

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-3

PABNA PEASANT UPRISINGS (1873-76 CE)

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.

Tribal and Peasant Movements were isolated outburst against local grievances though more or less similar in characteristic, which were primarily economic in nature. The primary target was local vested interest; British officers came into conflict due to question of law and order which were involved there.

The peasants themselves often on their own initiative offered resistance to British rule. In a broad sense it can be said that the changing economic relations in the Colonial period contributed to peasant grievances and their anguish found expression in various rebellions

In East Bengal the peasantry was oppressed by zamindars through frequent recourses to ejection, harassments, illegal seizure of property, arbitrary

enhancement of rent and use of force. Consequently, the peasants organised no-rent union and launched armed attacks on the zamindars and their agents. Pabna district was the storm-centre of this movement and hence the movement is known as the Pabna peasant movement.

The Act of 1859, provided ryots with immunity from eviction. Landlords enhanced rent through imposition of variety of adwabs (cesses). The attempts of zamindars to annihilate the tenant's newly acquired occupancy rights and to convert them into tenants at will, through forcible written agreement resulted into harassment and atrocities that was vehemently opposed by peasants under the leadership of Ishan Chandra Roy and Sambhunath Pal etc.

In 1873, peasants of Yusufshahi Pargana of Pabna organised an Agrarian League, which raised funds to mitigate litigation expenses, held mass meetings to which villagers were called by sounding of buffalo horns, drums etc. Peasants did not object to hike in rent.

In fact, the Agrarian League spread very fast and they wanted to become Queens's Ryots for securing redressal of their grievances. Pabna uprising is rarest example, where peasants did not defy colonial authority and as a matter of fact wanted to become Ryots of the queen.

Pabna rebellion is a landmark since, it brought about change in perception between individual rights of zamindar and peasants respectively. Attempts were made to paint the movement with communal colour since, majority of peasant activists were Muslims and Pabna has 70% Muslim population. However, such attempts are diluted by the fact that two of their prominent leaders were Hindus, Ishan Chandra Roy (landlord) and Shambhu Nath Pal (village headman) while Khodi Mulla (Jotedar) was a Muslim.

The movement was suppressed only after armed intervention by the government. Later an enquiry committee was appointed to look into the complaints of the peasants which led to the enactment of an act.
