

Topic 6

THE WAR OF INDEPENDENCE 1857:

The revolt of 1857 was the most severe outburst of anger and discontent accumulated in the hearts of various sections of the Indian society ever since the inception of British rule in Bengal, following the Battle of Plassey in 1757 and the Battle of Buxar 1764. British historians called it a "**Sepoy Mutiny**" and the Indian historians termed it as the "***First War of Independence***". Jawaharlal Nehru in his book "Discovery of India" described it as the Feudal Revolt of 1857 and added that "it was much more than a military mutiny and it rapidly spread and assumed the character of a popular rebellion and a war of Indian Independence".

Though the revolt was started by the Indian soldiers in the service of the East India Company, it soon proliferated all over the country. Millions of peasants, artisans and soldiers fought heroically for over a year and sacrificed their life so that others might live. Hindus and Muslims kept their religious differences aside and fought together in order to free themselves from foreign subjugation.

The British tried to dismiss this Revolt by merely calling it a "Sepoy Mutiny", but this Revolt clearly shows the hatred that the Indians had for the foreigners. The Revolt did not take place overnight. There were many causes that added fuel to the fire. The British were exploiting the Indians and the following reasons led to revolt.

Economic cause:

a)The first two hundred years (sixteenth and seventeenth centuries) the East India Company confined its activities to trade and commerce and had no political intention. The production of the Indian goods became so popular that the **British government had to pass a law in 1720 forbidding the use of Indian textiles.**

During the 18th century, the pattern of trade went through a drastic change. ***With the advent of the Industrial Revolution, England developed its own textile industry and with that the dependence on Indian textiles came to an end. Demand for Indian textiles having reduced, the local handloom industry faced heavy losses and suffered badly.***

Gradually, the Indian handicraft and Cottage industries died out. There was major **unemployment** problem and that resulted in resentment among workers against the British rule. ***The little patronage that they received from the native princes also was gone because of the annexations of those dominions.*** The miserable condition of the working class led to this rebellion against the British Rule. The ***trade and commerce of the country was monopolized by***

the by the East Indian Company. No efforts were made to improve on the living conditions of the people. Cruel exploitation of the economic resources made people miserable leading to periodic famines.

b) The **British confiscated the lands and properties of many landlords.** These landlords became leaders of the Revolt.

c) **Thousands of soldiers under the employment of the native states became jobless when the states were annexed to the British dominion.** As many as 60,000 families lost their livelihood, when Oudh's army was disbanded. Naturally the disbanded soldiers were seething with anger and were seeking an opportunity to strike at the new regime which had deprived them of their livelihood.

Social and religious cause

Indians had a suspicion that they would be **converted to Christianity** under the new regime. The fear was largely due to the activities of some of the activities of some Christian missionaries. The English also established **Chapels and Churches** for propagating Christianity at the expense of the government. Even **civil and military officers were asked to propagate the gospel.** The religious sentiments of the people were further hurt when a **tax was imposed on the construction of temples and mosques.**

An ACT was also passed in 1856 known as the "**General Services Enlistment Act**", which imposed on the Indian sepoy the obligation to serve wherever required. This **forced Hindus for overseas travelling which was against their religious customs.**

The introduction of western innovations had unsettled the minds of the ignorant people. **The spread of English education, the construction of railways and telegraph lines, legislation for the suppression of sati and the remarriage of the widows stimulated Indians belief that the British were determined to convert the people to Christianity.** The introduction of railways was resented on the ground that people of all castes would have to travel in the same compartments. The common people did not appreciate these changes. They looked upon them as foreign innovations designed to break down the social order to which they were accustomed and which they considered sacred.

The **educated Indians were also denied high posts.** The highest office open to an Indian in Civil Services was that of a *sadar or an Amin* with an annual salary of Rs. 500 only. In the military service the highest office that an Indian could secure is that of a *Subedar*. Humiliation and **torture were inflicted upon Indians** in their own country. This racial discrimination hurt Indian sentiments tremendously.

POLITICAL CAUSES:

Lord Dalhousie's policy of annexation caused uproar among the people of India. The last Peshwa, Baji Rao's adopted son Nana Sahib was deprived of the pension his father was receiving. Rani Laxmi Bai's adopted son was not given the throne after the death of his father. The annexation of Oudh without a reason led to a huge uprising. The annexation of Jhansi, Satara and Nagpur shocked the Hindus as they were predominantly Hindu states. The remaining Hindus and Muslims who were unaffected became insecure, lest they meet the same fate.

To make matters worse Lord Dalhousie announced ***in 1849 that Bahadur Shah Zafar will not be allowed to stay in the Red Fort*** anymore and they were compelled to move to a place near Qutab Minar. To further worsen the situation ***Lord Canning announced in 1856 that with the demise of Bahadur Shah Zafar, his successor will not be allowed to use the title "king"***.

The myth about the superiority of the British was shattered when they were badly beaten in the first Afghan War. Besides that there was a rumor floated around that with the end of the Revolt of 1857 the British Raj would come to an end. This rumor created from the fact that the battle of Plassey in 1757 brought about British power and with 1857 a century would be completed which will mark the end of British rule.

MILITARY CAUSES :

The East India Company was formed with the help of Indian soldiers. Instead of giving them due credit, the Indian soldiers were made victims of suppression. Disregarding the fact that the Indian soldiers were efficient, the British officials paid them poor. Indian soldiers who had formerly held high offices in the times of the native princes found themselves in low ranks. ***All the higher ranks were reserved for white men*** irrespective of their capacity to perform. The futures of the soldier were doomed and bleak. There was ***no hope of receiving any allowance*** also. The Bengal army lacked discipline. The sepoys were unhappy as they were for the most of the times ***sent overseas to fight***, which was not desirable at all. There was ***no retirement age***. The bitter feeling and anger reached its highest point with the ***emergence of the Enfield Rifles. The cartridges of these rifles were greased with cow and pig fats. The sepoys had to remove the cartridge with their teeth before loading them into the rifles. Both the Hindus and Muslims were discontented.*** Hindus consider cow sacred and Muslims considered pigs as impure. Thus, both refused to use this cartridge and they were disharmony everywhere.

Events of WOI:

Meerut

On 6th May, 1857 A.D. 85 out of 90 Indian soldiers at Meerut refused to bite the greased cartridges with their teeth. These 85 soldiers were court-martialled and imprisoned for 10 years. They were stripped off their uniforms in the presence of the entire Indian crowd. It was too

much of a disgrace and this incident sent a wave of anger. On 10th May 1857, the Indian soldiers at Meerut broke into open revolt. They released their companions and murdered a few European officers. On the night of 10th May the mutineers marched to Delhi and reached there on 11th May.

Delhi

The revolutionaries reached from Meerut to Delhi on 11th May, 1857 and the small British garrison at Delhi was not able to resist and consequently fell into their hands within 2 days. The Mughal Emperor, Bahadur Shah Zafar, was proclaimed Emperor of India. In order to regain Delhi, Sir John Lawrence sent a strong British force commanded by John Nicholson. After a long siege of four months, the British recovered Delhi in September 1857 A.D. The Mughal Emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar was captured, his two sons and a grandson were shot dead before his eyes and he was sent to Rangoon where he died in the year 1862 A. D.

Kanpur

At Kanpur the struggle for Independence was led by Nana Sahib (The adopted son of Peshwa Baji Rao II). A number of British fell into his hands and he showed great kindness to them. But when he heard about inhuman attitude of Gen. O'Neil towards Indians, he became very furious and killed all the British. General Havelock captured Kanpur after defeating Nana Sahib in a hotly contested battle on June 17, 1857. Later on Nana Sahib, with the help of Tantya Topi, recaptured Kanpur in November, 1857 but not for a long time and British defeated them once again in a fierce war from December 1 to 6, 1857. Nana Sahib fled towards Nepal, where he probably died, while Tantya Tope migrated to Kalpi.

Lucknow

The struggle for independence at Lucknow was led by Nawab, Wajid Ali Shah. The Chief Commissioner, Sir Henry Lawrence, sought refuge with 1000 English and 700 Indian soldiers inside the Residency. The Indians did not make any concession and killed most of the Englishmen, including Sir Henry Lawrence and the notorious English General O'Neil. At last, the Commander-in-Chief General Collin Campbell marched towards Lucknow and captured it after a fierce battle in March 1858.

