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Budhu Bhagat: Leader of the Kol Rebellion

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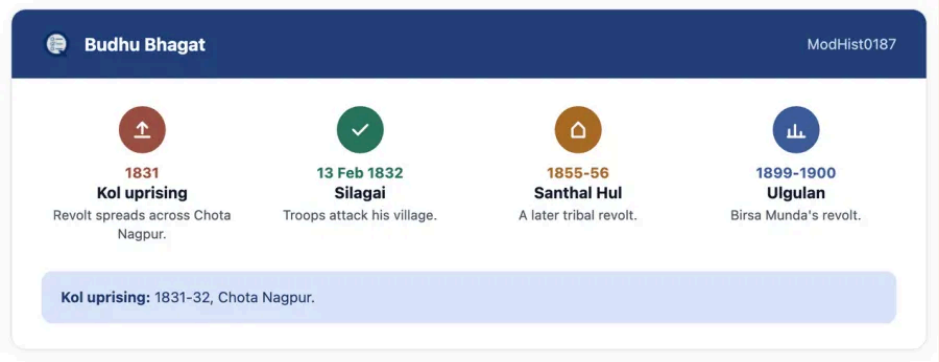
Budhu Bhagat: Leader of the Kol Rebellion

In February 1832 British troops marched on a village called Silagai, near Ranchi. They had come for one man, an Oraon farmer named Budhu Bhagat.

His followers met them with bows, arrows and axes. The fight ended the most famous chapter of the Kol uprising.



An illustration of Budhu Bhagat. No photograph exists. Image: credited to the Government of India on Wikimedia Commons, licence tag “Attribution”.



The Kol uprising and the later tribal revolts it is often compared with.

Leader. Budhu Bhagat, an Oraon from Silagai village, Ranchi district.
Uprising. The Kol uprising of 1831-32 in Chota Nagpur.
Who joined. Munda, Oraon, Ho and Bhumij communities.
Targets. Outside thikedars, moneylenders and settlers.
Silagai. Troops attacked his village on 13 February 1832.
Sons. Two of his sons died in that fight.

Kol: a colonial name for the tribal peoples of Chota Nagpur, mainly Mundas, Oraons, Hos and Bhumij.

Thikedar: a contractor who held land to collect dues from villagers.

Manki: the head of a group of villages in the old Munda-Manki system.

1 Who was Budhu Bhagat?

Budhu Bhagat belonged to an Oraon farming family. He lived in Silagai, a village in Chanho block, Ranchi district. This area is now in Jharkhand.

Wikipedia gives his birth as 17 February 1792. Some other accounts say 1772. The sources do not agree on the year.

Few records of his early life survive. Most of what we know comes from the events of 1831 and 1832. The British wrote about him as a rebel. Tribal memory remembers him as a hero.

His name is also spelled Buddhu Bhagat. Both forms appear in books and in exam questions.

- Community: **Oraon**.
- Village: **Silagai**, **Chanho block**, Ranchi district.
- Birth: **17 February**; the year is given as 1792 or 1772.
- Spelling varies: **Budhu** or **Buddhu**.

> **Quick check 1.** Budhu Bhagat belonged to the Oraon community. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

2 Why did the Kols rise in 1831?

Chota Nagpur is a plateau in present-day Jharkhand. For centuries its villages ran on their own customs. Local heads called Mankis led groups of villages. The land was held by the community.

That order began to break under Company rule. A Political Agent was appointed for the region around 1819. New land laws arrived. Outsiders came in as traders, moneylenders and settlers.

Some Mankis lost their lands. Their villages were handed to thikedars, who collected dues. These contractors added extra cesses and gifts. Taxes on goods such as salt also hurt people who had once traded freely.

Anger grew year by year. Then a few quarrels over land became the spark. The Mundas met and decided to act. Oraons and Hos soon joined them.

- Region: **Chota Nagpur plateau**.
- Old system: **Munda-Manki** village heads and community land.
- New pressures: **thikedars**, **moneylenders**, new land laws and taxes.
- Groups called **Kols**: Mundas, Oraons, Hos and Bhumij.

3 What did the uprising look like?

The revolt began in late 1831. The first targets were thikedars, many of them Sikh and Muslim contractors. Their houses were looted and burned. Some were killed.

Later the violence spread to other outsiders. Hindu villages nearby were also attacked. The rebels wanted the dikus, or outsiders, out of their lands.

Budhu Bhagat is remembered as a leader of this movement. Some books also call the revolt the Larka rebellion. He is said to have fought a guerrilla war against the British and the zamindars.

The revolt spread across Ranchi, Hazaribagh, Palamu and Manbhum. It was not one army under one chief. Many local leaders rose at once. The British called it the Kol mutiny.

The state was caught off guard. Troops were rushed in from other stations. They needed weeks to bring the countryside back under control.

- Start: **late 1831**.
- First victims: **Sikh and Muslim thikedars**, then other outsiders.
- Spread: **Ranchi**, **Hazaribagh**, **Palamu**, **Manbhum**.
- Other names: **Kol mutiny** and **Larka rebellion**.

4 What happened at Silagai?

The British announced a reward for Budhu Bhagat’s capture. Some accounts give the sum as 1,000 rupees. They wanted to break the movement by taking its best-known name.

A force reached Silagai on 13 February 1832. Some retellings stretch the fight over two days. Budhu Bhagat’s followers stood and fought.

They had only bows, arrows, axes and swords. The troops had guns. The fight was never equal.

Two of his sons, Haldhar and Giridhar, were killed. Wikipedia says Budhu Bhagat himself was captured and killed. Other accounts say he died in the fighting. Treat the exact manner of his death with care.

