

Rana Punja Bhil

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A dispute in Rajasthan's Udaipur district over hoisting of a flag on August 9 on the statue of Rana Punja Bhil has triggered tensions between Adivasi groups and some political members.



[Ref: Facebook]

- After the Amargarh fort dispute, this is the **second issue in Rajasthan within a month** when Adivasi groups and Hindu outfits are at odds over tribal history.

Who was Rana Punja Bhil?

- Punja Bhil was a **contemporary of 16th century ruler of Mewar**, Maharana Pratap.
- Punja is considered to be a significant character who bolstered the strength of Pratap during his battles with Mughal emperor Akbar.
- When Maharana Pratap was readying for the battle with Akbar, the tribal Bhil community voluntarily came to his assistance commanded by Punja.
- Owing to his status as a commander, he was bestowed the **title of Rana**.

Why did Bhils exercise significant influence in Mewar?

- The Bhil community-classified as a **scheduled tribe in Rajasthan**, which is a forest dweller group has exercised significant influence in the Mewar region and throughout the past.
- The Rajput rulers of the region have **forged alliances with the tribal group**.
- Bhils have always had control over the forest produce from Mewar which is rich in natural resources. The Bhils were also **adept in guerilla warfare with bows, arrows and slingshots** and were a significant part of the Rajput resistance against the Mughal Army during the battle of Haldighati owing to their knowledge of the region's topography.
- Later during the British period as well, the Bhils and the colonial powers were often engaged in confrontations.
- Rajput rulers consistently recognized the importance of Bhils in their kingdoms and the emblem of the Mewar royal family also has a Bhil alongside a Rajput, reflecting the importance of alliance

between the two.