

UPSC Civil Services Examination

UPSC Notes [GS-I]

Topic: NCERT Notes: Peasant Movements in the 19th Century

Peasant Movements in India

In 1875, peasants in the Bombay Presidency rose in rebellion against the agrarian crisis that faced them.

- In the Bombay Deccan region, the British had introduced the Ryotwari settlement as the system of land revenue.
- Under this system, the revenue of land was fixed on a yearly basis.
- In the Ryotwari system, the agreement was between the government and the ryot (cultivator) directly.
- The revenue was fixed according to the soil-type and the paying capacity of the farmer. However, the revenues were so high that farmers found it extremely difficult to pay their dues. Any failure in the rains would deteriorate the situation.
- To pay their revenues farmers generally took loans from moneylenders. Once the loans were taken, the farmers found it impossible to repay them since the interest rates were steep.
- Peasant indebtedness became a serious problem in the rural areas.
- In 1861, civil war broke out in the USA. USA was the largest supplier of cotton to Britain. Once the civil war broke out, the demand for cotton from India became high and this led to a surge in cotton cultivation in India and there was a period of 'boom' then.
- However, once the war in America ended, cotton demand sunk and this affected the farmers adversely.
- The moneylenders, who during the time of the civil war were generous with their loans, once again refused the farmers loans.
- This infuriated the farmers because they were completely dependent on the moneylenders, who were insensitive to their plight.

Deccan Riots 1875 India

- The uprising began at Supa village in the district of Poona.
- In 1875, farmers attacked a market place where many moneylenders lived. They burnt account books and looted grain shops. They also torched the houses of sahuks (people who were both traders and moneylenders).
- The farmers were led by the village headmen.
- The farmers' main motive was to destroy the account books of the moneylenders and they resorted to violence only when these books were not handed over to them.
- They also socially boycotted the moneylenders.
- The movement continued for 2 months and spread to over 30 villages.
- The movement also got support from the Poona Sarvajanik Sabha co-founded by M G Ranade.

- It took several months for the police to restore order in the countryside.
- The Bombay government initially dismissed the uprising as trivial.
- However, the Government of India pressurised Bombay to enquire into the matter.
- Accordingly, the Deccan Riots Commission was set up which presented a report to the British Parliament in 1878.
- In 1879, the Agriculturists Relief Act was passed which ensured that the farmers could not be arrested and imprisoned if they were unable to pay their debts.

