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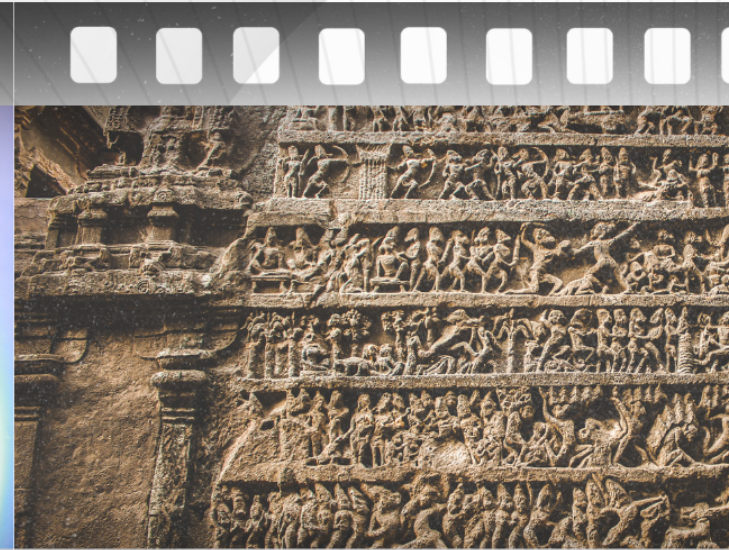
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"Nothing is better than a life dedicated to people's service"
"To be able to serve without expecting anything in return, is the beauty of humanity"

UPSC CSE - 2025

CURRENT AFFAIRS



CULTURE AND HISTORY

CULTURE AND HISTORY

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CULTURE AND HISTORY

CURRENT AFFAIRS

Buddhu Nonia and the Nonia Rebellion: Unsung Resistance in Colonial India

GS Paper I – Modern Indian History | Freedom Struggle | Role of Communities in Resistance Movements

Context:

On the centenary of his martyrdom, the Government of India paid tribute to **Buddhu Nonia**, recognizing both his personal sacrifice and the broader **Nonia community's contribution to anti-colonial resistance**, particularly during the **Nonia Rebellion**.

Who was Buddhu Nonia?

- **Birthplace:** Begusarai, Bihar
- Belonged to the **Nonia community**, traditionally engaged in **saltpetre production** (used in gunpowder).
- He played a courageous role during **Mahatma Gandhi's Salt Satyagraha in 1930**, by **producing and distributing salt**, defying British salt laws.
- In retaliation, the British **arrested him and threw him into a boiling salt cauldron**, making him a **symbol of grassroots resistance and martyrdom**.

The Nonia Rebellion (1778–1800)

Feature	Details
Timeline	Late 18th century (1778–1800)
Region	Bihar – Saran, Vaishali, and Purnia districts
Community Involved	Nonia community – key players in saltpetre production
Cause	Exploitation by the East India Company (EIC) in saltpetre trade
Nature of Rebellion	A series of localized uprisings against economic injustice and forced monopolies

- The **East India Company's monopoly** over saltpetre severely affected the Nonia livelihoods.
- The community organized itself to **resist unjust taxation, forced procurement, and exploitation**.
- Though less documented, this resistance represents **early indigenous anti-colonial assertion** by marginalized communities.

Significance:

- The Nonia Rebellion highlights **pre-1857 localized resistances** against British economic exploitation.
- Buddhu Nonia's participation in the **Salt Satyagraha** connects 18th-century grievances to the **20th-century national movement**, showing **continuity in grassroots resistance**.
- Recognition of figures like Buddhu Nonia promotes a more **inclusive historiography**, emphasizing the role of **non-elite and backward caste communities** in the freedom struggle.

Model UPSC Mains Question (GS Paper I)

- ❖ “The contributions of marginalized communities like the Nonias to India's freedom struggle remain underrepresented in mainstream historical discourse.” Discuss with reference to the Nonia Rebellion and Buddhu Nonia's role during the Salt Satyagraha.

**SUSHRUTA AND CHARAKA: ANCIENT INDIAN PIONEERS
OF MEDICINE**

GS Paper I – Indian Heritage and Culture | GS Paper II/III – Health, Ethics, and Science

Context:

The Vice-President of India unveiled statues of Sushruta and Charaka in Goa, emphasizing the relevance of their contributions to modern medicine and the importance of drawing inspiration from India's ancient scientific heritage.

About Sushruta: The Father of Surgery

- **Period:** Flourished around **600 BCE** in **Kashi (Varanasi)**.
- **Lineage:** Disciple of **Divodasa Dhanvantari**, the deity of Ayurveda.

Major Contributions:**1. Sushruta Samhita:**

- A foundational text of surgery in Ayurveda.
- Divided into two parts: **Purvardha** (five sections) and **Uttaratantra** (added later).
- Part of the "**Great Ayurvedic Trilogy**" along with Charaka Samhita and Astanga Hridaya.

2. Pioneer in Surgery:

- Known as “**The Father of Surgery**”.
- Described **8 surgical techniques**:

- *Chedya* (excision), *Lekhya* (scarification), *Vedhya* (puncturing), *Eshya* (probing), *Ahrya* (extraction), *Vsraya* (drainage), *Sivya* (suturing), etc.

3. Anatomy and Dissection:

- Advocated for the study of **human anatomy through cadaver dissection**, a practice revolutionary for its time.

4. Plastic Surgery:

- Described methods for **reconstructing noses, lips, and ears** using advanced techniques like **cheek flaps and skin grafting**.

5. Medical Ethics:

- Laid the foundation for ethical medical practice in India, especially for students and physicians at **Benares University**.

