so oppressed that they resolved to rebel against the landlords and the government.

The Santhals engaged in guerrilla warfare. This was a new occurrence for Bihar. The Santhals formed their own armies composed of peasants marching against their oppressors. The Santhal army dismantled the railway and postal communications. Surely, the Santhal revolt was very effective for a while but it could not succeed against the absolute power of the government and was suppressed.

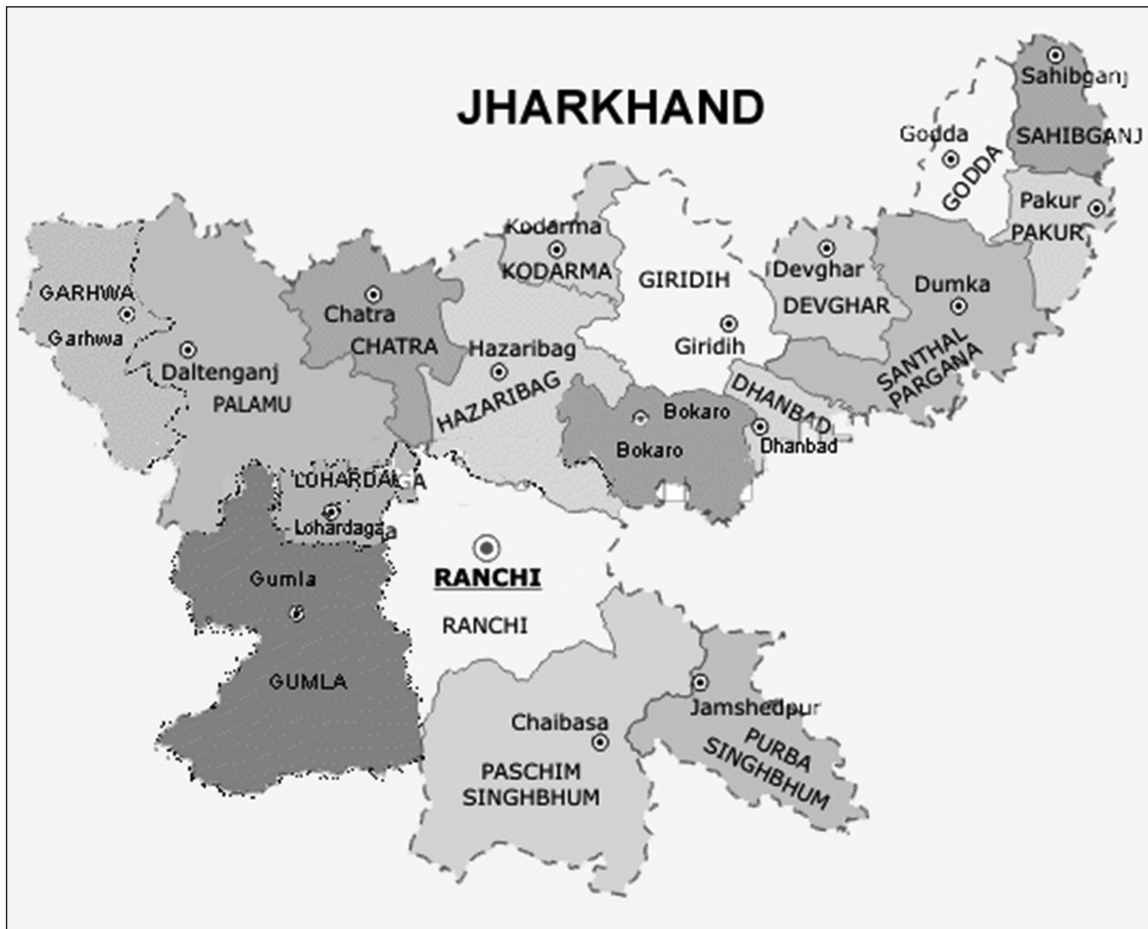
Khond Uprising (1837-56)

- The Khonds inhabited the mountainous regions that ran from Bengal to Tamil Nadu as well as the central provinces.

