

ST. XAVIER'S SCHOOL, PURULIA

SUB – HISTORY

PHASE – 1

DATE – 06.05.2020

CHAPTER – 1

THE FIRST WAR OF INDEPENDENCE

CLASS- X

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Instructions : *The entire chapter has been prepared in a nut-shell for you. It is therefore that you can read and prepare the chapter from here itself, with ease, according to the given topics and points. For future reference, you may also take print-outs of the same.*

Introduction : The First War of Indian Independence has been referred to a series of rebellions in the northern and central India, against the British power in 1857-1858. The British usually refer to the rebellion of 1857 as the Indian Mutiny or the Sepoy Mutiny. It is widely acknowledged to be the first-ever united rebellion against colonial rule in India. Although the protest had been an unsuccessful one, the events of 1857 continued to inspire the Indians in their struggle against the British Raj.

The causes of the First War of Independence have been summarized as under the following heads : -

I. POLITICAL CAUSES : -

1. Expansion of British Dominions : After the Battle of Plassey in 1757, the British empire started with a rapid expansion of its territories in India, by conquests or any other questionable means.
- (i) **System of Subsidiary Alliance** : Devised by Lord Wellesley, Subsidiary Alliance implied to the subordination of Indian Princes to the British Company. Indian rulers who entered the alliance : (a) were required to keep the British army at their own expenses, (b) give money or a part of

their territory for the maintenance of the British troops, (c) had to keep a British official called 'Resident' at their capitals of states. For examples – Hyderabad, Mysore, Lucknow etc.

(ii) The Doctrine of Lapse : The Doctrine of Lapse, devised by Lord Dalhousie, the Governor-General of India from 1846 to 1856, stated that when a ruler of a dependent state died without a natural heir, the state passed to the British Company. The heirs adopted without the consent of the Company could inherit only the private property and not the territory. For example – Satara, Jhansi and Nagpur.

(iii) Annexation of Awadh : On 7th February, 1856, Nawab Wajid Ali Shah, was deposed on the grounds of mis-management of Awadh, as a result of which Awadh was annexed by the British empire on February 13th. This became a reason of great dissatisfaction among the soldiers from Awadh and even the zamindars.

2. Discourtesy to the Mughal Emperor : In those days, the Mughal Emperor held a 'title' in namesake, with no powers at all. Later, the announcement of Lord Canning, that the successor of the Nawab would not be able to hold the title of 'king', caused great resentment in the Mughal Empire.

3. Unpopular Administration : the following administrative measures made the British Rule completely unpopular in India.

(a) The Indians found themselves completely out of place with the English Laws and the English Language.

(b) Indians were excluded from all the high offices in the army as well as administration.

(c) The British officials had great arrogance against the Indians.

II. RELIGIOUS AND SOCIAL CAUSES :-

1. Fears regarding mass conversion to Christianity :

(a) The activities of the Christian missionaries created a sense of alarm among the Hindus and the Muslims.

(b)The 'Bible' was introduced not only in the government institutions, but also in the Government schools.

(c)The Officials openly preached Christian doctrines in the mosques and temples.

2. Laws that interfered with the Religion and Customs of the people :-

(a) The Religious Disabilities Act of 1850 changed the Hindu Law of Property, according to which only those converted from Hinduism could inherit the property of father.

(b)The Widow Remarriage Act of 1856, as a social reform, was also seen with suspicion by the people, accusing the British to be interfering in their social and religious matters.

3. Introduction of the Railways and the Telegraph : - In the railway compartments, people of all castes had to sit together, which was looked down as a means to break the social order and caste-rules. Also, rumours spread that the telegraph poles would be used to hang the people, who were against the British rule.

4. Fears regarding English Education : - The Christian missionaries had established a number of schools in British India. This shifting of emphasis to the English classes, from oriental learning to Western Education was not well received by the people, especially by the Pandits and the Maulvis.

