

Patharughat Peasants' Uprising

Why in news?

On January 28, 2021, an Integrated Training and Skill Development Centre will be inaugurated near Patharughat uprising martyrs' column.

What led to the Patharughat uprising?

- The incident took place in Patharughat, a small village in Assam's Darrang district, Northeast of Guwahati on January 28, 1894.
- After the British annexed Assam in 1826, they surveyed the vast lands of the state & imposed land taxes which created resentment among farmers.
- In 1893, the British government decided to increase agricultural land tax by 70- 80%.
- Across Assam, peasants began protesting against the move by organising Raj Mels, or peaceful peoples' conventions.

How did the colonial government react to it?

- Guwahati-based author Arup Kumar Dutta in his book — Pothorughat —said that despite the gatherings being democratic, the British perceived them as breeding grounds for sedition.
- Whenever there was a Raj Mel, the British used to come down on it with a heavy hand to disperse them.
- On January 28, 1894 when British officers refused to listen to the farmers' grievances & there was lathi charge, open fire against farmers wherein many peasants got killed.
- Official records in Darrang District Gazette, 1905, mention that 15 were killed and 37 got wounded in the Patharughat incident.
- However, unofficial sources claim it was a much higher number and 140 were killed.

Why was the incident significant?

- This incident is one of the most tragic & inspiring episodes in the saga of Indian freedom movement but rarely features in mainstream historical discourse of freedom struggle.
- Even within Assam, especially the younger generations, know nothing about Pothorughat though British kept meticulous records as there was little

archival material related to this incident.

- For larger Assamese community, Patharughat comes 2nd only to the Battle of Saraighat, where the Ahoms defeated the Mughals in 1671.
- Though the episode is called as Battle of Patharughat it is misnomer since it was peaceful and seen as precursor to the Civil Disobedience movement which was later propagated by Gandhi.
- In the history of pre-Congress, pan-Indian anti-imperialist movement, this uprising is the one where masses organised themselves to resist the British without a well defined leadership.

How is the site today?

- A martyrs column was erected at the site on 28 January, 2001 by the Army and unveiled by SK Sinha, former Governor of Assam.
- Every year on January 28, the government & local people pay respects to the martyrs of the incident (Krishak Swahid Diwas) in an official function.
- On January 28, 2021, Assam CM Sarbananda Sonowal will inaugurate an Integrated Training and Skill Development Centre for the farmers near the site.
- This centre will be equipped to teach farmers new skills and technology & those who come to teach from various parts of India will learn about the unique history of Patharughat.

Source: The Indian Express