About Charaka: The Father of Indian Medicine

- **Period:** Estimated to have lived between **2nd century BCE and 2nd century CE**.
- **Position:** Court physician in the **Kushan Empire**.

Major Contributions:

1. Charaka Samhita:

- Based on **Agnivesha Tantra**, later compiled and edited by Charaka.
- Divided into **eight sections (Ashtanga Sthanas)**.
- Remains a foundational Ayurvedic text with deep philosophical and therapeutic insights.

2. Medical Theories and Practices:

- **Tridosha Theory:** Defines health as the balance of **Vata (movement)**, **Pitta (transformation)**, and **Kapha (stability/lubrication)**.
- Disease is a result of the imbalance among the three doshas.

3. Pharmacology and Plant-Based Medicine:

- Extensive cataloguing of **medicinal plants**, their properties, and therapeutic applications.
- Examples include **Ashwagandha, Tulsi, Triphala**, etc., still used in modern Ayurvedic practice.

4. Yoga and Holistic Health:

- Emphasized **Yogic practices** for maintaining both physical health and mental well-being.

Legacy and Modern Relevance:

- **Sushruta's surgical techniques** are studied globally, influencing modern plastic surgery and operative procedures.
- **Charaka's theories** about holistic health and lifestyle medicine are echoed in current integrative medical approaches.
- Their works highlight India's **long-standing tradition of ethical, evidence-based, and integrated medical knowledge.**

Model UPSC Mains Questions

- ❖ Discuss the contributions of Sushruta and Charaka in shaping ancient Indian medical science. How are their teachings relevant in contemporary health discourse? (GS Paper I – 15 Marks)
- ❖ The ancient texts of Ayurveda, such as Charaka Samhita and Sushruta Samhita, embody holistic health approaches. How can these be integrated into India's modern public health system? (GS Paper III – 15 Marks)

LOTHAL TO BECOME A GLOBAL HUB FOR MARITIME HERITAGE**Context:**

The Government of India is developing the **National Maritime Heritage Complex (NMHC)** at **Lothal**, Gujarat—an ancient port city of the **Indus Valley Civilization (IVC)**—to **showcase India's maritime legacy** and promote **heritage tourism**.

National Maritime Heritage Complex (NMHC) – Key Facts:

- **Location:** Lothal, Gujarat
- **Developed By:** Ministry of Ports, Shipping, and Waterways
- **Design & Execution:** Designed by **Hafeez Contractor**, being built by **Tata Projects Ltd.**

Objectives:

- Preserve and promote India's **maritime heritage**.
- Attract **international tourism**, scholars, and maritime historians.
- Serve as a **centre of education, research, and experience** in India's naval and maritime history.

Key Features:

- **National Maritime Museum** with **14 thematic galleries** showcasing India's maritime history from antiquity to modern times.
- **World's tallest Lighthouse Museum** – **75+ meters** tall.

- **Four maritime-themed heritage parks** for immersive experiences.
- Virtual and physical exhibits highlighting ancient Indian navigation, shipbuilding, trade, naval power, and coastal civilizations.

About Lothal – The Ancient Port City

- **Time Period:** Established ~2200 BCE; active port and trade centre until ~1900 BCE.
- **Location:** Bhal region, Gujarat; part of the southernmost sites of the IVC.
- **Name Meaning:** "*Lothal*" means "Mound of the Dead" in Gujarati.

Significance:

- **Only known port town** of the **Indus Valley Civilization**.
- Believed to have been a **key maritime node** on ancient trade routes linking **Sindh and Saurashtra**.
- Possibly connected to a river system that enabled seaborne trade with the **Persian Gulf and Mesopotamia**.

Urban Features:

- **Citadel and Lower Town:** Two-zone city with raised platforms made of **mud-bricks**, instead of fortified walls.
- **Dockyard:** Rectangular structure believed to be the **earliest known dock** in the world, connected to trade with West Asia.
- **Bead-Making Factory:** Indicating advanced **craftsmanship in gems and ornaments**; major center for **trade in beads and semi-precious stones**.
- **Artifacts:** Items traceable to **Mesopotamian and Persian Gulf origins**, proving Lothal's participation in **international trade**.

Global Recognition:

- **UNESCO Tentative List:** Nominated for inclusion in the **World Heritage List** in April 2014; remains on the **tentative list**.

Relevance in Contemporary India:

- Promotes **cultural pride** and recognition of India's ancient scientific and trading achievements.
- Boosts **tourism and local economy**.
- Supports **blue economy** by reinforcing India's historical maritime strength.
- Enhances India's **soft power and global image** through heritage diplomacy.

Model UPSC Mains Questions

- ❖ "The development of the National Maritime Heritage Complex at Lothal is a step towards reclaiming India's ancient maritime legacy." Discuss. (GS Paper I – 15 Marks)

YAKSHAGANA**Context:**

15-year-old Tulasi Raghvendra Hegde received the **Young Achiever Award 2024** for her performance in **Yakshagana**, a traditional art form from Karnataka.

What is Yakshagana?

A **traditional folk theatre form** of Karnataka, blending **dance, music, dialogue, costume, makeup, and stage techniques** in a unique style.

Origin and Region:

- Predominantly performed in **coastal Karnataka**, especially **Udupi, Uttara Kannada, and Dakshina Kannada districts**.
- Rooted in **temple rituals** and **epic storytelling** traditions.

