

Santhal Rebellion

UPSC aspirants need to be well aware of the historical background of the Santhal rebellion which is given here. From the time they began consolidating, after the Battle of Plassey in 1757, the East India Company started implementing revenue policies, laws to be followed by the citizens to control the vast territory of India.

- Lord Cornwallis established the Permanent Settlement in a few regions of the country, including Bihar, Bengal, and Orissa, in 1793.
- Landlords had permanent and hereditary control of the land under the permanent revenue system till they paid a set revenue to the British.
- In case the peasants were unable to provide their rent, the British would auction off large tracts of Santhal land to anyone willing to pay a fixed amount in revenue, and many of the tribal lands were sold.
- The Santhal lost ownership over the land during this process, and their long-standing tribal network and political layouts ended.
- The Santhals were a tribal people who lived in the Rajmahal hills' forest. The East India Company separated the Damin-i-Koh from the portion of Jharkhand in 1832 and handed it to the Santhals in exchange for a promise not to interfere in their land.
- However, as time passed and the Britishers' demand increased, the charges to the Santhals skyrocketed.
- Finally, the Santhals found themselves in a position where their only option was to revolt against the British and the Zamindars.
- Another reason for the Santhal rebellion to take place was because of the fact that the Santhals used the barter system. They had difficulty paying money to the zamindars, forcing them to borrow money by asking the moneylenders, which would come at exorbitant interest rates, trapping them in a never-ending cycle.
- The only way out of this vicious circle and to save the Santhals' identity was to stand against British policies.

Santhal Uprising

There was yet another uprising against the British in North India just two years prior to the uprising of 1857. Tribes used crossbows on one side, and the British, along with their agents, the Zamindars, used the most modern weapons on the other. Sadly, our school history textbooks only give a cursory reference to the epic Santhal rebellion, which was waged in the forests of Jharkhand and West Bengal. This Santhal revolt was not only very significant, but the fundamental issue it addressed (the right to tribal lands) also served as the inspiration for a more recent, deadly movement in India known as the Naxalite movement, which is still active today.

The Santhals are a tribal community that lives in Jharkhand, West Bengal, Bihar, and Odisha. They communicate in Santhali and idolize their own deities. Santhals lived in the region's dense forests and hunted until the 18th century. But even so, distant political events had a considerable influence on their daily lives. This was accompanied by Lord Cornwallis' initiation of the notable Permanent Settlement or Zamindari system in 1793 CE. It was agreed in this settlement that landlords would have continual and hereditary rights to the land as provided that they paid a set revenue to the British Government.

To build this new generation of Zamindars, the British auctioned off large swaths of Santhal land to anybody who could assure them such set revenues. Many wealthy Indians living in cities purchased zamindaris in these remote forests.

Soon after, began exploiting people there. With the implementation of the Zamindari system, Santhals were stripped of all land rights. Individuals were lowered to hired workers in the farms for these new occupants' This also meant the end of the old tribal frameworks and political layouts that had remained in place for generations The Zamindar and his troops were in command.

The introduction of the monetary system of currency was another major setback that gave rise to the Santhal rebellion. The Santhals used a barter system, but the Zamindars required cash payments. This implied they had to take loans from money lenders at exorbitant interest rates. The hold of moneylenders and the loss of identity created a deep sense of resentment among the Santhals.

The Santhal Revolt

The Santhal revolt began on June 30, 1855, along with the assistance of eminent leaders such as Kanhu, Sidhu, Chand, and Bhairav, as well as their sisters, Phulo and Jhano.

- The anguished Santhals waged guerrilla warfare opposite to the Britishers, forming their own armies of farmers, villagers, and women.
- They were capable of hijacking large areas of land during this quest, including Rajmahal Hills, Bhagalpur district, and Birbhum.
- These people militarised over ten thousand Santhals. The villagers set fire to the warehouses, and any or all forms of communication were cut off.
- The government used all available means to put a stop to the movement. To put down the Santhal rebellion, Britishers used heavy loaded weapons against the Santhals' bows and arrows.
- The landlords supported the government, whereas the locals backed the Santhals wholeheartedly.
- Unfortunately, the brothers Sidhu and Kanhu were arrested, and the Santhal revolt came to an end in a bloodbath.
- The Santhals were suppressed, and the movement ended in 1856.