Ajit Singh & Pagri Sambhal Jatta movement

Why in News?

Farmers protesting at the Punjab and Haryana borders are observing February 23 as Pagri Sambhal Diwas, in honour of Ajit Singh, paternal uncle of freedom fighter Bhagat Singh.

Ajit Singh

- Ajit Singh was a prominent freedom fighter, revolutionary, and nationalist leader.
- **Born on -** February 23, 1881 at Khatkar Kalan village in ***Punjab.***
- He played a significant role in inspiring his nephew Bhagat Singh.
- Ajit was the elder brother of Kishan Singh, Bhagat Singh's father.
- Singh attended the DAV College in Lahore after graduating from the Anglo-Sanskrit High School in Jalandhar in 1894.
- He later enrolled at Bareilly College to study law, but he dropped out.
- In 1905, Ajit Singh and his brother Kishan Singh worked among the people in famine-stricken areas like Barar (Madhya Pradesh) and Ahmedabad, as well as flood and earthquake-affected areas like Srinagar and Kangra.

Pagri Sambhal Jatta movement

- Ajit Singh started the Pagri Sambhal Jatta movement in 1907 in protest against 3 agricultural laws imposed by the British.
- 'Pagri Sambhal Jatta' literally translates to ***'take care of your turban, o farmer',*** and invokes self-respect and honour.
- **The 3 laws**
  - The Punjab Land Alienation Act, 1900
  - The Punjab Land Colonisation Act, 1906
  - The Doab Bari Act, 1907.

The Punjab Land Alienation Act	• It restricted the rights of farmers to sell or mortgage their land freely. • It favored moneylenders and landlords, making it difficult for peasants to escape debt.
Punjab Land Colonization Act	• It gave the British control over land ownership in the newly developed Chenab Colony (now in Pakistan). • Farmers had to transfer their land to the British government upon death instead of passing it to their heirs.
Doab Bari Act, 1907	• It took away farmers' ownership rights over their lands, effectively reducing them to contract workers.

- Along with this, the British raised taxes on agricultural land and water for irrigation, increasing the financial burden on farmers.

- Many small farmers and peasants were forced into debt and land loss.
- Soon, farmers started protests against these laws, demanding their repeal.
- Ajit Singh and Kishan Singh (Bhagat Singh's father) formed the ***Bharat Mata Society,*** a revolutionary group for farmers.
- *Lala Lajpat Rai* and other leaders also supported the movement.
- The slogan "Pagri Sambhal Jatta" was coined by ***Banke Dayal***, a nationalist poet, and became a symbol of resistance.
- The movement inspired future protests, including the *Ghadar Movement and Bhagat Singh's revolutionary activities*.
- Both Ajit Singh and Lala Lajpat Rai were arrested in May 1907 and exiled to Burma (now Myanmar), but due to public pressure, were released in November 1907.
- Ajit Singh, however, escaped to Persia, then Turkey, Brazil, Germany, and later settled in Italy.
- He worked closely with revolutionaries in Europe and was associated with Lala Hardayal and Madame Cama.
- He came to India in March 1947 but died in Dalhousie due to ill health on August 15, 1947, the day ***India got independence.***
- From 2021 onwards, ***February 23*** has been observed as Pagri Sambhal Diwas.
- In 2021, farmers were protesting at the Delhi borders seeking repeal of the now-scrapped 3 farm laws, and hence had observed Ajit Singh's birth anniversary as Pagri Sambhal Diwas.

References

1. The Indian Express | Ajit Singh
2. Ministry of culture | Ajit Singh

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