

Sant Sevalal Maharaj

February 28, 2023

In news– The Central government has recently kick-started the year-long commemoration of the 284th birth anniversary of Sant Sevalal Maharaj, a spiritual and religious leader of the Banjara community.

About Sant Sevalal Maharaj-

- Sant Sevalal Maharaj was **born on February 15, 1739, at Surgondankoppa in Karnataka's Shivamogga district.**
- It's believed that while he was young, he miraculously prepared sheera (a sweet) out of the mud and wheat puri to offer to Goddess Jagadamba – making him a divine personality in the eyes of his followers.
- He dedicated his life to serving tribal forest dwellers and nomadic tribes.
- He worked tirelessly to dispel and eradicate myths and superstitions prevalent in the tribal communities, including the Banjaras, and brought about reforms in their way of life.
- Sant Sevalal Maharaj is believed to have **mastery in Ayurveda and Naturopathy.**
- Many also believe that once he **moved to Hyderabad, he cured cholera in the city and was allowed to graze his cattle in the present-day Banjara Hills area.**
- Sant Sevalal died at the age of 33 in Maharashtra.
- His shrine is situated in Manora Taluka of Washim District of Maharashtra at Pohradevi, also known as Banjara Kashi.
- Today, he is **revered as a spiritual guru and social reformer by the Banjara community,** which has mainly settled in parts of Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh.

Banjara community-

- The Banjara (also known as Lambadi, Gour Rajput, Labana)

are a historically **nomadic trading caste who may have origins in the Mewar region of what is now known as Rajasthan.**

- The Banjaras **usually refer to themselves as Gor and outsiders as Kor** but this usage does not extend outside their own community. A related usage is Gor Mati or Gormati, meaning Own People.
- Together with the Bhopa, Domba and Kalbelia, they are sometimes called the “Gypsies of India”
- The name Banjara /Banjari probably had come from two different sources: ‘Banijya’ – trade or ‘Banachara’, the forest dwellers.
- Their principal group’s name Laban/Labana is derived from the Sanskrit word lavanah, meaning salt as they were salt traders.
- The Banjaras were among many tribes that resisted the British attempt to seize their lands for plantations and enrol them as labour.
- Their constant revolt frustrated the British, and in 1871, the Banjaras and several other tribes were brought under the Criminal Tribes Act, and put to hard labour in order to cure their “criminal” tendencies.
- After Independence, the community was denotified in the 1950s, but were listed under the Habitual Offenders Act, 1952.
- Now, the Banjara community have been declared as ST in five States (Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Bihar, Odisha, Jharkhand), Scheduled Caste in Himachal Pradesh and Karnataka, and Other Backward Class (OBC) in Chhattisgarh, Daman and Diu, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand.