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THE FREEDOM MOVEMENT OF 1857 C.E.

Nationalism emerged in India due to not only the arrival of the Europeans but also their behaviour and policies. An important event happened in India in the year 1857 C.E. which became the first in the factors responsible for consolidating the sentiment of Nationalism in our country.

Reasons for the outbreak of the Revolt of 1857 C.E.

The main reason for the revolt of 1857 C.E. was the widespread dissatisfaction among the people in India due to the suppressive policies of the British adopted to spread their empire in India. Let us review the reasons in detail about what led to this dissatisfaction.

Social and religious reasons

The Policy of Social Reforms by the Company made people feel insecure and suspicious. They felt that the government was trying to convert them to Christianity and destroy the Indian culture and religion forever. People believed that the Indian social system was deliberately undermined in the railways, jails and military. A larger section of our society was orthodox at that time and thus, the new changes arouse dissatisfaction in them. As a result, many people joined this freedom movement to sustain their socio-religious structure.

Economic reasons

The aim of the British was to bring prosperity to England at the cost of India. As a result, most of the sections of Indian society became impoverished. The landlords and peasants, having lost their lands participated in the revolt.

Political reasons

The East India Company acquired the Diwani Rights (right to collect revenue) as a result of their victory in the Battle of Buxar in 1764 C.E. This was followed by an aggressive policy of expansion with the help of Subsidiary Alliance, Doctrine of Lapse, Policy of Annexation and mere diplomacy. Rani Lakshmibai of Jhansi and Raja Kunwarsingh of Bihar, who were among the few of the victims of these policies, joined the revolt to regain their territories. Landlords and peasants who had lost their lands too joined the revolt.

Military reasons

The number of British officers and soldiers was very less in a vast country like India. The ratio of the Indian soldiers to the British soldiers was approximately 6:1 in the military. The higher posts in the military were reserved for the British. The opportunity of promotion was very limited for the Indian soldiers. There was a big difference between the salary of an Indian soldier and a British soldier.

The Indian footsoldiers received 7 rupees while the British soldiers received 150 rupees per month. The British soldiers considered the Indian soldiers to be low and insignificant. As per the religious restrictions, the Indian soldiers were not allowed to cross the sea or else the person would be treated as an outcast. Despite this custom, the Indian soldiers were compelled to cross the sea in order to fight battles for the British. Thus, like other Indians, the soldiers too felt that their religion was at stake. The soldiers, being a part of the Indian society, shared the same sentiments of grief, suspicion and anger as others did.

The immediate reasons

There were various reasons for the rising anger and discontentment among the people towards the British rule. In January 1857, a new rifle 'Enfield Rifle' was introduced in the Indian army. The cartridge of this rifle had to be bitten off before being used. This cartridge was greased with the fat of cow and pig. For the Hindus the beef and for the Muslims the pork was prohibited by their religion. Hence, they felt that the British were deliberately trying to desanctify their religion. The response to their complaints in the same regards was not satisfactory. Hence, the 19th Battalion of Barrackpore was the first to refuse the use of the cartridge. As a result, the entire battalion was disbanded.

Planning of the revolt and Mangal Pandey

It was planned to begin the revolt across the nation against the East India Company on 31st May, 1857. Leaders like Nanasaheb Peshwa, Bahadur Shah Zafar, Kunwar Singh and the Nawab of Awadh had joined hands with Tatya Tope, an efficient military commander; Rango Bapuji, an accomplished planner, and Azimullah Khan, a lawyer and a journalist to lead the revolt. Lotus and roti were the symbols to join the revolt for the civilians and the soldiers respectively. These symbols were circulated across the nation. Bards, Hindu and Muslim priests, Auliyas and messengers played their part in spreading the word about the revolt.



9.1 Mangal Pandey

Mangal Pandey opposed the use of the cartridge greased with the fat of cows and pigs. As a result, the revolt began earlier than the fixed date. It disrupted the planning and the objectives of the revolt could not be achieved.

Mangal Pandey was born in a Brahmin couple in Nagwa village of Uttar Pradesh. He joined the British army as a soldier at Rs.7 as his salary. The Indian soldiers who had agreed to revolt, wanted to wait till 31st May. Whereas 26 years old Mangal Pandey could not wait till then. He refused to follow the orders of using the Enfield Rifle and challenged the British officers. Sergeant-Major Hewson ordered to arrest him. but Mangal Pandey shot him.

He defeated another British officer too. The Indian soldiers refused to arrest Mangal Pandey, being a Brahmin. When he was cornered by the British soldiers, A bleeding Mangal Pandey was taken to the hospital because the British wanted to get information about the plan of the revolt from him.

The Military court pretended to run a case against Mangal Pandey on 6th April 1857. The entire proceeding was in English. He was sentenced to death at the end but he did not divulge any information regarding the revolt to the British. That's how our patriots were! He was hanged at 5:30 a.m. on 8th April and that's how he became the first martyr of the Revolt of 1857.

Activity

- *With the help of the given political map of India prepare a list of the regions of the concentration of the Revolt of 1857.*



9.2 Major Centers of the Revolt of 1857

Spread of the revolt and its leaders

Delhi and Bahadur Shah Zafar

The soldiers reached Delhi from Merath (Meerut) in the morning on 11th May. They could capture Delhi with the help of the Indian soldiers present there. They convinced the 80-year-old Mughal Emperor, Bahadur shah Zafar to accept the leadership of the revolt. This news infused a new life in the revolt and many regions of India joined the revolt.



9.3 Bahadur Shah Zafar

Kanpur and Nana Saheb

Kanpur broke into the revolt on 4th June 1857 and Nanasaheb Peshwa was asked to assume the leadership of the revolt. However, they had to surrender to the Britishers following an acute shortage of food and water due to a 22-day long siege.



9.4 Nana Saheb

Bihar and Kunwarsingh

Patna and Jagdishpur were the main centers of the revolt in Bihar. Kunwarsingh, a 70-year old landlord was the leader of the revolt. He fought bravely against the Britishers. During a battle, he got shot in his arm. To stop the poison from spreading into his body he chopped his hand off from the elbow and offered it to the river Ganga. He freed Jagdishpur from the British control before he died.



9.5 Kunwar Singh

Jhansi and the great warrior Laxmi Bai

The Queen of Jhansi, Laxmibai was a great warrior. The Britishers did not accept her adopted son as the heir to the throne. This is the reason for her joining the revolt. She was one of the most skillful leaders of the revolt. She had also prepared an army of women to fight against the British. They fought bravely against the British. According to the British officials, Queen Laxmibai was one of the greatest women leaders in the revolt of 1857.



9.6 Queen of Jhansi, Laxmi Bai

A brave army commander - Tatya Tope

Nanasaheb Peshwa had made Tatya Tope the commander of the army at Kanpur. Soon he became his trusted commander. He skillfully fought to free Kanpur playing the role of a commander for the first time in his life. For the next two years he played a major role in the revolt across the country. No one in his time had fought as many battles as he did.

Soldiers from different parts of India had joined the revolt. From North India Bareilly, Banaras, Allahabad, Agra, Azamgarh and Gorakhpur had joined. Ajmer, Nasirabad and Abu from the Rajputana and Gwalior, Mandsore, Indore and Dhar from the Central India participated in the revolt. Satara, Kolhapur, Savantwadi, Nargadh, Dharwad, etc. became active in South. However, these centers were scattered.



**9.7 Commander-in-chief,
Tatya Tope**

Revolt of 1857 in Gujarat

The 7th battalion of the British Army broke into Revolt in Ahmedabad, Gujarat in June, 1857. However, it was soon halted. Dahod, Jhalod and Godhara of Panchmahal witnessed the skirmishes with the British Army. The soldiers could capture Government offices with the help of the natives but were soon defeated. The Nayakadas of Panchmahal continued the rebellion almost for a year.

Garbad Das Patel, the Headman of Anand in Kheda district collected almost 2000 volunteers of the Koli and Nayakada communities to join the revolt. He was supported by Jivabhai Thakor of Khanpur, Malaji Joshi and Krishna Das Dave. However, the supporters of Garbad Das were captured by the Britishers, tied to the cannon and were blown off with the cannon ball fire. Garbad Das was exiled to Andamans where he died.

The people of Chandup (Chandap) village, which is 16 miles away from Idar, accepted the leadership of Nathaji and Yamaji and joined the revolt. The British had camped at Nandana village between Okha and Baradi. The British Commander of Navy became impatient and he reached the fort of Bet Dhawarka via the Bay of Bet. Donovan ordered an attack on the fort. The Waghers inside the fort had no such artillery to counter attack. At this time the Wagher women came up with a very brave and innovative idea. They soaked the mattress with water in which they could catch the cannon balls and cool them immediately. This would enable the Wagher men to fight the battle without being hit by the cannon balls. Nowhere in the history of the world such act of valor has been exhibited. Wagher women very bravely disarmed the cannon balls without worrying about their own lives. Their act of bravery was equivalent to that of Rani Laxmibai. These women were the Laxmibais of Gujarat.