III. ECONOMIC CAUSES :-

1. The ruin of trade and handicrafts : - The Act of 1720, which prohibited the use of Indian silks In England, deliberately crippled the Indian Arts and Crafts. By the middle of 19th century, export of cotton and silk goods practically ceased, that eventually crippled the Indian Trade and handicrafts.

2. Impoverishment of the Cultivators : - The Permanent Settlement of 1793 made zamindars the absolute owners of their estates. They had the power to eject the cultivators due to the non-payment of the taxes,

as a result of which the farmers were driven more and more for the payment of taxes.

3. India reduced to an Agricultural Colony of the British :- The raw materials required by the British included jute, opium and indigo, as a result of which the British did everything to keep India as an agricultural economy, especially after the Industrial Revolution.
4. Loss of Livelihood :- Millions of artisans and craftsmen lost their jobs, and were left with no other alternative source of income. Introduction of Western Education would make the Pandits and the Maulvis jobless too, which eventually became a matter of great concern for the Indians.
5. Big Famines:- The big Famine of 1837-38 made the people desert their villages, and wander in search of food. The government could have reduced their misery, but it seemed least interested to do so.

IV. MILITARY CAUSES :-

1. Resentment of the Sepoys or the Indian Soldiers:-
 - (i) Poor Prospects of Promotion:- All the high ranks in the army were reserved for the British only. The native sepoy could not rise above the rank of Risaldar or Subedar, even if their performance was excellent.
 - (ii) Low Salary :- The maximum pay that a *subedar* of the infantry could expect was less than the minimum pay of a raw English Recruit. The additional allowance called *bhatta*, to serve abroad was also cancelled, which eventually affected their morale.
 - (iii) Ill-Treatment or Social Distance between British officers and Indian Soldiers :- The officers treated the Indian Soldiers like their servants, in spite of their excellence and mastery as a soldier. The feelings of the sepoy could be understood from the proclamations issued during the Great Revolt.
2. Faulty Distribution of the Troops :- The key places like Delhi and Allahabad had no British armies. The British were engaged in several

wars, like the Chinese War and the Persian War, as a result the Indian soldiers needed an opportunity to strike against the British.

3. General Service Enlistment Act :- The General Service Enlistment Act of 1856 stated that the recruits of the Bengal Army, had to be ready to serve anywhere, even within or outside of India. This was a matter of great concern for the Indian Soldiers.
4. The Immediate Cause (Introduction of the Enfield Rifles) :- The introduction of the Enfield Rifles became the immediate cause of the revolt of 1857. Rumors spread that the cartridges of these rifles were greased with the fat of cows and pigs. Cow, is considered holy by the Hindus, and the Muslims consider pig to be unclean. The Indian Sepoys, therefore refused to use the cartridges for these rifles.

-: THE EVENTS OF THE WAR :-

THE War of Independence was supposed to begin on 31st May, 1857. However, on 29th March, 1857, a Brahmin soldier, named Mangal Pandey, belonging to the regiment stationed at Barrackpore, refused to bite the greased cartridge. He also killed two British officers, on account of which he was tried and executed. The news spread like wild fire amongst the Indian soldiers, and was sure to disturb the Indian masses. The First War of Independence, therefore, started in the various parts of India, like Delhi (Bahadur Shah), Meerut, Kanpur (under Nana Saheb), Lucknow (under Begum Hazrat Mahal) and so on.

-: THE CAUSES OF OUR FAILURE :-

By the end of 1858, the War was over, with the defeat of the Indian Soldiers. However, there have been several reasons for the failure of the Indians.

1. *Lack of Co-ordination among the Leaders* :- The revolt of 1857 lacked Co-ordination amongst the Indian rulers and the leaders. There was no action plan, nor a definite ideology, on the basis of which the revolt was to be taken further. As for an example, there was no

effort made to relieve the siege of Delhi by Nana Saheb, nor any other leader.

2. Lack of Efficient Leadership :- The Indian leaders like Rani Lakshmi Bai, Tantia Tope attained notable victories against the British, but their activities were confined to a narrow area and also for a brief period. On the other hand, the British were led forward under the able leadership of leaders like Lawrence, Havelock, Campbell and so on.
3. Superior Equipment and Resources of the British :- The Indian Sepoys lacked behind the British in terms of their resources and equipments. The weapons used by the British were far more advanced as compared to the Indian soldiers. Also, the unlimited resources enabled the British to gain control over the Indians in a very short period of time.
4. The War was localized :- The revolt did not spread evenly in many parts of the country. As for an example, Punjab remained completely quiet. Leaders like Sindhia and Nizam of Hyderabad, took the side of the British in the War.

-: RESULTS AND CONSEQUENCES OF THE WAR :-

1. End of Company's Rule and Changes introduced in the Administrative set-up :- The War ended the rule of the East India Company, with several changes in the administration in India, under the Act of 1858.
 - (a) The Act of 1858 transferred the Government of India from the Company to the Crown.
 - (b) The Company's Board of Directors was also abolished. All the powers were transferred to a Cabinet Minister, known as the Secretary of the State for India.
 - (c) The Secretary of State was to be assisted by the Indian Council, consisting of fifteen members.

(d) The appointments to the Civil Services were to be made by open competition under the rules made by the Secretary of State in Council.

2. Policy towards the Indian Princes and Chiefs :-

- (i) The British Government would not annex the Indian States.
- (ii) All the treaties that the princes had concluded with the British would be honoured.
- (iii) Their rights of adoption and succession were also recognized.

3. Re-organization in the Army :-

- (i) The proportion of the British to the Indian soldiers was increased.
- (ii) Artillery and other effective weapons were reserved for the British.
- (iii) All key positions in the army were also reserved exclusively for the British.

4. Solemn promises made to the People of India :-

- (i) Queen Victoria in her Proclamation of 1858 promised not to interfere in the religious beliefs of the people.
- (ii) The Queen also promised the equal treatment of her subjects, the Indians and the Europeans.
- (iii) The proclamation ended with a promise that the moral and material advancement of the Indian people would be the main concern of the Government.

5. Economic Exploitation :-

- (i) The number of Englishmen in India, both private and members of the State, increased.

- (ii) India became a dumping ground for the goods manufactured in England.
- (iii) There was a rapid rise in the indebtedness of the peasants under the British rule.
- (iv) The British invested their surplus capital in India in railways, coal-mines, jute-mills and so on.

6. Policy of Divide and Rule :- The Chiefs and the Princes of the Indian states remained to be the supporters of the British. This was done to create a wall of separation between the princes and the 'ordinary masses' in India. Further, the strength of the uprising lay in the unity of the Hindus and the Muslims, and this development was viewed with alarm by the British. Therefore, the British started the policy of Divide and Rule, to create a misunderstanding between the Hindus and the Muslims.

-: THE NATURE OF THE REVOLT :-

Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose referred to the 'Revolt of 1857' as the First War of Independence. Although the revolt resulted in failure, but it was the first revolt ever, of the Indians, against the British, in the struggle for Independence.

Sir John Lawrence, on the other hand, has described the revolt to be a 'sepoys mutiny', as the incident of the greased cartridges had been the main cause of the revolt. The revolt seemed to be primarily started by the Sepoys, and even if the revolt had been localized, restricted and unorganized, it did assume the character of a National Revolt. The crisis even if appeared as a mere sepoy mutiny, but it soon changed the character and became a national uprising, aptly to be called as 'The First War of Independence'.

-: HOMEWORK AND ASSIGNMENTS :- (TO BE DONE IN THE SCHOOL HISTORY COPY) :

Page Numbers – 108, 109 and 110 :-

Short Answer Questions :- Questions 1 to 27 (as 2 marks for each)

Structured Questions :- Question No. 2 to 6. (as 10 marks for each)

N.B. :- If 3 questions in each, then to be written as per 3 + 3 + 4 answer pattern,

If 2 questions in each, then to be written as per 5 + 5 answer pattern.

Thank You.
