Santhal Hul

Why in news?

June 30 marks the 169th anniversary of the Santhal Hul, one of the earliest peasant uprisings against the British.

What is a Santhal Hul?

Santhals
• **History of Santhals** – They were *not the original inhabitants of modern day Santhal Pargana* which includes the six districts of Dumka, Pakur, Godda, Sahibganj, Deoghar and parts of Jamtara. • They had *migrated from the Birbhum and Manbhum regions* (present-day Bengal), starting around the late 18th century. • **Migration** – The *1770 famine in Bengal caused the Santhals* to begin moving and soon, the British turned to them for help. • **Geographical distribution** – They spread across *Jharkhand-Bihar, Odisha and West Bengal*. • **Population** – Today, the Santhal community is the *third largest tribal community in India*.

> ***Santhal pargana*** *is the region in present-day Jharkhand, more specifically, around the Rajmahal Hills of eastern Jharkhand's Sahibganj district.*

- **Santhul Hul** – It represents the *Santhal revolution that began in 1855* in the Santhal pargana region, two years before the uprising of 1857.
- It was an ***organised war*** against colonialism and other forms of oppression they were subjected to by the British and their collaborators.
- It is one of the first *peasant uprisings* against British colonial oppression.

> *The state of Jharkhand celebrates June 30 as* ***'Hul Diwas'****.*

- **Leaders** – It was led by four brothers, ***Sidho, Kanho,*** *Chand, and Bhairav Murmu*, along with sisters *Phulo and Jhano*.
- **Objective** – It was a revolt *against imperialism* to safeguard the economic, cultural, and religious aspects of their lives.
- **Targets** – Apart from British, they also fought against the upper castes, zamindars, darogas, and moneylenders, described by the umbrella ***term 'diku' (outsiders).***

What were the major causes of the revolt?

- **Permanent Settlement Act of 1790** – It allowed the East India Company to bring an ever-increasing area in its control under settled agriculture.
- They, thus, chose the ***area of Damin-i-Koh***, at the time heavily forested, *to be settled by the Santals*, in order to collect a steady stream of revenue.
- It comprises present-day Sahibganj, Godda, Dumka, Deoghar, Pakur, and regions of Jamtara, in *present-day Jharkhand*.
- The area was allocated to the Santhals displaced from Birbhum, Murshidabad, Bhagalpur, Barabhum, Manbhum, Palamau, and Chhotanagpur, all areas the Bengal Presidency.
- **Repression by British** – While the Santhals were promised settlement and agriculture in Damin-i-Koh, they indulged in repressive practice of *land-grabbing and begari* (bonded labour).
- **Worsened social conditions** – Zamindars, the police, the revenue court alas have exercised a combined system of
    - Oppressive *extractions*
    - *Forcible dispossession of property*
    - *Abuse and personal violence* and a variety of petty tyrannies upon Santhals
- Willful and *uncharitable trespass by the rich* by means of their untethered cattle, tattoos, ponies or even elephants, on the growing crops of the poorer race.
- **Declining economic prosperity** – *Usurious interest* on loans of money ranging *from 50 to 500%*.
- False measures at the haut and the market.
- **Loss of traditional lands** – The introduction of *private property rights* and the *encroachment of non-Santhal settlers* led to the loss of traditional lands for the Santhals.
- Their traditional ways of life and livelihoods were disrupted, creating further discontent.

Elaborate the events of the revolt?

- **Rebellion** - By 1854, there was talk of rebellion in tribal councils and meetings.
- It finally began after a massive assembly of over 6,000 Santhals representing around 400 villages that took place ***in 1855.***
- **Course of events** – *Moneylenders and zamindars were executed* or forced to flee.
- The police stations, railway construction sites and dak offices thus *all symbols of colonial rule were attacked*.
- **Diversified participations** – Apart from the Santal community it saw the participation from ***32 communities (tribals and non-tribals both)***.
- **Participation of women** – The ***sisters Phulo-Jhano*** had led an army of 1,000 women.
- Their involved in providing food supply, *gathering information and also attacked* the East Indian camps during the night.
- **Repression by British** – They *invoked martial law* and killed thousands of locals and also *burned down villages*.
- The British *hanged Sidhu* to death in 1855, followed by Kanhu ***in 1856*** and thus the

insurrection ended, but the impact it left was everlasting.

What are the significances of the revolt?

- **Broke the myth of British supremacy** – ***British army was defeated twice*** during the rebellion.
- The *first was in Pirpainti and the second in Birbhum*, all part of lower Bengal then and the narrative that the East India Company's army could not be defeated was exposed.
- **Santhal Pargana Tenancy Act of 1876** – It was enacted aftermath of the revolt.
- It *prohibits the transfer of Adivasi lands* (urban or rural land) to non-Adivasis, was the result of the Hul.
- The land can only be inherited as per the Act, thus retaining the *rights of Santhals to self-govern their land*.
- **Inspiration to other revolts –** This revolt motivated *many tribals' revolts* which emerged for claiming their ownership rights and other rights.

*The **Chhotanagpur Tenancy Act 1908** was enacted as a result of the Birsa Movement that allowed land transfers within the same caste and certain geographical areas with the approval of the District Collector.*

- **Heightened the nationalist sentiments** – The revolt and the subsequent harsh measures by the British authorities *fueled nationalist sentiments* among Indians.
- It highlighted the brutal nature of colonial rule and increased support for the independence movement.

References

1. The Indian Express| 169th Anniversary of Santhal Hul
2. The Indian Express| Significance of Santhal Hul

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