Jhansi

and

Gwalior:

The leader of the revolutionaries in Central India was Rani Laxmi Bai of Jhansi. General Sir Hugh Rose attacked Jhansi in March 1858 but the brave Rani Laxmi Bai kept the British General frightened for quite some time. She with the help of Tantya Tope created problems for the British troops. Both fought many successful battles against the British. A fierce battle was fought between the British and the revolutionaries under Rani Laxmi Bai and Tantya Tope from June 11 to June 18, 1858 A. D. But the personal valour of Rani and Tantya Tope could not match the resources at the command of the British. Tantya Tope was betrayed by the Gwalior Chief Man Singh and fell into the hands of the British. He was subsequently hanged on April 18, 1859.

Reasons for the Failure of WOI:

Lack of unity amongst Indians was one of the important reasons for the failure of WOI. The war spread over a few places. Starting from Meerut it spread to Delhi, Lucknow,



Allahabad, Kanpur, Gwalior and Jhansi. Each area had its own leader. In Delhi the Mughal emperor bahadur shah II was made the commander. Hazrat mahal led the rebel forces in lucknow .Nana sahib and Tatia Topi rose up in Kanpur. Rani lakshmibai fought in Gwalior and Jhansi but there was no link and coordination between them.

The reason for lack of unity was that there was **no common cause** and no common planning. Muslims wanted to bring back Muslim rule, while Hindus wanted that the power should be in hands of Hindu rulers such as Marathas.

Another aspect of lack of unity was that there was **no common leader** and concept of nationalism was absent among Indian people. Most of the local fighters were interested in their personal security and wellbeing.

Many Indian states rulers sided and **helped the British**. Rulers of Gwalior, Kashmir, Hyderabad and Nepal were loyal and offered help to British. The **Sikh** from Punjab assisted the British to regain Delhi and the ruler of Kashmir sent 2000 troops to support the British. The leaders of Indian forces did not come to support one another.

There was also no planning, **no arrangement** for training of soldiers and no supply of weapons and funds on a regular basis which was essential to conduct a successful war. Therefore the local forces were too weak to face the British.

But besides all that the main reason for the failure of the WOI was that the British were too strong and had superiority in weapon and fighting methods. The British army was disciplined and trained. There was regular supply of weapons and funds from England. Therefore the Indian rebel forces were suppressed one by one at all the places by the British.

The war of Independence of 1857 achieved nothing .Give reasons why you agree & disagree with this statement.

The WOI 1857 achieved nothing for Indians who were defeated and crushed by British. Delhi was captured eventually. Later Lucknow, Kanpur, Allahbad, Gawalior and Jhansi were brought under full control of British. The plan and effort of Indian rebel forces to throw the British out of India failed badly. By July 1858 all uprising was suppressed and the British had brought the whole of India under their control.

Although the Indians achieved nothing, the WOI became a source of patriotic inspiration for the Indian people during later years. The war became a symbol of people's determination to free trade from foreign rule. Educated Indians formed political parties and they adopted constitutional methods to achieve independence.

On the other hand, from the British point of view, the WOI achieved much for the British. India came directly under British government, ending the rule of EIC. The British strengthened the grip and control over India in every way. The title of governor general was changed to viceroy who was given vast powers. The British Indian Army was re organized in such a way that in future no revolt may be possible. India became a British colony and was a source of much economic benefit. The British rule over India became a pillar of strength for the British Empire. British became the permanent power in the world. The British started building roads, railways, canals and school in India. The British gave a sound educational, judicial and administrative system to India.

EXPECTED SHORT QUESTIONS:

Mirza Abu Zafar Sirajuddin Muhammad Bahadur Shah Zafar 24 October 1775 – 7 November 1862), also known as *Bahadur Shah Zafar* was the last Mughal emperor . He was the son of Akbar II and Lal Bai, a Hindu Rajput. He became the Mughal emperor when his father died on 28 September 1837. He used *Zafar*, a part of his name, meaning “victory” .Following his involvement in the Indian Rebellion of 1857, the British tried and then exiled him from Delhi and sent him to Rangon in British-controlled Burma. When Zafar reached the age of 87, in 1862 he was "weak and feeble". However in late October 1862, his condition deteriorated suddenly. He was "spoon-fed" but he found it difficult to do it by 3 November. Zafar finally died on Friday 7 November 1862.

