

Birsa Munda

November 17, 2022

In news- On the occasion of the birth anniversary of tribal leader Birsa Munda, the Centre marked the second Janjatiya Gaurav Divas on November 15 to celebrate the contributions of tribal communities to Indian culture.

A Brief note on him-

- Birsa Munda was an Indian tribal freedom fighter, and folk hero who belonged to the Munda tribe.
- He **spearheaded a tribal religious millenarian movement that arose in the Bengal Presidency in the late 19th century**, during the British Raj, thereby making him an important figure in the history of the Indian independence movement.
- The revolt mainly concentrated in the Munda belt of Khunti, Tamar, Sarwada and Bandgaon.
- The Munda tribe inhabited the Chota Nagpur region of today's Jharkhand. When Birsa Munda was born in 1875, the British were attempting to establish control over and exploit forest lands, disrupting the tribal way of life.
- This was done in part by allying with local zamindars, who helped force the tribals into bonded labour.
- **A feudal zamindari system was introduced, destroying the tribal "Khuntkatti" agrarian** and land ownership system that was more community-based.
- The Raj brought in outsiders – moneylenders and contractors, as well as feudal landlords – to aid them.
- Munda received his early education under the guidance of his teacher Jaipal Nag. Influenced by him, Birsa converted to Christianity in order to join the German Mission school. He, however, opted out of the school after a few years.
- With the impact of British rule in the region, as well

as the activities of Christian missionaries, many tribals became critical of the British and missionaries' presence.

- **From 1886 to 1890, Birsa Munda spent a large amount of time in Chaibasa, which was close to the centre of the Sardari agitation.**
- **The Sardars' activities had a strong impact on him and he became a part of the anti-missionary and anti-government programmes.**
- Birsa soon emerged as a tribal leader who brought people together on fighting for these issues.
- He became a **God-like figure, with him leading the faith of 'Birsait'**. Soon, members of the Munda and Oraon communities started joining the Birsait sect and it turned into a challenge to British conversion activities.

The Ulgulan movement-

- **The Ulgulan movement of 1899 also involved the use of weapons and guerrilla warfare to drive out foreigners.**
- Munda encouraged the tribals to refuse following colonial laws and paying rent.
- He encouraged changes in the social sphere too, challenging religious practices to fight against superstition, and **became known as 'Bhagwan' (God) and 'Dharati Aba' (Father of the earth) by his followers.**
- But the British were soon able to halt the movement. On March 3, 1900, Munda was arrested by the British police while he was sleeping with his tribal guerilla army at Jamkopai forest in Chakradharpur.
- **It is believed he died in Ranchi jail due to an illness on June 9, 1900, at the young age of 25.**
- Though he lived a short life and the movement died out soon after his death, Birsa Munda is known to have paid a significant role in mobilising the tribal community against the British and forcing the colonial officials

to introduce laws protecting the land rights of the tribals.