

# **PAPER 1 DSE-A-1 SEM -5: HISTORY OF BENGAL (c.1757-1905)**

## **VI. PROTEST MOVEMENTS AND INSURGENCIES AGAINST THE RAJ: THE FAKIR AND SANYASI REVOLTS, INDIGO REVOLT (1859-60), PABNA PEASANT UPRISINGS (1873-76)**

### **NOTE-2**

#### **INDIGO REVOLT (1859-1860)**

When the elites of the India society were busy in initiating social and religious reforms to change their society from within to answer the moralistic critiques of the West, the rural society was responding to the imposition of the colonial rule in an entirely different way. In contrast to the urban intelligentsia, who were also the chief beneficiaries of the colonial rule, the response of the traditional elite and the peasantry, who were losing out as a result of colonial imposition, was that of resistance and defiance, resulting in a series of unsuccessful attempts at restoring the old order.

The peasants suffered from high rents, illegal levies, arbitrary evictions and unpaid labours in zamindari areas. In Ryotwari areas, the government itself levied heavy land revenue. The overburdened farmers, fearing the loss of their only source of livelihood, often approached the local money lenders who made full use of the farmers' difficulties by extracting high rates of interest on the money given to the farmers.

The social, political, economic and cultural life of the Indians with the help of the enactment of law and introduction of new legal system etc led to discontentment among all the sections of people in India which included the

farmers and peasants as well. Accumulation of grievances and absence of redressal of the same precipitated into a series of rebellion or uprisings and movements.

One of the important peasants uprising during the Colonial period in India was the **Indigo Revolt**. The Indigo Revolt also known as Neel Bidroho (in Bengali) was a revolt by the farmers against the British planters who forced them to grow indigo under the terms that were greatly unfavourable on the part of the farmers. The Indigo Revolt took place in Bengal in 1859-1860.

Indigo was in high demand worldwide. Indigo cultivation started in Bengal and Bihar in 1777 CE. The indigo trade was lucrative due to the high demand of blue dye in Europe. The European planters enjoyed monopoly over indigo and they forced the Indian farmers to grow indigo by signing fraudulent deals with them. The Indian peasant and cultivators were forced to cultivate Indigo instead of the food crops and not only that, the European planters forced the Indian peasants to cultivate indigo in the fields selected by the planters.

The formation of the Indigo Planter's Association worsened the situation and added to the oppression of the indigo farmers and increased atrocities on them. The farmers were given loans for the cultivation of indigo and upon taking the loans once, the farmer failed to repay them due to unusual high rates of interest. The farmers were paid much below the market rate of indigo in order to maximize the European Indigo Planter's profit and they were also cheated in weights and measures. The price of the indigo was not revised although the cost of its production doubled. The farmers had to face brutal oppression on failure of payment of revenue.

If the Indian farmers and peasants refused to grow indigo and instead cultivated food crops, the European planters resorted to illegal means to oppress the Indian

Peasants and farmer like burning their crops or by harassing their family and thus forcing them to cultivate indigo.

Finally, in 1860 the terribly oppressed indigo peasants launched non-cultivation of indigo movement. All the cultivators of the Barasat sub-division, Nadia and Pabna resorted to strike to articulate their demands. The agitated cultivators attacked the police-posts and the police men who tried to intervene. The rebellion and strike spread to other parts of Bengal.

People like the Biswas brothers (Bishnucaharan Biswas and Digambar Biswas) of Nadia, Rafique Mondal of Malda and Kader Molla of Pabna provided efficient leadership to the oppressed indigo cultivators. The Indigo Revolt 1859-60 received widespread support from all sections of Indian people. Hindus, Muslims, Christian Missionaries, Zamindars and farmers and a large amount of rural population all came together to support the indigo cultivators in their revolt against the European planters. The press also played an important role in the revolt by portraying the condition of the oppressed indigo cultivators and their rebellion against the oppressions.

The Indigo Revolt of 1859-1860 was a result of the oppression and resentment of the Indian farmers and peasants accumulated over the years against the European planters and the Colonial Government. The Indigo Revolt was suppressed the British Government. The Government appointed Indigo Commission in 1869 which worked for the removal of some of the abuses of the indigo cultivation.

This was the first strike of the Indian peasants and they succeeded in articulating their demands. *Nil Darpan*, a Bengali play written by Dinabandhu Mitra and enacted in 1869, portrayed the indigo revolt and highlighted the plight of the peasants

---