Cities of North Gujarat like Patan, Kheralu, Bhiloda, Mudeti, etc. broke into the revolt with the help of the natives. Apart from this, in December 1858 Tatya Tope stayed with his army in Panchmahal district of Gujarat. He had to escape to the forest of Vansvada when being chased by the British Army.

Think

- *If you were a soldier in 1857, what would have been your strategy?*
- *Why did the revolutionaries find it difficult to fight against the British army?*

End of the Revolt

During the revolt, weapons and soldiers were supplied to the Britishers from England, Iran etc. The revolt had started on 10th May, 1857 but by the end of June 1857 the Britishers were able to regain control on Banaras and Allahabad. Kanpur was recaptured by the end of July and Delhi in September 1857. Bahadurshah Zafar and his queen Begum Zeenat Mahal were imprisoned and exiled to Rangoon, the capital of Burma where they died after few years. Their three sons were murdered.

Lucknow was recaptured in March 1858. Jhansi fell because of the treachery of one of the courtiers of Jhansi. As a result, Laxmibai escaped towards Kalpi where she died while fighting a battle with the British troops.

Nana Saheb Peshwa escaped to Nepal after the final defeat. It is believed that he lived in the Shihor village of Bhavnagar district of Gujarat where he is believed to have died in 1902.

It is said that Tatya Tope was captured due to the betrayal of one of his allies. According to the official documents, Tatya Tope was hanged on 18th April, 1859. However, as per the other sources we come to know that Tatya Tope had managed to escape and someone else was hanged in his place. It is believed that he had spent the last years of his life in Navsari.

Things to know

- *Samau is a village in Mansa Taluka in Gandhinagar district. A tombstone that stands in the primary school has an epitaph that reads 29th, November, 1857.*

Why was the revolt a failure?

The revolutionaries failed to retrieve the power from the Britishers due to their limitations, some of which were:

1. The rebels lacked coordination. There was an absence of centralized leadership. There was no provision of reinforcement of men, money and ammunition.
2. The outbreak of the revolt happened way before the pre planned date. As a result the planning was disrupted and it alerted the British.
3. The revolt remained concentrated largely in north India. Many social reformers refrained directly or indirectly from joining the revolt. This proves that the intellectual class did not support the revolt.
4. India is a country known for its regional diversity in languages, food habits, dressing etc. Before the British rule, the people were ruled by regional dynasties. As a result, the sentiments of nationalism, belongingness to India as one nation had not developed either in people or in their leaders. Many leaders either sided with the British or remained passive at the time of the revolt.
5. The Sikhs and the Gurkhas fought by the side of the British which proved to be a major disadvantage for the rebels.
6. The British had a superior Army, weapons and military commanders compared to the rebels.
7. All the leaders were fighting for regaining their power or territories lost to the British. They were not fighting for the freedom of their nation.

Think

- *Which were the other causes responsible for the revolt being a failure?*

Effects and Consequences

The revolt was not successful against the Britishers. However, it still ushered in a new era of change:

- Company rule came to an end in India and India came under the rule of the Crown.
- The interference in the internal affairs of the princely states of India was stopped.
- The British government was compelled to change its policies towards India.
- The salary, allowances and facilities given to the Indian soldiers/sepoys were increased.
- This revolt helped in invoking a feeling of nationalism in the people of India.

EXERCISES

Q.1 Answer the questions in short

1. What were the main reasons for the outbreak of the revolt of 1857 C.E.?
2. Who were the main leaders in the revolt of 1857?
3. What was the result of the revolt of 1857?

Q.2 Answer in one or two sentences

1. What was the ratio of the Indian soldiers in the British Army in India?
2. What was the immediate cause of the revolt of 1857?
3. Who was the first martyr of the revolt of 1857?
4. Who was the last Mughal Emperor of Delhi?
5. How did Kunwarsingh attain martyrdom?
6. Who was the trustworthy person for Nana Saheb?
7. Who took the leadership in the revolt in Kheda district?
8. In which district of Gujarat had Tatya Tope stayed?
9. Which were the centres of the revolt in North Gujarat?

Q.3 Fill in the blanks with appropriate words

1. In the year 1857 rifle was introduced in the Indian Military.
2. The landlord of Jagdishpur took the leadership of the revolt.
3. was the Commander in-Chief of the rebelling army that tried to free Kanpur from the British control.
4. The Queen of Jhansi waged war against Britishers in the revolt.