- Due to the impassable hilly terrain, they were entirely independent before the British arrived.
- Between 1837 to 1856, they rose against the British for their exploitation of forest practices, led by Chakra Bisoi, who adopted the name “Young Raja.”
- Tribal people from the Ghumusar, Kalahandi, and Patna regions took part in the uprising.
- The British attempt to outlaw the practice of “Mariah” (Sacrifice) and the subsequent introduction of new taxes, as well as the influx of Zamindars and Sahukars (Moneylenders), were the main causes of their uprising.
- Using bow-and-arrows, swords, and axes, the Kols rose up in rebellion against the British-created “Maria Agency.”
- Additionally, some local militia clans led by Radha Krishna Dand Sena helped them. The insurrection finally came to an end in 1955 when Chakra Bisoi was taken, prisoner.

Munda Rebellion (1899- 1900)

The Munda Rebellion, also known as the Munda Ulgulan, was one of the most prominent tribal revolts in the history of Indian Independence. It was led by Birsa Munda, a tribal freedom fighter and folk hero belonging to the Munda tribe. This rebellion took place in the Bengal Presidency (now Jharkhand) in the late 19th century, during the British Raj. It is considered an important event in the Indian independence movement.



Causes

- The Munda tribe was based in Chhota Nagpur of Jharkhand and their means of living was agriculture.
- The main causes of the rebellion were the British colonizers, zamindars and missionaries.
- The Mundas practiced the **Khuntkatti System**, where the whole clan jointly owned the land fit for cultivation. However, over the course of the 19th century, non-tribal people started to settle in the land of the Munda and became Jagirdars and zamindars.
- The land owned by the Mundas was seized or forfeited, and they were forced to work as landless labourers (**begari**) in the fields of these Jagirdars and zamindars. They were also exploited by high rates of interest and withholding of receipts. This led to conflicts with the “**dikus**” (outsiders).
- In addition, large forest areas were designated as protected forest by the British government and the Mundas lost their rights to these lands.
- Missionaries were also converting tribals to Christianity
- As a result, the Mundas were in dire need of a leader who could guide them in fighting for their land.

The Rebellion

- It was at this time that Birsa Munda came forward to lead the tribal movement.
- Birsa had a knowledge of the Golden Age of the Munda tribe, which existed before the arrival of the dikus, and had witnessed its transformation into an impoverished tribe.
- Birsa strived for a positive political program, with the goal of attaining both religious and political independence for the Mundas.
- The movement sought to assert the rights of the Mundas as the rightful proprietors of the soil.
- Birsa called upon the Mundas to fight against superstition, give up animal sacrifice, stop taking intoxicants, to wear the sacred thread and retain the tribal tradition of worship in the sarna or the sacred grove.
- Birsa Munda also created a new religion called ‘**Birsait**’ which became a challenge for

the British conversion activities. The religion believed in One God and encouraged them to revert to their original religious beliefs.

- Thus the rebellion was essentially a revivalist movement that aimed to purge Munda society of all foreign elements and restore its pristine character.
- By the 1890s, Birsa was mobilizing the people and inciting the tribal in the region.
- In 1894, he declared a revolt against the British and the dikus and declared the establishment of a ‘Munda Raj’.
- Under his leadership, the villagers attacked police stations, churches, and government properties in 1899.
- However, on 9 January, 1900, the rebels were defeated. Birsa was captured and died in jail. Nearly 350 Mundas were put on trial, and of them, three were hanged and 44 transported for life.

Significance of the Movement

- Although the rebellion did not achieve its desired outcome, it had a significant impact on the tribal movement of India.
- It showed that the tribal people had the capacity to protest against injustice and express their anger against colonial rule.
- The British enacted the **Chotanagpur Tenancy Act, 1908**, which restricted the transfer of tribal land to non-tribal people.
- The “Khuntkatti” rights were recognized by the British government and the practice of “Beth begari” (wageless labor) was banned. This provided legal protection for the land rights of the tribals and helped in improving their condition to some extent.
- Birsa Munda, in just 25 years of age, left a legacy behind him, and he is named among the exceptional freedom fighters of India.
- The rebellion, led by Birsa Munda, also served as a reminder of the sacrifices and devotion of the Munda tribe and their legacy continues to be followed by people in India.
- The Munda Rebellion and Birsa Munda’s contributions have been remembered and celebrated in Jharkhand and India, with the state government commemorating his birth

anniversary as “Birsa Munda Jayanti” and the Indian government recognizing him as a freedom fighter and national hero. His portrait even hangs in the Indian Parliament Museum.

