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Mains Practice Questions

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Q. There were some common characteristics of the tribal uprisings even though they were separated from one another in time and space. Discuss. (250 Words)

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Approach

- Start with writing the expanse of tribal uprisings and causes of such uprisings under British rule.
- Discuss common characteristics of the tribal uprisings.
- Conclude by writing the significance of these uprisings in the Indian freedom struggle.

Introduction

Tribal movements under British rule were the most frequent, militant and violent of all movements.

The tribal movements can be categorised into **mainland tribal revolts** and frontier tribal revolts concentrated mainly in the **north-eastern part of India**.

Body

Uprising Sparked by Number of Factors:

- **Mainland Tribal Revolts:** The land settlements of the British affected the joint ownership tradition among the tribals and disrupted their social fabric
 - As agriculture was extended in a settled form by the Company government, the tribals lost their land, and there was an influx of non-tribals to these areas.
 - Shifting cultivation in forests was curbed and this added to the tribals' problems.
 - Exploitation by the police, traders and money-lenders (most of them 'outsiders') aggravated the tribals' sufferings
 - Christian missionaries came to these regions and their efforts interfered with the traditional customs of the tribals.
 - Eg. Chuar Uprising, Kol Mutiny, The Santhal Rebellion, Bhil Revolts etc
- **Frontier Tribal Revolts (in north-eastern part of India):** Their revolts were often in favour of political autonomy within the Indian Union or complete independence.
 - These movements were not forest-based or agrarian revolts as these tribals were generally in control of land and forest area.
 - Continued for a longer time than the non-frontier tribal movements. De-sanskritisation movements also spread among the frontier tribals.
 - Eg. Khasi Uprising, Ahoms' Revolt, Singphos' Rebellion, Kukis' Revolt etc

Characteristics of Tribal Revolts

- **Tribal identity or ethnic ties** lay behind the solidarity shown by these groups.

- **Not all 'outsiders' were seen as enemies:** The poor who lived by their manual labour or profession and had a socially/economically supportive role in the village were left alone; the violence was directed towards the money-lenders and traders who were seen as extensions of the colonial government.
- **Against Foreign Government:** A common cause was the resentment against the imposition of laws by the 'foreign government' that was seen as an effort at destroying the tribals' traditional socioeconomic framework.
- Many uprisings were **led by messiah-like figures** who encouraged their people to revolt and who held out the promise that they could end their suffering brought about by the 'outsiders'.
- **Technologically Backward:** The tribal uprisings were doomed from the beginning, given the outdated arms they fought with as against the modern weapons and techniques used by their opponents.

Conclusion

It is evident that the colonial rule even, during the days of the east India Company witnessed numerous uprising and disturbances. These varied grievances reached their climax in the revolt of 1857, which in spite of targeting certain groups of Indians remains the prominent uprising against the British before the beginning of the Indian Freedom movement.