His village paid a heavy price. Yet his name outlived the defeat. Jharkhand now honours him as one of its first freedom fighters.

- Date: **13 February 1832**.
- Place: **Silagai** village.
- Sons killed: **Haldhar** and **Giridhar**.
- Reward on him: some accounts say **1,000 rupees**.
- His own death: **captured and killed** or **died fighting**; accounts differ.

5 What changed afterwards?

The rebellion was put down by killing and arresting its leaders and their followers. The force was commanded by Thomas Wilkinson.

The Company then changed how it ruled the region. In 1833 it set up the South-West Frontier Agency. This gave the area a special administration, separate from Bengal's regular system.

Wilkinson became the first Agent of the new body. The change did not end tribal grievances. Land loss to outsiders continued.

Later revolts show the same pattern. The Santhal Hul came in 1855-56. The Munda Ulgulan came in 1899-1900. Each grew from land, debt and distrust of outsiders.

- Suppressed under **Thomas Wilkinson**.
- New body in **1833**: the **South-West Frontier Agency**.
- Same roots as the **Santhal Hul** and the **Ulgulan**.
- Read about Tilka Manjhi and the Santhal Hul.

6 What are the exam traps?

Tribal revolts are easy to mix up. Keep the dates and regions apart.

- **Kol uprising**: **1831-32**, Chota Nagpur; Budhu Bhagat.
- **Santhal Hul**: **1855-56**; Sidhu and Kanhu.
- **Munda Ulgulan**: **1899-1900**; Birsa Munda.
- **Palamu uprising**: 1857-58; Nilambar and Pitambar.
- Budhu Bhagat was an **Oraon**, not a Santhal or a Munda.
- The **Kol** label covered several tribes, not one.
- Read about Nilambar and Pitambar.
- Read about tribal and peasant uprisings.

> **Quick check 2.** The Kol uprising of 1831-32 was led only by the Santhals. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Remember: Budhu Bhagat, an Oraon of Silagai. Kol uprising, 1831-32. Troops attacked Silagai on 13 February 1832. Two sons died. The Kol label covered Mundas, Oraons, Hos and Bhumij.

> **Think it through:** Why would a revolt with no single army still frighten the Company?
>
> Many local leaders acted at once. There was no one camp to capture. Troops had to chase fires across several districts. That stretched the Company's thin forces and forced a change in how the region was ruled.

Quick check 3. Troops attacked Silagai on 13 February 1832 and two of his sons died. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Practice MCQs

1. Budhu Bhagat was the leading figure of which tribal uprising in Chotanagpur, 1831-32?

A. The Santhal Rebellion

B. The Munda Ulgulan

C. The Kol Rebellion

D. The Bhil Eki Movement

See answer ↓

2. The Kol Rebellion's core grievance was the replacement of which traditional communal land system by British-imposed Zamindari and Thikadari systems?

A. The Mahalwari system

B. The Khuntkatti system

C. The Ryotwari system

D. The Permanent Settlement

See answer ↓

3. On 13 February 1832, British forces attacked Budhu Bhagat's village, Silagai. Who else died in that same confrontation?

A. His wife

B. Two of his sons

C. His entire extended family

D. No one else was killed

See answer ↓

4. The Kol Rebellion mobilised which combination of tribal communities under one resistance movement?

A. Gond and Bhil only

B. Naga and Khasi communities

C. Santhal and Paharia only

D. Kol, Munda, Oraon, Bhumij, and Ho

See answer ↓

5. Rebels in the Kol Rebellion particularly targeted which group, responsible for tax collection under the new landholding system?

A. Company soldiers

B. Bengali clerks

C. Sikh and Muslim thikadars

D. British missionaries

See answer ↓

6. Budhu Bhagat, a leader of the Kol uprising, belonged to which tribal community?

A. The Oraon

B. The Bhil

C. The Santhal

D. The Gond

See answer ↓

7. Which village near Ranchi was the base of Budhu Bhagat?

A. Bijolia

B. Sonpur

C. Pal

D. Silagai

See answer ↓

8. Which later Chota Nagpur revolt of 1899-1900 was led by Birsa Munda?

A. The Ulgulan

B. The Hul

C. The Eki

D. The Larka

See answer ↓

Answer Key

1. **C.** Budhu Bhagat was the leading figure of the Kol Rebellion of 1831-32 in Chotanagpur. ↑ Q1
2. **B.** The rebellion's core grievance was the replacement of the Khuntkatti communal land system by British-imposed Zamindari and Thikadari systems. ↑ Q2
3. **B.** Budhu Bhagat was captured and killed alongside two of his sons, Haldhar Bhagat and Giridhar Bhagat, at Silagai on 13 February 1832. ↑ Q3
4. **D.** The Kol Rebellion mobilised Kol, Munda, Oraon, Bhumij, and Ho communities together against British-imposed landholding systems. ↑ Q4
5. **C.** Rebels particularly targeted Sikh and Muslim thikadars, the contractors responsible for tax collection under the new landholding system. ↑ Q5
6. **A.** Budhu Bhagat was an Oraon farmer from Silagai village near Ranchi. Munda, Ho and Bhumij people also joined the Kol uprising. ↑ Q6
7. **D.** Silagai in Ranchi district was his home village. British troops attacked it on 13 February 1832. ↑ Q7
8. **A.** Birsa Munda led the Ulgulan, or Great Tumult, in 1899-1900. It came decades after the Kol uprising of 1831-32. ↑ Q8

Quick-check answers

1. **True.** ↑ 1
2. **False.** ↑ 2
3. **True.** ↑ 3

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