

Revision Notes

Class- 8 Social Science(History)

Chapter 5 - When People Rebel 1857 and After

Nawabs Losing Power

- From the middle of the 18th century, Nawabs and Rajas had seen their power eroded. They progressively lost their authority and honor.
- The inhabitants had been stationed in numerous courts, the freedom of the rulers reduced, their armed forces dismantled, and their revenues and territories removed in stages.
- Numerous family leaders have attempted to negotiate with the Company to protect their interests. For example, Rani Lakshmibai of Jhansi wanted the Society to recognize her adoptive son as heir to the kingdom after her husband's death.
- The company even started planning how to terminate the Mughal dynasty. The Mughal king's name has been removed from coins minted by the Society.

The Peasants and the Sepoys

- In the countryside, farmers and zamindars were dissatisfied with high taxes and rigid methods of collecting receipts.
- Many have not repaid their loans to lenders and have progressively lost the land they have been cultivating for generations.
- Indian burials employed by the Society also had reasons for dissatisfaction. They were dissatisfied with their pay, entitlements, and conditions of service.
- In addition, some of those new rules violated their religious beliefs and sensitivities.
- When in 1824 the sepoys were told to go to Burma by the sea route to fight for the Company, they refused to follow the order, though they agreed to go by the land route.

- Sepoys also reacted to what was going on in the campaign. A good number of them were farmers and had families in the villages. Thus the anger of the peasants spread rapidly amongst the sepoys.

Responses to Reforms

The English thought it was necessary to reform Indian society. Legislation has been passed to stop the practice of Sati and to encourage widows to remarry. The teaching of English has been actively encouraged. After 1830, the Society allowed Christian missionaries to operate freely in its field and even to own lands and possessions. In 1850, a new statute was adopted to facilitate conversion to Christianity. This law made it possible for an Indian converted to Christianity to inherit the property of his ancestors.

A Mutiny Becomes a Popular Rebellion

- Although the struggles between the leaders and the governed are not unusual, at times such struggles become widespread as popular resistance to the collapse of state power.
- Very many people are beginning to believe that they have a common enemy and are rising against the enemy at the same time.
- After about 100 years of conquest and administration, the English East India Company was confronted by a massive rebellion that began in May 1857 and threatened the very presence of the Company in India.
- Sepoys mutinied in several locations from Meerut and a large number of people from different sections of society arose in rebellion.

From Meerut to Delhi

- On April 8, 1857, a young soldier, Mangal Pandey, was hanged to death for assaulting his officers in Barrackpore.
- Some sepoys of the Meerut Regiment refused to exercise the army using the new cartridges, which were believed to be coated with cow and pig grease.
- Eighty-five sepoys were sent back from the service and sentenced to ten years in prison for disobedience to their officers. That occurred on May 9, 1857.

- The reaction of the other Indian soldiers at Meerut was absolutely amazing. On May 10, the soldiers walked to Meerut prison and freed the imprisoned sepoys
- The Meerut sepoys drove through the night of May 10 and arrived in Delhi early the next morning. While word of their arrival spread, the regiments stationed in Delhi also rose up in rebellion.
- The Mughal dynasty ruled an enormous part of the country. Most of the leaders and smaller leaders controlled various territories on behalf of the Mughal sovereign.

The rebellion spreads

- After the English were routed from Delhi, there was no uprising during nearly a week. It took all that time to get the new people to travel. Then the outbreak of mutiny began.
- Regiment after regiment mutinied and departed to join other troops at nodes such as Delhi, Kanpur and Lucknow.
- Nana Saheb, the adoptive son of the deceased Peshwa Baji Rao who lived near Kanpur, assembled the armed forces and expelled the British garrison from the city.
- At Lucknow, Birjis Qadr, son of the ousted Nawab Wajid Ali Shah, was proclaimed the new Nawab. He also recognized Bahadur Shah Zafar for his suzerainty.
- In Jhansi, Rani Lakshmi Bai joined the rebellious forces and fought the English with Tantia Tope, Nana Saheb's general. In the Mandla region of Madhya Pradesh, Rani Avantibai Lodhi of Ramgarh raised and led an army of four thousand against the British who had taken over the administration of her state.

The Company Fights Back

- Troubled by the magnitude of the upheaval, the Company decided to suppress the revolt with all its strength.
- It brought assistance from England, passed new laws so that the rebels could be condemned with ease, and then moved to the storm centers of the uprising. Delhi was recaptured from the rebel forces in September 1857.

- The last Mughal emperor, Bahadur Shah Zafar, was brought to trial and sentenced to life imprisonment.
- Lucknow was captured on March 1858. Rani Lakshmibai was beaten to death in June 1858. A similar fate awaited Rani Avantibai, who, following the initial victory at Kheri, chose to embrace death while surrounded by the British from all sides.
- Tantia Tope fled to the jungles of central India and continued to conduct guerrilla warfare with the support of numerous tribal chiefs and peasants. He was taken prisoner, tried, and assassinated in April 1859.

Aftermath

The British had regained control of the country by the end of 1859, but they were unable to continue to govern the country with the same policies. The major changes made by the British are set out below. The British Parliament passed a new Act in 1858 and transferred the powers of the East India Company to the British Crown in order to ensure more responsible management of Indian affairs. All the country's top leaders have received assurances that their territory will never be annexed in the future. They were permitted to hand over their kingdoms to their heirs, including their adoptive sons. The British chose to abide by the traditional religious and social practices of the Indian people. Policies have been put in place to protect landowners and zamindars and provide them with the security of their rights to their lands.