

## **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-1**

#### **THE FAKIR AND SANYASI REVOLTS**

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.

In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries the revenue reforms of the Company's government had fundamentally affected and altered the India rural society.

In many of the peasant movements of this period, religion played an important role in providing a discursive field within which the peasants understood colonial rule and conceptualised resistance. In other words, their religion defined their ideology of protest. The earliest of these was the **Sanyasi and Fakir rebellion**, which, rocked northern Bengal and adjacent areas of Bihar between 1763 and 1800. The Dasnami Sanyasis, known for their martial tradition, were involved in landholding, moneylending and trade in raw silk;

piece goods, broad cloth, copper and spices. The Madari Fakirs, who traced their origin from the Sufi order initiated by Sha-i-Madar, enjoyed rent free tenures and retained armed followers during the Mughal days. Both these groups of armed wandering monks were affected by the Company's high revenue demands, resumption of rent free tenures and commercial monopoly. And then, their ranks were inflated by the sufferers from the famine of 1769-70, a large number of aggrieved small -zamindars, disbanded soldiers and the rural poor.

The remarkable philosophical affinity between the two religious orders, their mutual relationship, organisational network and communication with the followers, facilitated mobilisation of the rebels. However, what made the conflict inevitable was the Company-state's unwillingness to tolerate such wandering bands of armed monks, who would seriously challenge its cherished ideal of a settled peasant society in Bengal that would regularly, pay revenue without resorting to resistance.

Therefore, from the beginning of the 1760s until the middle of 1800s recurrent confrontations between the Sanyasi-Fakirs and the armed forces of the East India Company took place in a wide region of Bengal and Bihar and the number of participants rose up to fifty thousand at the height of insurgency, which however began to decline after 1800. Infact they established independent government in Bogra and Mymensingh in which Hindus and Muslims participated enthusiastically. This is evident from the names of important leaders like Majnu Shah and his son Chirag Ali, Musa Shah, Bhawani Pathak, Debi Chowdhurani and others.

Warren Hastings was able to control Sanyasi rebellion only after military action. However, he did not succeed in quelling the movement altogether. The Sanyasis and the Fakirs who revolted, thought unsuccessful in their attempt to

restore old order but were successful in questioning and challenging the administrative policies of the English East India Company. Ananadamath written by Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay and published in 1882 is set in the background of the Sanyasi Rebellion. The Fakir and Sanyasi revolts were overt or undisguised acts of aggression and resentment against the English East India Company's Government.

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### **REFERENCE**

Bandyopadhyay, Sekhar. *From Plassey to Partition: A History of Modern India*. New Delhi: Orient Blackswan, 2004