

Sanyasi Revolt

Since the British East India Company had been granted the authority to collect taxes following the Battle of Buxar in 1764, some historians refer to it as an early conflict for India's independence from foreign rule; however, other historians, with British support, classify it as violent banditry as a result of the Bengal famine of 1770's depopulation of the province.

Sanyasi Revolt: Reason

In February 1770, in the Bengal province of British India, a famine hit the rural areas. In the famine year, people migrated from their villages to cities, searching for food and employment. According to Joseph Goldstucker, the historian of Bengal Famine: The First Great Crisis of Britain's Indian Empire, the famine resulted in mass migrations, thousands running overland to Dhaka and Calcutta.

- As a result of the severe famine of 1770 and the British government's stringent economic policies, a handful of sanyasis in Eastern India were compelled to rebel against the British yoke.
- The sanyasis were first peasants, some of whom had been forced off their land, but soon a sizeable proportion of evicted minor zamindars, dismissed troops, and the rural poor joined them.
- There are at least three different events that make up the Sanyasi Rebellion. One is a sizable number of Hindu sannyasis who journeyed to various Bengali districts from North India to visit shrines.
- On their journey to the shrines, many of these sadhus would demand a religious donation from the zamindars and leaders of the surrounding area.
- The zamindars and headmen were more inclined to assist while the economy was booming. This had now become difficult as the zamindars were bound to diwani to the British government.
- The Sanyasis were denied entry to holy places because the British thought they were looters.
- In a revolution against the British, the Sanyasis rose up and pillaged English factories and government coffers.
- The main figure in the 'Sanyasi Rebellion' (18th century) against British rule and exploitation in Bengal was Pandit Bhawani Sharan Pathak.
- The Sanyasi Rebellion marked the beginning of the anti-British uprising in India.

Importance of Sanyasi Revolt

Every day, thousands of peasants were dying in the fields and forests. The British East India Company was blamed for the famine. The Company was seen as an intolerable oppressor who exploited the peasantry with their high taxes. The peasants took to arms against the Company and its collaborators to seek relief for their grievances.

In April 1770, a revolt broke out in Baikunthpur (1770 incident). It spread to Murshidabad, where more than thirty incidents (termed as 'Sanyasi Revolt') of Sanyasi Revolts during 1770-79 just in Bengal province alone.

Sanyasi Revolt: Objectives

The objective of the Sanyasi Revolts was to make a statement on their grievances and seek personal vengeance against the British. The revolt had two prime objectives:

- The first was against the Company and its collaborators, who were accused of oppressing the peasantry.
- The second objective was to be against British officers who were serving as district magistrates. The peasants wanted their magistrates.

The Santhal Revolt of 1855–56 and the Chuar Revolt of 1799 were two revolts that occurred in the western regions of the province after the Sanyasi uprising. Among the best literary memories of the Rebellion are the Bengali novels *Anandamath* (1882) and *Devi Chaudhurani* (1884), written by India's first modern novelist Bankim Chandra Chatterjee.

Sanyasi Revolt: Failure

One of the primary reasons for the failure of the Sanyasi Revolt was the caste discrimination in society which led to internal clashes. Pandit Bhabani Charan Pathak preached against the social evils that he perceived in his locality, he was tolerant of others. He also criticised the authority of the zamindars, whom he thought was corrupt.

Bhabani Charan Pathak's revolt roots in the caste system, where upper castes supported the status quo. In contrast, there were conflicts among lower castes based on religious identity and political power. The higher castes wanted to preserve their privileges and dominance over non-Hindus; therefore, they used violence against them when they spoke out against the exploitation or mistreatment of Dalits.