Key Features:

Aspect	Description
Themes	Based on episodes (<i>prasangas</i>) from Ramayana, Mahabharata, Bhagavata Purana , etc.
Performance Structure	- Narration by Bhagawatha (lead singer) - Interspersed with musical interludes and dance-dramas
Music Instruments	Chande, Maddale, Taala, Harmonium, Flute
Costumes	- Exaggerated headgear, colored facial makeup, heavy ornaments - Gejje (anklet bells) add rhythm during movement
Troupes (Melas)	Notable ones include: Saligrama Mela, Dharmasthala Mela, Mandarthi Mela, Perduru Mela
Gender Inclusion	Traditionally male-only, but female artists are now increasingly participating

Question:

- ❖ "Yakshagana reflects the deep interconnection between performance art and religious storytelling in Indian culture." Discuss the distinctive features of Yakshagana and evaluate its relevance in preserving India's intangible cultural heritage. (250 words)

VEER BAL DIWAS

Context:

The **Prime Minister of India** participated in **Veer Baal Diwas 2024** at Bharat Mandapam, New Delhi.

What is Veer Bal Diwas?

- **Commemoration Day: 26th December** every year (since 2022)
- **Purpose:** To honour the martyrdom of **Sahibzadas Baba Zorawar Singh** (aged 9) and **Baba Fateh Singh** (aged 6), the young sons of **Guru Gobind Singh**.

Historical Background:

- During the Mughal siege of **Anandpur Sahib** (1705), the two young Sahibzadas and their grandmother **Mata Gujari Devi** were captured by **Wazir Khan**, Nawab of Sirhind.
- Despite pressure, the children **refused to convert to Islam** and were **bricked alive**.
- Their **supreme sacrifice** symbolizes **courage, conviction, and unwavering faith**.

About Guru Gobind Singh (1666–1708):

Attribute	Details
Position	10th Sikh Guru , succeeding Guru Tegh Bahadur
Major Contributions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Founded Khalsa Panth in 1699 - Introduced Five Ks: Kesh, Kanga, Kara, Kirpan, Kachera - Fought Battle of Muktsar (1705) against Mughals
Scriptural Reform	Declared Guru Granth Sahib as the eternal Guru of Sikhs in 1708
Legacy	Symbol of resistance, spiritual leadership, and defender of dharma

Question:

- ❖ “The commemoration of Veer Bal Diwas not only honours the martyrdom of young Sahibzadas but also strengthens the cultural narrative of India’s resistance to religious persecution.” Examine the historical significance of the martyrdom of Zorawar Singh and Fateh Singh and its relevance to contemporary India. (250 words)

HORNBILL FESTIVAL

GS Paper I – Indian Culture | Festivals | Tribal Culture | North East India

Context:

The **Hornbill Festival**, known as the “Festival of Festivals”, is Nagaland’s most celebrated cultural and tourism event, held every year from **December 1 to 10** at the **Naga Heritage Village, Kisama**, near Kohima.

About the Festival:

- **Inception:** Launched in **2000** by the Government of Nagaland to **showcase tribal culture and promote inter-tribal harmony**.
- **Name Origin:** Named after the **Hornbill bird**, which holds a significant place in Naga folklore and is considered a symbol of **respect and cultural identity**.

Key Features:

- **Venue:** Hosted at **Naga Heritage Village, Kisama**, which replicates tribal morungs (traditional dormitories) of all **17 major tribes** of Nagaland.
- **Duration:** Initially a 5-day event; now extended to **10 days** due to its growing popularity.
- **Activities Include:**
 - **Cultural Performances:** Folk dances, war cries, and traditional songs.
 - **Traditional Sports:** Naga wrestling, archery, and indigenous games.
 - **Art & Craft Exhibition:** Tribal handicrafts, textiles, bamboo products.
 - **Culinary Stalls:** Traditional food and herbal medicine booths.
 - **Music & Entertainment:** Rock concerts, Naga Idol, fashion shows, beauty pageants.
- **Associated Attractions:**
 - **WWII Museum, Bamboo Pavilion, and Tribal Heritage Museum.**
- **Theme 2024:** “*Cultural Connect*”, promoting inter-cultural exchange and global tribal awareness.

Cultural Significance:

- Serves as a **platform for cultural preservation and innovation**.
- Boosts **eco-tourism and local entrepreneurship**.
- Encourages **youth participation in heritage conservation**.
- Strengthens **tribal identity, unity, and inclusiveness**.

AKAL TAKHT

GS Paper I – Indian Culture | Religious Institutions | Sikh History and Philosophy

Context:

The **Akal Takht**, the highest temporal authority of the Sikhs, recently issued a religious verdict against a prominent political leader, highlighting its ongoing role in socio-religious matters.

About Akal Takht:

- **Meaning:** *Akal Takht* means "**Throne of the Timeless (Immortal) One**", symbolizing the temporal sovereignty of the Sikh faith.
- **Founded by:** **Guru Hargobind** on **15 June 1606**, opposite the **Golden Temple (Harmandir Sahib)** in **Amritsar, Punjab**.

Historical Significance:

- **Miri-Piri Doctrine:**
 - Represents **dual sovereignty** – *Miri (temporal)* and *Piri (spiritual)* – foundational to **Sikh political thought**.
- **Sarbat Khalsa:**
 - Venue for historical assemblies where the Sikh community made collective decisions during **periods of persecution and war**.
- **Akal Bunga:**
 - The original name and structure, **five stories high**, served secular and justice functions.

Modern Relevance:

- **Supreme Authority:**
 - The **Jathedar of Akal Takht** is the **chief spokesperson of Sikhism**, issuing **hukamnamas (religious edicts)**.
- **Judicial Role:**
 - Has moral authority to summon individuals, even politicians or religious figures, for disciplinary actions in accordance with Sikh code.
- **Symbol of Sovereignty:**
 - Embodies **autonomy in Sikh decision-making**, especially regarding community ethics and leadership disputes.