Koya Uprising (1879- 1880)

- Assisted by Khonda Sara commanders, the Koyas of the eastern Godavari track (now Andhra) revolted in 1803, 1840, 1845, 1858, 1861, and 1862.
- They rose once again under Tomma Sora in 1879–1880.
- They complained about being persecuted by the police and moneylenders, new limitations and the denial of their historical rights to forest areas.
- Following the passing of Tomma Sora, Raja Anantayyar led a new uprising in 1886.

Tana Bhagat Movement/Oraon Movement (1914-1919)

- During the colonial time period, tribal uprisings were taking place in different parts of India due to the local reasons and Tana Bhagat movement is one of them.
- This movement was religious in its initial stage, but gradually targeted the political objectives.
- This movement is considered as an extended part of the Birsa movement.
- Tana Bhagat movement was started in April 1914, under the leadership of Jatra Bhagat.
- Basically Tana Bhagat movement was started to stop the evil practices which were taking place in the Oraon community of Chotanagpur and to oppose the Jamindars policies which were exploiting the Oraon people directly.
- People adopted non-violence as their strategy to make this movement successful as the followers of this movement were influenced by Mahatma Gandhi.

Reasons of the movement

- In April 1914 Jatra Bhagat announced, that he had a direct message from God Dharmesh (God of Oraon community) to revive the Oraon religion, because some bad practices like-exorcism, ghost hunter, animal sacrifices for

God and alcoholism etc. have entered in their religion and somehow these practices should be abandoned. So these all religious issues provided the platform for movement in the initial stage.

- Jamindars were exploiting the Oraon community people by taking extra rent of lands. This kind of rebel behaviour of Jamindars agitated the Oraon community.
- The role of pahan (priests) and mahto (village representative) in the village gave way to the Jatra followers, to raise voice against these people as they believed in ghosts and other evil practices.
- The Oraon people were also forced for unpaid labour by their landlords.
- Further, the people of the community, faced land alienation from the Government.

Impact

- Animal sacrifices were stopped
- Drinking alcohol was prohibited
- Superstitious belief did not get importance
- People were exempted from imposed taxes
- The followers decided that they will not provide services as coolies or labourers
- Demand of self-governance

Significance

- Later this movement joined the national movement of Mahatma Gandhi and adopted his principles of truth and non-violence.
 - Also, the followers of this movement participated in congress sessions of Calcutta, Gaya and Lahore.
- In this way the followers of the Tana Bhagat movement took part in national movements against the British rule. In present also Oraon community people follow the Gandhian thought.
 - This movement was very unique in its nature, because it tried to associate with the national movement and played a significant role in Indian independence.

North-East Tribal Movement

We need to bear in mind the unique geopolitical and historical background of the tribal people of the North-East in order to understand the specificity

and very different character of the tribal movements of this region from those of other areas. These background factors include:

- (i) Because of their location of international borders, many of these tribal communities played the role of bridge and buffer communities and so had developed bonds with certain groups across the borders
- (ii) British colonial administration followed a policy of insuring economic social and political isolation on these tribes from the rest of the country. The tribal areas were categorized as excluded or partially excluded areas and contacts of the outsiders with these areas were strictly regulated, particularly in the excluded areas where no outsiders could enter without obtaining a permit. Thus their areas not only remained unaffected by the political influence of the freedom struggle in the country, but also developed apprehensions about maintaining their own separate identity and political autonomy in relation to independent India.
- (iii) Unlike the tribals of middle India, tribals in the North-East have throughout constituted an overwhelming majority (except in Tripura) and being free from exploitative economic and social contacts with their Assamese neighbours including alienation of their land and forests, failed to develop agrarian and millenarian movements which frequently characterised the tribals of other regions of the country.
- (iv) Spread of the Christianity and mission education gave the tribals a distinctive sense of identity and made them apprehensive about their future in Independent India.
- (v) Influence of the second world war as theatres of war came close to their habitat in the North-East.
- (vi) Impending independence of India and resulting heightening of political consciousness and struggle.
- (vii) After independence there was open unrestricted contact between the tribals and outsiders. A number of traders, refugees and other migrants began to settle in the area, acquiring land and resources. All these generated fears of being swamped by outsiders and losing land, forests and other resources to the outsiders.

