Birsa Munda was an Indian freedom fighter and a tribal leader who revolted against the British rule. He was a visionary who played a crucial role in liberation of his community, the tribal people, who were exposed to persistent dominance by the British exploitative policies and atrocities. His own experiences as a young boy, when he traveled from one place to another in search of work provided him with an understanding of different matters from which the community was suffering due to the British oppression. After realizing the fact that the British company arrived in India to torture the people and carry the wealth abroad, he started spreading awareness to expose the agenda of British and gathered his army of tribals. The army responded with movements and protests against the injustice and treachery of the British Raj. He was an active participant in the revolt and is remembered as a relentless fighter who possessed the courage to fight the British. He also claimed himself to be a messenger of the almighty and told his followers to follow the concept of One God. His influential personality and motivational speeches encouraged the public to believe in the power of freedom, to dream of a different world than the one they lived in. His efforts for the restoration of full ownership rights of tribals exemplified his leadership and vision.

**Childhood & Early Life**

- He was born on November 15, 1875 in Ulihatu, Khunti, Jharkhand, India, to Sugana Munda, an agricultural laborer, and his wife, Karmi Hatu. He was one of the several children in his family. He had an elder brother, Komta Munda; and two elder sisters, Daskir and Champa.
- His family belonged to the ethnic tribal community known as Munda and moved from one place to another before settling in Chalkad, where he spent his early childhood. From an early age, he developed an interest in playing the flute.
- Due to poverty, he was taken to his maternal uncle’s village, Ayubhatu, where he lived for two years. He also accompanied his mother’s younger sister, Joni, to her new home in Khatanga, after her marriage.
- He received his early education from a school at Salga, run by a Jaipal Nag. Being a sharp student he was persuaded by Jaipal Nag to attend German Mission School. Therefore, he was converted to Christianity as Birsa David and got enrolled in the school. He studied for a few years before opting out.

**Activism**

- From 1886 to 1890, his family resided at Chaibasa, a place which came under the influence of the Sardars’ activities. He was influenced through the activities and was encouraged to support the anti-Government movement. In 1890, his family moved and gave up their membership in the German mission to support the Sardar’s movement.
- Later he involved himself in the popular agitation movement against the unjust laws enforced upon the traditional rights of the Mundas in the protected forest in the Porhat area. During the early 1890s, he started spreading awareness among the common people about the plans of the British company to gain total control of India.
- He emerged as a successful leader and revolted against the dual challenge of agrarian breakdown and culture change. Under his leadership, the tribal movements gained momentum and numerous protests were staged against the British. The movement demonstrated that tribals were the real proprietors of the soil and also demanded the expulsion of middlemen and the British.
- The movement eventually faded out after his sudden demise. But it was remarkably significant as it forced the colonial government to introduce laws so that the land of the tribal people could not be easily taken away by the dikus (outsiders). It also symbolized the strength of the tribal community and the courage tribals possessed to stand against the prejudice of the British Raj.
- He was also a self-proclaimed messenger of the almighty and propagated the principles of Hindu religion. He recommended that the tribal people who converted to Christianity return to
their original religious system and also advocated the concept of One God. Eventually, he came across as a god-man figure to the tribal people who sought his blessings.

**Personal Life & Legacy**

- While living in the neighborhood of village Sankara in Singhbhum, he came across a suitable life partner but later left her because of her infidelity. Later he received the proposal for marriage from two women; the daughter of Mathura Muda of Koensar and the wife of Jaga Munda of Jiuri, but refused to marry either of them.
- On March 3, 1900, he was arrested, along with his tribal guerrilla army, by the British troops in Jamkopai forest, Chakradharpur.
- On June 9, 1900, he died at the age of 25 in Ranchi Jail where he was imprisoned. British government declared that he died of cholera although he showed no symptoms of the disease, fuelling rumors that he might have been poisoned.
- To honour this revolutionary, a number of institutes/colleges and places have been named after him. Some of the prominent ones are ‘Birsa Institute of Technology’, ‘Birsa Agricultural University’, ‘Birsa Munda Athletics Stadium’ and ‘Birsa Munda Airport’. 