Other Sikh Takhts (Seats of Authority):

1. **Takht Sri Keshgarh Sahib** – Anandpur Sahib, Punjab
2. **Takht Sri Patna Sahib** – Patna, Bihar
3. **Takht Sri Hazur Sahib** – Nanded, Maharashtra

4. **Takht Sri Damdama Sahib** – Talwandi Sabo, Punjab
(Akāl Takht being the **supreme** among these five)

Conclusion:

The **Hornbill Festival** is a vibrant expression of **tribal identity and cultural diplomacy**, while the **Akāl Takht** remains a **pillar of Sikh governance and religious authority**, showcasing the rich pluralism of India's cultural landscape.

UPSC Mains Practice Question:

- ❖ “India's cultural festivals and religious institutions play a vital role in community identity and heritage preservation.” Illustrate with reference to the Hornbill Festival and Akāl Takht.

BHAGWAN BIRSA MUNDA AND THE ULGULAN MOVEMENT

GS Paper I – Modern Indian History | Tribal Movements | Freedom Struggle | Social Reform

Context:

India celebrated the **150th birth anniversary** of **Bhagwan Birsa Munda** on **15th November**, observed as **Janjatiya Gaurav Divas** since 2021. The day commemorates his contributions as a **freedom fighter, social reformer, and tribal icon**.

Who was Birsa Munda?

- **Born:** 15th November 1875 in **Ulihatu village**, Khunti district, Jharkhand.
- **Tribe:** Munda, from the **Chota Nagpur Plateau** region.
- **Religious Influence:** Inspired by **Vaishnav preacher Anand Panre**; emphasized monotheism and social morality.
- **Died:** 9th June 1900 in Ranchi Jail, reportedly of cholera, at the age of 25.

Contributions of Birsa Munda:

1. Religious and Spiritual Leadership

- Founded the **Birsait sect**, promoting:
 - **Monotheism**
 - **Moral conduct**
 - **Purity, hygiene, and cultural pride**
- Criticized **witchcraft, sorcery, alcoholism, and superstition**.

2. Social Reformer

- Advocated tribal **self-respect** and **identity revival**.
- Resisted **Christian missionary influence**, which undermined traditional tribal beliefs.
- Campaigned for **clean living** and social unity.

3. Freedom Fighter

- Mobilized tribals to fight **British colonialism** and **zamindari oppression**.
- Opposed **dikus** (outsiders) who exploited tribal lands and labor.
- Revered as “**Dharti Aaba**” (**Father of the Earth**) for his role in protecting tribal land rights.

The Ulgulan Movement (1899–1900)

“**Ulgulan**” literally means “The Great Tumult” – a revolt for tribal autonomy and justice.

Causes of the Rebellion:

1. Zamindari System:

- British replaced traditional **Mundari Khuntkatti** (community land ownership) with exploitative **zamindari**, turning tribals into bonded laborers.

2. Forced Labor (Veth Begari):

- Tribal labor was forcibly extracted by landlords and colonial authorities without pay.

3. Cultural Disruption:

- Christian missionaries disrespected tribal customs and attempted religious conversions.

4. Economic Exploitation:

- Influx of **moneylenders**, **contractors**, **forest officials**, and **traders** into tribal areas led to debt, land alienation, and impoverishment.

Nature of the Revolt:

- **Started:** December 24, 1899
- **Tactics:** Guerrilla warfare, village mobilization, and symbolic assertion of tribal sovereignty.

Key Symbols:

- **White Flag:** Represented peace and freedom.
- **Slogan:** “**Abua Raj Setarjana, Maharani Raj Tundujana**” (Let the Queen’s rule end, let our rule begin).

Targets:

- British administrative offices
- Police stations
- Missionary establishments
- Local landlords and moneylenders

Suppression and Outcome:

- Rebellion was suppressed by British military forces in early 1900.
- Birsa Munda was arrested and later died in custody.
- Though short-lived, the movement forced the British to recognize tribal grievances.

Post-Rebellion Achievements:**1. Chotanagpur Tenancy Act (1908):**

- Prohibited land transfer from **tribals to non-tribals**.
- Secured traditional tribal land rights.

2. Abolition of Veth Begari:

- Forced labor system was banned due to tribal unrest.

Pradhan Mantri Janjati Adivasi Nyaya Maha Abhiyan (PM-JANMAN)

- Launched in 2023 to uplift **Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs)**.
- Covers **75 PVTGs in 18 States and 1 UT** over 3 years (2023–26).
- Budget: **₹24,104 crore**
- Focuses on: **Housing, drinking water, education, road connectivity, and economic empowerment.**

Commemoration of Birsa Munda:

- **Janjatiya Gaurav Divas:** Observed annually on **15th November**.
- **2024 Celebrations:**
 - “Maati Ke Veer Padyatra” & “My Bharat Youth” campaigns.
 - Launch of ₹6,640 crore projects under **PM-JANMAN** and **Van Dhan Vikas Kendras**.
 - Release of commemorative **postal stamp and coin**.

Conclusion:

Birsa Munda's legacy is not only of tribal resistance but of **social transformation, spiritual revival, and assertion of indigenous identity**. His rebellion may have been quelled, but it marked a **turning point in colonial tribal policy**, earning him a place among India's greatest freedom fighters.

