



Mains Marathon 2024

Day 2: Though the peasant and tribal uprisings of the early colonial period have been viewed from various perspectives, these movements cannot be considered apolitical acts. Elucidate.(150 words)

09 Jul 2024 | GS Paper 1 | History

Approach / Explanation / Answer

Approach

- Provide a brief introduction about the peasant and tribal uprisings of the early colonial period.
- Discuss the various factors of these movements were fundamentally political in nature.
- Provide a brief overview of notable uprisings.
- To conclude, mention these uprisings as a foundation for future national movements.

Introduction

The early colonial period in India, witnessed a series of significant peasant and tribal uprisings. These movements emerged as a reaction to the exploitative policies and oppressive practices implemented by British colonial authorities and their local collaborators. These uprisings, often analyzed through lenses of economic distress, cultural resistance, and social disruption, were inherently political in nature.

Body

These movements are inherently political for the following reasons:

- **Rising Against Economic Exploitation:** The economic hardships faced by peasants and tribals due to British policies were not merely economic grievances but also a form of political resistance against colonial oppression.
 - **Sanyasi Revolt (1763-1800):** The disastrous famine of 1770 and the harsh economic order of the British compelled a group of sanyasis in eastern India to fight the British Yoke.
- **Protest Against Land Revenue Systems:** The Permanent Settlement of 1793 and the Ryotwari system imposed heavy taxes on peasants, leading to widespread discontent. These policies alienated peasants from their land and created a class of zamindars who exploited them.
 - **Pabna Revolt(1870-1880):** Large parts of Eastern Bengal witnessed agrarian unrest caused by the oppressive practice of the Zaminadars. Intellectuals like BankimChandra Chatterjee, RC Dutt, and Surendranath Banerjee supported the peasant's cause.
- **Forced Cultivation:** The British policy of compelling Indian farmers to cultivate cash crops such as indigo, opium, and tea severely disrupted their traditional agricultural practices and livelihoods. This exploitation led to widespread discontent and various forms of resistance from the peasants.

- The Indigo Rebellion (1859-60): Peasants in Bengal revolted against the oppressive practices of British indigo planters who forced them to grow indigo under harsh conditions and exploitative contracts.
- **Assertion of Sovereignty:** Many uprisings directly challenged the authority of the colonial state. By resisting colonial policies and asserting traditional rights, these movements were fundamentally contesting the legitimacy of colonial rule
 - **The Munda Rebellion (1899-1900):** Led by Birsa Munda, this uprising aimed at establishing Munda Raj and removing the British government and missionary institutions. The movement was deeply rooted in the desire to restore traditional political authority and resist the intrusion of colonial rule.
- **Anti-British Tribal Movements:** Many uprisings were led by organized leaders who articulated clear political goals. During British colonial rule in India, numerous tribal communities rose in rebellion against the exploitative policies and oppressive practices imposed by the British and their collaborators.
 - **The Santhal Rebellion(1855-56):** Under Sidhu and Kanhu, the Santhals proclaimed an end to Company rule, and declared the area between Bhagalpur and Rajmahal in Bihar as autonomous.

Conclusion

The British used military force to suppress these uprisings, indicating the political threat they perceived. The colonial administration enacted laws such as the **Bengal Tenancy Act (1885)**, the **Santhal Pargana Tenancy Act (1876)**, and the **Criminal Tribes Act (1871)** to curb such movements, further emphasizing the political dimension of these movements. These uprisings embodying political resistance to colonial authority certainly laid the foundation for future political movements.

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