Mangal Pandey 19 July 1827 – 8 April 1857), was an Indian soldier who played a key part in events immediately preceding the outbreak of the Indian rebellion of 1857. Mangal Pandey was a sepoy in the 34th Bengal Native Infantry (BNI) regiment of the British East India Company. While contemporary British opinion considered him a traitor and mutineer, Pandey is widely regarded as a freedom fighter in modern India

Suttee, the Indian custom of a widow burning herself, either on the funeral fire of her dead husband or in some other fashion, soon after his death. Although never widely practiced, suttee was the ideal of certain Brahman and royal castes. It is sometimes linked to the myth of the Hindu goddess Sati, who burned herself to death in a fire that she created through her yogic powers after her father insulted her husband, the god Shiva—but in this myth Shiva remains alive and avenges Sati’s death.

Expected Questions:

Question No. 1: Briefly explain three reasons for the war of Independence of 1857.

(7)June 2000.Q.1 b

Question No. 2: Was the introduction of the ‘Doctrine of lapse’ in 1852 the most important reasons for the war of Independence in 1857? Explain your answer.

(14)June 2001 Q.1 c

Question No. 3: Why did war of Independence of 1857 fail?

(7)June 2002 Q, 2 b

Question No. 4: The war of Independence of 1857 achieved nothing .Give reasons why you agree & disagree with this statement.

(14)Nov. 2002 Q.1 c

Question No. 5: The war of Independence of 1857 was caused by the Greased Cartridges incident. Give reasons why you might agree & disagree with this statement.

(14)June 2003 Q.1 c

Question No. 6: A lack of unity & coordination was the main reason for the failure of the war of Independence by 1858 Do you agree?

(14)June 2004 Q. 1 c

Question No 7: The introduction of Social reforms by the British, such as education, caused the war of Independence in 187.’ Do you agree? Give reasons for your answer.

(14)Nov. 2005 Q. 2 c

Question No. 8: "The establishment of English as the official language of the sub continent in 1834 was the main reason for the war of Independence of 1857". Do you agree or disagree? Give reasons for your answer.

(14)June 2007 Q. 2 c

Question No. 9: Why did the war of Independence of 1857 fail?

(7)Nov.2007 Q.2 b

Question No. 10: Religious factors were more important than any other in causing the war of independence of 1857-58. Do you agree? Give reasons for your answer.

(14)Nov.2008 Q.1 c

Question No. 11: explain the three reasons for the failure of the war of Independence 1857-1858.

(7) Nov 2009.Q.1 b

Question No. 12: was a lack of unity amongst the Indians the main reasons for the failure of the war of Independence 1857-58? Explain your answer.

(14)June 2010 Q. 1 c

Question No. 13: in 1857, a number of sepoys refused to use the new cartridges at Meerut, near Delhi. The sepoys were given long prison sentences and this led to a revolt in which their fellow sepoys marched on Delhi and massacred all the British they could find. Things got worse for the British at Kanpur.

(a) What happened at the battle of Kanpur?

(4)June 2011 Q. 2 a

Question No.14: Did educational reforms have a more important effect on the Indians than the social, religious and economic ones introduced by the British during the years 1773 to 1856? Explain your answer.

(14) Nov.2011 Q.1 c

Question No.15: was the greased cartridges incident the most important cause of the war of independence of 1857? Explain your answer.

(14) June 2012 Q.1 c

Question No.16:

Read the source below carefully to answer question (a).

Indians began to resent British control of the sub-continent, and in 1857 the British faced a serious challenge to their control of India. For the British it was a revolt against their authority but for the Indians it was a revolt to throw off foreign domination.

(a) Describe the events of the War of Independence, 1857–1858.

(4) June 2013 Q.2 a

Question No.17: Why did the War of Independence fail to meet its aims in 1857? (7) Nov.2013 Q.2 b

Question No.18:"The strength of the British army was the sole reason for the failure of the War of Independence by 1858." Do you agree? Give reasons for your answer.

(14) Nov.2014 Q. 1 c