UPSC Mains Practice Question:

- ❖ "The Ulgulan Movement led by Birsa Munda was both a tribal assertion and a nationalist resistance." Examine the causes, nature, and impact of the movement. (15 marks)

PRAJA MANDAL MOVEMENT AND SEWA SINGH THIKRIWALA

GS Paper I – Modern Indian History | Freedom Struggle in Princely States | Role of Reformers

Context:

January 20 marks the **death anniversary of Sewa Singh Thikriwala**, a prominent leader of the **Praja Mandal Movement** in Punjab, which was a part of the wider **people's resistance** in princely states during the Indian freedom struggle.

What was the Praja Mandal Movement?

The **Praja Mandal Movement** was a **grassroots democratic movement** that emerged in **princely states** during British rule. Unlike British India provinces directly administered by the Crown, princely states were governed by **hereditary rulers** under **British paramountcy**.

Nature and Background:

- **Origin:** 1920s–30s in states like Patiala, Hyderabad, Mysore, Jaipur, Travancore, and Baroda.
- **Aim:** Democratization of administration, civil liberties, economic reforms, and protection of peasant rights.
- **Link to National Movement:** These movements were **parallel to the Indian National Movement** but focused specifically on **autocratic rule within princely states**.

Objectives of the Praja Mandal Movement:

1. **Civil Liberties:**
 - Demand for **freedom of speech, press, and assembly**.
 - End of arbitrary detentions and surveillance.
2. **Tax Reforms:**
 - **Reduction of oppressive land revenue** systems.
 - Abolition of **forced labor** (begar) and illegal levies.
3. **Peasant Empowerment:**
 - Protection from exploitation by landlords and feudal elites.
 - Support for **agricultural reforms and tenancy rights**.
4. **Educational Advancement:**
 - Establishment of **vernacular schools** and promotion of **literacy** among the rural poor.

5. Responsible Governance:

- Demand for **constitutional reforms** and formation of **elected legislative bodies**.

6. Abolition of Feudal Practices:

- Curtailment of powers of **zamindars, jagirdars, and princely autocrats**.

Key Leaders and Regions:

Region	Notable Leaders
Patiala (Punjab)	Sewa Singh Thikriwala
Jaipur	Hiralal Shastri, Manikyalal Verma
Mysore	N. S. Subba Rao, K. C. Reddy
Travancore	Pattom Thanu Pillai, T. K. Madhavan
Hyderabad	Swami Ramananda Tirtha

SEWA SINGH THIKRIWALA (1886–1935)**Early Life:**

- Born in **Thikriwala village**, Patiala princely state.
- Son of **Dewa Singh**, a high-ranking Patiala official.
- Served as **Health Officer** in Patiala State before resigning in protest against feudal oppression.

Association with the Singh Sabha Movement:

- Joined the **Singh Sabha Movement**, which aimed to:
 - Revive **Sikh values** and cultural identity.
 - Counter **Christian missionary conversions**.
 - Promote **modern education** and **social reform**.

Role in the Praja Mandal Movement:

- **1928:** Became **President of the Punjab Riyasat Praja Mandal** after release from a false criminal case filed by Patiala authorities.
- Led the **struggle against autocratic rule** of Maharaja Bhupinder Singh of Patiala.
- Advocated **democracy, social justice, and civil liberties** for the people of princely states.

Persecution and Martyrdom:

- **1933:** Arrested and sentenced to three years in prison.

- **1935:** Died in jail during a **hunger strike**, protesting the **inhuman treatment of political prisoners**.
- His death inspired widespread **resistance and awareness** across Punjab and neighboring princely states.

Significance of the Praja Mandal Movements:

- Created **political consciousness** among rural populations in princely states.
- Laid the foundation for **democratic governance** after independence.
- Exposed the **nexus between British colonial power and princely autocracy**.
- Played a pivotal role in integrating princely states into the **Indian Union post-1947**.
- Contributed to **constitutional reforms** and highlighted the **importance of civil liberties**.

Conclusion:

The **Praja Mandal Movement**, through leaders like **Sewa Singh Thikriwala**, broadened the **geography and sociology** of the Indian freedom struggle. It symbolized the **voice of the voiceless** in the feudal interiors of India and complemented the **nationalist movement** by focusing on internal oppression and princely misrule.

UPSC Mains Practice Question:

- ❖ “The Praja Mandal Movements were instrumental in democratizing princely states and broadening the base of India’s freedom struggle.” Elaborate with special reference to the contributions of Sewa Singh Thikriwala. (15 marks)

ETIKOPPAKA TOYS

Context:

Andhra Pradesh's eco-friendly Etikoppaka Toys earned accolades at the Republic Day parade.

About Etikoppaka Toys:

- Also known as Etikoppaka Bommalu, these are exquisite wooden toys originating from Etikoppaka village in Andhra Pradesh.
- They have a 400-year-old tradition and are famous for smooth contours, vibrant colors, and eco-friendly nature.
- The toys are known for fine craftsmanship and the use of natural dyes.

Geographical Origin:

- Etikoppaka village is situated along the banks of the Varaha River.
- The region supplies essential raw materials, including softwood from Ankudu trees (*Wrightia Tinctoria*), ideal for toy-making.
- In 2017, Etikoppaka Toys received the Geographical Indication (GI) tag.

Unique Features of Etikoppaka Toys:

- **Material:** Made from soft, lightweight Ankudu wood (*Wrightia Tinctoria*), which is easy to carve.
- **Natural Colors:** Painted with eco-friendly dyes derived from seeds, lacquer, bark, roots, and leaves.
- **Design & Safety:** Toys have rounded edges for child safety, and the Turned Lacquerware technique provides a smooth, glossy finish.