- (viii) The Impact of modernization on Tribal life and social institutions, especially the conflict between members of the growing middle class and traditional chiefs as well as dislocations of the traditional pattern of land control and land relations.

Depending on the particular circumstances and objective of the individual movements, many of these factors in different combinations affected the formation and development of the different tribal movements. Because of the characteristic contrition's of their genesis, thrust of these movements has been largely political, centring on issues of 'identity and security', with 'goals ranging from autonomy to independence and means from constitutional agitation to insurgency'. Although a majority of the movements have also Tribal Ethnicity : The North-East centred on issues of language, script and cultural revival, the same political struggle appears to have been reflected in these movements also.

Causes of Tribal Revolts in India

- The practice of Settled Agriculture: The tribals' mainstay were shifting agriculture, hunting, fishing and the use of forest produce. With the influx of non-tribals into the traditional regions of the tribals, the practice of settled agriculture was introduced.
 - This led to a loss of land for the tribal population. The tribals were reduced to being landless agricultural labourers.
 - There were restrictions imposed on the use of forest produce, on shifting agriculture and on hunting practices. This led to the loss of livelihood for the tribals.
- Introduction of the outsiders: The British introduced outsiders like money lenders into the tribal areas which led to severe exploitation of the local tribals. They became bonded labourers under the new economic system.
- Private ownership by non-tribal landlords: The tribal societies had a system of joint ownership of land which was replaced by the notion of private property.
- Society became non-egalitarian: Tribal society was traditionally egalitarian compared to mainstream society which was marked by caste

and class distinctions. With the coming of the non-tribals or outsiders, the tribals came to be classified under the lowest rungs of society.

- Introduction of Forest Acts: A Forest Department was set up in 1864 by the government mainly to control the rich resources of Indian forests. The Government Forest Act of 1865 and the Indian Forest Act of 1878 established a complete government monopoly over the forested land.
- The work of the Christian missionaries also led to social upheaval in tribal society and this was also resented by them as they considered the work of missionaries an extension of colonialism.
- A section of the tribal rebellion was a response to the landlords' attempts to impose taxes on the traditional use of timber and grazing areas,

police exaction, new excise regulations, low country traders' and moneylenders' exploitation, and limitations on shifting agriculture in forests.

Weakness of these Uprisings:

- The tribal uprisings were massive in totality but were localised and isolated.
- They were the result of the local problems and grievances.
- The uprising lacked a strong leadership as they were semi-feudal in character, backwards-looking, and traditional in outlook and their resistance represented no societal alternative.

On the whole, however, these rebellions were able to establish valuable traditions of local resistance to authoritarianism.

Previous Years' Questions (Prelims)

1. Indigo cultivation in India declined by the beginning of the 20th century because of [2020-I]
 - (a) Peasant resistance to the oppressive conduct of planters
 - (b) Its unprofitability in the world market because of new inventions
 - (c) National leaders' opposition to the cultivation of indigo
 - (d) Government control over the planters
2. With reference to the history of India, "Ulgulan" or the Great Tumult is the description of which of the following events? [2020-I]
 - (a) The Revolt of 1857
 - (b) The Mappila rebellion of 1921
 - (c) The Indigo revolt of 1859 – 60
 - (d) Birsa Munda's revolt of 1899-1900

Solution 1. (b) 2. (d)

Previous Years' Questions (Mains)

1. The 1857 Uprising was the culmination of the recurrent big and small local rebellions that had occurred in the preceding hundred years of British rule. Elucidate [2019]
2. Explain how the uprising of 1857 constitutes an important watershed in the evolution of British policies towards colonial India. [2016]