UPSC Mains Practice Question:

- ❖ Discuss the significance of Etikoppaka Toys in preserving India's traditional handicrafts and promoting sustainable eco-friendly practices. How does the Geographical Indication (GI) tag help artisans of this craft?
- ❖ Examine the role of government initiatives and local communities in reviving and sustaining traditional crafts like Etikoppaka Toys. What challenges do such crafts face in the modern market economy? Suggest measures for their better promotion and protection.

KALARIPAYATTU

Kalaripayattu is one of the oldest martial arts in the world, originating from the southern Indian state of Kerala. The term is derived from two Malayalam words: “**Kalari**” meaning a traditional training space or gymnasium, and “**Payattu**” meaning fight or practice. Rooted in ancient traditions, Kalaripayattu emphasizes the integration of physical agility, mental discipline, and spiritual balance.

Historically, it is believed that sage Parasurama introduced this martial art as part of Kerala's cultural heritage. Recent studies trace its origins back to the Sangam period (approximately 600 to 300 BCE). Kalaripayattu training takes place in a Kalari, which is traditionally treated as a sacred space, akin to a temple.

The practice involves several stages of training, starting with **Maippayattu** (body conditioning), progressing through **Kolthari** (wooden weapons), **Angathari** (metal weapons), and culminating in **Verumkai**, which focuses on unarmed combat techniques, especially targeting pressure points.

There are two main styles of Kalaripayattu:

- **Vadakkan Kalari (Northern Style)** – Known for graceful movements and an emphasis on weapon-based combat, prevalent in the Malabar region.
- **Thekkan Kalari (Southern Style)** or **Adi Murai** – Concentrates on hand-to-hand combat techniques, marked by powerful strikes, common in the Travancore region.

Kalaripayattu is believed to have influenced martial arts beyond India, with some accounts crediting Bodhidharma, an Indian monk from Thanjavore, for introducing it to the Shaolin Temple in China during the 5th century AD.

The Government of Kerala promotes this ancient art through annual events like the "Ponnyathankam," preserving and showcasing its legacy.

Model UPSC Mains Questions

- ❖ **Examine the historical evolution and key training stages of Kalaripayattu. How does this martial art integrate physical and mental discipline?**
- ❖ **Discuss the cultural significance of Kalaripayattu in Kerala and its influence on martial arts beyond India. What steps have been taken to preserve this ancient tradition?**

KASHI TAMIL SANGAMAM

Context:

Kashi Tamil Sangamam (KTS) 3.0, a 10-day cultural event, was recently held in Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh.

About Kashi Tamil Sangamam (KTS):

- Launched in 2022 as part of the **Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat (EBSB)** program.
- Aims to promote unity and cultural exchange between different regions of India.
- Organized by the Ministry of Education in collaboration with various central ministries and the Government of Uttar Pradesh.
- Aligns with **National Education Policy (NEP) 2020**, which encourages integration of Indian Knowledge Systems with modern education.
- Theme for 2024: Contributions of Sage Agasthyar.

Sage Agasthyar's Legacy:

- One of the **Saptarishis** in Vedic tradition.
- Made contributions in health, philosophy, science, linguistics, and art.
- Founder of **Siddha Medicine**, an ancient Tamil medical system.
- Authored **Agattiyam**, an early Tamil grammar text.

- Promoted Vedic culture in South India; also worshipped in Southeast Asia (Java and Sumatra).
- Authored Sanskrit texts like *Agastya Gita* (Varaha Purana), *Agastya Samhita* (Skanda Purana), and *Dvaidha-Nirnaya Tantra*.

About Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat (EBSB):

- Launched in 2015 to promote inter-state cultural exchange and national integration via state-UT pairings.
- **Objectives:**
 - Celebrate India's unity in diversity.
 - Promote national integration through deeper engagement between states.
 - Showcase heritage, culture, customs, and traditions for a shared national identity.
 - Encourage cross-learning by sharing best practices among states.

Model UPSC Mains Questions

- ❖ Discuss the significance of the Kashi Tamil Sangamam initiative in promoting India's cultural integration. How does it align with the objectives of the Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat program and the National Education Policy 2020?

KUMBH MELA

Context:

The Maha Kumbh Mela of Prayagraj was recently concluded.

About Kumbh Mela

- **Kumbh Mela** is the **largest peaceful congregation of pilgrims on Earth**, where millions gather to take a holy dip in sacred rivers, with the belief that it **purifies sins and liberates one from the cycle of rebirth**.
- Pilgrims include **sadhus, saints, kalpavasis, spiritual seekers**, and devotees from all strata of society, transcending barriers of caste, gender, or creed.
- The festival is significantly marked by **Akharas (monastic orders), ascetics**, and the **rituals of Naga Sadhus**, especially the **Shahi Snan** and **Peshwai processions** with elephants, horses, and religious fanfare.

Mythological Origins

- The word *Kumbh* means "pitcher" in Sanskrit.
- Origin is traced to the legend of **Samudra Manthan**, where **Devas and Asuras churned the ocean** for **Amrit (nectar of immortality)**.

- During a divine tussle, the Amrit pitcher was carried away by Jayant (Indra's son), and a few drops fell at **Haridwar, Prayagraj, Ujjain, and Nashik**, giving rise to the Kumbh Mela at these four locations.
- The timing of the Kumbh Mela is determined by **astrological alignments** of **Jupiter, Sun, and Moon**.

Historical Evolution:

- Ancient references appear in texts like the **Skanda Purana**.
- The **Chinese traveler Xuanzang** documented a large religious gathering resembling Kumbh in the 7th century CE.
- **Adi Shankaracharya (8th century CE)** is believed to have institutionalized it as a religious congregation of Hindu monks.
- Mughal-era accounts and **Bhakti movement literature** also describe it.
- In **2017**, **UNESCO** recognized **Kumbh Mela as an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity**.

Types of Kumbh Melas:

1. **Purna Kumbh (Maha Kumbh):** Every 12 years at Prayagraj.
2. **Ardh Kumbh:** Every 6 years at Prayagraj and Haridwar.
3. **Simhastha Kumbh:** At Ujjain and Nashik, when **Jupiter is in Leo (Simha Rashi)**.
4. **Magh Mela:** Held **annually at Prayagraj**, considered a smaller version of Kumbh.

Sacred Sites and Rivers:

- **Haridwar** – Ganga
- **Prayagraj** – Confluence of Ganga, Yamuna & mythical Saraswati
- **Ujjain** – Kshipra
- **Nashik-Trimbakeshwar** – Godavari

UPSC Mains Model Questions

- ❖ Kumbh Mela has evolved from a mythological tradition to a globally recognized cultural heritage. Discuss the spiritual, social, and economic dimensions of this evolution in the context of India's intangible heritage.
 - ❖ Evaluate the historical and astrological underpinnings of the Kumbh Mela.
- How

ALI ALI LIGANG FESTIVAL

Context:

Ali Ai Ligang, the main festival of the Mising tribe of Assam, was recently celebrated in the state.

About the Festival:

- **Ali Ai Ligang** is an **agricultural festival** celebrated by the **Mising tribe** of Assam, especially in **Jorhat** and adjoining regions.
- It marks the **onset of the sowing season** and is observed on the **first Wednesday of the month of Fagun** (February–March).

Name and Meaning:

- **Ali** = Roots and Seeds
- **Ai** = Fruits
- **Ligang** = To sow

Duration and Practices:

- The festival spans **five days**.
- **Taboos** observed during the period include prohibition on **cutting trees, fishing, ploughing, burning jungles**, etc.
- The festival begins with **Laitom Tomchar** (flag hoisting), followed by prayers to **Donyi Polo** – the **Sun (Mother)** and **Moon (Father)** – for protection of the crops.
- Celebrations include offering **Apong (rice beer), meat, and fish** at the **Morung Okum** (traditional youth dormitory).
- The highlight is the **Gumrag dance**, performed joyously by **both men and women**.

LEZIM**Context:**

The **Lezim dance** became a subject of public debate after its portrayal in a Hindi film based on **Chhatrapati Sambhaji Maharaj**.

About Lezim Dance:

- **Lezim** is a **folk dance of Maharashtra**, named after the instrument used – a **wooden handle with attached metal cymbals**.
- It involves **rhythmic, high-energy movements** such as **stepping, squatting, and jumping**, often performed in **pairs or circular formations**.
- Traditionally accompanied by the **dhhol (drum)**.
- **Types of Lezim:**
 1. **Military Lezim** – martial training and defense
 2. **Talathekya**
 3. **Samanyajananna** – general performance type

About Chhatrapati Sambhaji Maharaj:

- **Sambhaji Maharaj** was the **eldest son of Chhatrapati Shivaji**, ruling from **1681–1689**.
- His reign saw **intense warfare against the Mughal Empire**, especially resisting **Aurangzeb's expansion** in the Deccan.
- **Captured and executed** by the Mughals in **1689** after **refusing to convert to Islam**, he remains a **symbol of Maratha bravery and martyrdom**.

UPSC Mains Model Questions

- ❖ The celebration of indigenous festivals like Ali Ai Ligang highlights the connection between tribal communities and ecological values. Discuss the significance of such festivals in the context of sustainable agriculture and cultural preservation.
- ❖ Folk arts like Lezim reflect the martial and social ethos of regional communities. Examine the relevance of folk dances in preserving traditional identities and their role in contemporary cultural discourse.

THAIPUSAM**Context:**

The Prime Minister extended greetings to the nation on the occasion of **Thaipusam**.

About Thaipusam Festival

- **Thaipusam** (also spelled Thai Poosam) is a **Hindu festival** celebrated to honor **Lord Murugan** (also known as **Lord Kartikeya**), the **Hindu god of war, wisdom, and victory**.
- The term "**Thaipusam**" comes from:
 - **Thai** – the **Tamil month** (January–February)
 - **Poosam** – a **star** that reaches its zenith during the full moon on which the festival is observed.
- The festival marks the occasion when **Goddess Parvati** gave **Lord Murugan** the **divine spear (Vel)** to **defeat the demon Soorapadam**.
- **Symbolism**: Represents the **victory of good over evil**.
- Widely celebrated by **Tamil communities** in **Tamil Nadu** and abroad, especially in **Sri Lanka, Singapore, Malaysia**, and other parts of the world with Tamil diaspora.

UPSC Mains Model Questions

- ❖ Religious festivals like Thaipusam play a vital role in preserving the cultural identity of diaspora communities. Discuss the role of such festivals in fostering transnational cultural solidarity and spiritual diplomacy.

TRINATION BUDDHIST MOTORCYCLE EXPEDITION**Context:**

The Heartfulness Lord Buddha Trination Tri-Services Motorcycle Expedition was recently flagged off.

Overview:

- A unique **tri-nation expedition** involving **India, Nepal, and Sri Lanka**, aimed at strengthening **Buddhist cultural ties**.
- Organized in collaboration with:
 - **International Buddhist Confederation (IBC)**
 - Strategic and logistical support from:
 - **Land Port Authority of India** (Ministry of Home Affairs)
 - **Nalanda University, Rajgir** (Ministry of External Affairs)
 - **BIMSTEC** – Strategic Partner

Route & Key Buddhist Sites Covered:**Nepal:**

- **Lumbini** – Birthplace of Lord Buddha

India:

- **Sarnath, Uttar Pradesh** – Site of Lord Buddha's **first sermon**
- **Bodhgaya, Bihar** – Place of his **enlightenment**
- **Nalanda, Bihar** – Renowned **ancient Buddhist university**
- **Nagarjuna Sagar, Andhra Pradesh** – Ancient center of **Buddhist learning**
- **Udayagiri, Odisha** – Significant **monastic site**
- **Karnataka** – Several **Buddhist heritage sites**

UPSC Mains Model Questions

- ❖ The Trination Buddhist Motorcycle Expedition is a modern initiative to revive ancient civilizational linkages. Examine the role of cultural diplomacy and soft power in India's neighbourhood outreach, particularly in the context of shared Buddhist heritage.

VAJRAYANA BUDDHISM & RATNAGIRI BUDDHIST SITE

Context:

Recent excavation at **Ratnagiri's Buddhist complex** in Odisha (5th–13th century CE) revealed significant archaeological finds, including an 8th–9th century Buddha head, a giant palm sculpture, inscribed relics, and ancient walls

About Ratnagiri Site (Odisha):

- Located **100 km northeast of Bhubaneswar**, between the **Birupa and Brahmani rivers**.
- It is part of Odisha's "**Diamond Triangle**" of Buddhist sites: **Ratnagiri, Udaygiri, and Lalitgiri** in **Jajpur and Cuttack districts**.
- **Ratnagiri** was a **major Vajrayana Buddhist center**, known for emphasizing **mystical and spiritual power** through the symbol of "**Vajra**" (diamond/thunderbolt).
- Unique for housing **India's only Buddhist monastery with a curvilinear roof**.
- Once hosted **about 500 monks** and served as a hub for **esoteric rituals and tantric practices**.

Odisha's Role in Buddhist History:

- Under the **Bhaumakara dynasty (8th–10th century CE)**, Odisha became a flourishing center of **Buddhist learning**.
- **Tapassu and Bhallika**, two of Lord Buddha's **first disciples**, were said to be from **Utkala (ancient Odisha)**.
- **Maritime trade** with Southeast Asia (Java, Sumatra, Borneo, Bali, etc.) enabled cultural diffusion.
 - Celebrated through the **Baliyatra Festival**, meaning "Voyage to Bali", commemorating 2,000 years of maritime links.
- The **Kalinga War (261 BCE)** and subsequent transformation of **Emperor Ashoka** marked a major turning point for the **spread of Buddhism**.

Vajrayana Buddhism (Tantric Buddhism):

- Evolved from **Mahayana Buddhism** around the **6th–7th century CE**.
- Thrived in **eastern India (Bengal, Bihar)** and **Tibet**.
- Central idea: Attainment of **spiritual power (Vajra)** and enlightenment through **esoteric methods**.
- Incorporates:
 - **Tantric rituals, guided meditation, and deity visualization**.
 - Importance of **initiated master (guru)**.

- Celebrates **feminine divine power (Shakti)**:
 - **Tārās** are feminine savior figures revered in this tradition.
- Prominent chant: **“Om Mani Padme Hum”** — used for spiritual power and mystical realization.

UPSC Mains Questions

- ❖ Odisha's Buddhist heritage, centered around sites like Ratnagiri, reflects the region's cultural, spiritual, and maritime significance. Examine how these archaeological and historical linkages enhance India's soft power in the Indo-Pacific.

MENHIRS OF MUDUMAL, TELANGANA

Context:

The Menhirs (standing stones) of Mudumal in Narayanpet, Telangana, have been added to the **tentative list of UNESCO World Heritage Sites**.

About Mudumal Megalithic Menhirs:

- **Period:** Erected between 1500–500 BCE, they are India's oldest known menhirs.
- **Location:** Near Mudumal village, close to the Krishna River, spread across ~80 acres.
- **Cultural significance:** Locally revered as “Niluralla Thimmappa” (Lord of the Standing Stones); one menhir is worshipped as Goddess Yellamma.
- **UNESCO Designation:** Described as a "Megalithic Astronomical Observatory".
 - Suggests ancient astronomical alignments or ritual functions tied to celestial movements.

What is a Menhir?

- A **menhir** is a large, upright, free-standing stone, often placed singly or in groups.
- **Configuration:** Arranged in lines, circles, ellipses, or semicircles.
- **Etymology:** From Brittonic language –
 - "Maen" = Stone
 - "Hîr" = Long
- **Global Example:**
 - The **Grand Menhir Brisé** in Brittany, France, originally 20.6 meters tall, is the largest known.

- **Cultural Links:**

- In **Europe**, associated with the **Beaker culture** (Late Neolithic–Early Bronze Age).
- The **oldest European menhirs** are dated to ~7000 BP (Before Present).

Significance of Mudumal Site:

- **Archaeological Value:** Offers insights into the **ritual, astronomical, and social life** of early megalithic communities in India.
- **Cultural Continuity:** Local worship traditions show the **living heritage** aspect of the site.
- **Comparative Heritage:** Like **Stonehenge** (UK) and **Carnac Stones** (France), these menhirs also reflect **prehistoric astronomy and ritual culture**.

UPSC Mains Model Questions

- ❖ The menhirs of Mudumal challenge the Eurocentric narrative of prehistoric astronomy and ritual culture. Discuss their significance in India's archaeological and cultural landscape.