

Atomic Energy Education Society
Study material

Class-VIII

Subject-History

Lesson 05-When People Rebel: 1857 and After

Module- 1/2

Important points

- ❖ **Policies and the People:** The policies of the East India Company affected the lives of the Indian people in many ways. These policies of East India Company had affected different people such as Kings, queens, landlords, tribals, sepoys and peasants. So, they started resisting against the East India Company / Britishers as these policies were against their rights and sentiments.

- ❖ **Nawabs Lose their Power:**
 - Since the mid-18th century, Nawabs and Rajas had gradually lost their power, honour and authority.
 - The British had appointed Residents in many courts. So the freedom of the Indian rulers was reduced and their armed forces were disbanded.
 - The Company also took away their revenues and territories in stages.
 - Many ruling families tried to negotiate with the Company to protect their interests but they failed.
 - For example- Rani Lakshmbai of Jhansi wanted the company to recognize her adopted son as the legal heir after her husband's death.
 - Nana Sahib the adopted son of Peshwa Baji Rao II pleaded that he should receive his father's pension as he was his legal heir. But the Company never accepted such requests.
 - In 1801, a subsidiary alliance was imposed on Awadh. Governor General Dalhousie declared that the state or territory was being misgoverned by Nawab Wajid Ali Shah and imposed British rule for a proper administration.
 - In 1856, finally Awadh was taken over by British. It was one of the last territories to be annexed by the British.

- ❖ **Bringing an end to the Mughal Dynasty:**
 - Company began to plan to bring an end to the Mughal dynasty. To make this plan successful the Company took several measures.
 - The name of the Mughal king was removed from the coins minted by the Company.

- In 1849, Governor-General Dalhousie announced that after the death of Bahadur Shah Zafar, the family of the king would be shifted out of the Red Fort and given another place in Delhi to reside in.
- In 1856, Governor-General Canning decided that Bahadur Shah Zafar would be the last Mughal king, and after his death his successors would be known as 'prince' and not 'king'.

❖ **The Peasants and the Sepoys:**

- In the countryside peasants and zamindars resented the high taxes and the rigid methods of revenue collection.
- Many failed to pay back their loans to the moneylenders and gradually lost the lands they had tilled for generations.
- The Indian Sepoys in the employ of the Company also had reasons for discontent.
- They were unhappy about their pay, allowance and conditions of service.
- Some of the new rules, moreover, violated their religious sensibilities and beliefs.
- In those days many people believed that if they crossed the sea they would lose their religion and caste.
- In 1824 the Sepoys were told to go to Burma by the sea route to fight for the company, when they refused they were severely punished.
- In 1856 the company passed a new law which stated that every person who took up employment in the Company's had to agree to serve overseas if required
- Sepoys reacted to what was happening in the countryside. Many of them were peasants and had families living in the villages, so the anger of the peasants quickly spread among the Sepoys.

❖ **Responses to Reforms:**

- The British believed that the Indian society had to be reformed
- Laws were passed to stop the practice of sati and to encourage widow remarriage.
- English language education was actively promoted.
- After 1830, the Company allowed the Christian missionaries to function freely in its domain and even own land and property.
- In 1850, a new law was passed to make conversion to Christianity more easier.
- This law allowed an Indian who had converted to Christianity to inherit property of his ancestors.

- Many Indian began to feel that the British were destroying their religion, their social customs and their traditional way of life. However, there were some others who wanted to get rid of many of the social evils.

❖ **A Mutiny Becomes a Popular Rebellion:**

- A large number of people began to view the British as their common enemy and, therefore, they rose up against this enemy at the same time.
- For such a situation to develop people have to organise, communicate, take initiative and display the confidence to turn the situation around.
- After hundred years of conquest and administration the Company faced a massive rebellion that started in May 1857 and threatened the Company's very presence in India.
- Sepoys mutinied in several places beginning from Meerut and a large number of people from different sections of society rose up in rebellion.
- Some regard it as the biggest armed resistance to colonialism in the nineteenth century in the world.

❖ **From Meerut to Delhi.....**

- On 29th March 1857, a young soldier, MANGAL PANDEY, was hanged to death for attacking his officers in Barrackpore.
- Some days later, some Sepoys of the regiment at Meerut refused to do the army drill using the new cartridges, which were suspected of being coated with the fats of cows and pigs.
- Eighty five Sepoys were dismissed from service and sentenced to ten years in jail for disobeying their officers.
- This happened on 9th MAY, 1857.

❖ **The Response :**

- On 10th May, the soldiers marched to the jail in Meerut and released the imprisoned Sepoys.
- They attacked and killed British officers. They captured guns and ammunition and set fire to the buildings and properties of the British and declared war on the FIRANGIS.
- The soldiers were determined to bring an end to their rule in the country.

❖ **The Leader :**

- The soldiers decided to make the Mughal Emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar as their leader.

- The Sepoys of Meerut rode all night of 10th MAY to reach Delhi in the early hours of next morning.
- The regiments stationed in Delhi also rose up in rebellion. The British officers were killed, arms and ammunition seized, buildings set on fire.
- The soldiers forced their way in to the Red Fort, convinced Bahadur Shah Zafar and proclaimed him as their leader.
- The ageing Emperor had to accept this demand and wrote letters to all his chiefs and rulers of the country to come forward and organize a confederacy of Indian states to fight the British.
- The Mughal dynasty had ruled over a very large part of the country. Most smaller rulers and chieftains controlled different territories on behalf of the Mughal ruler.
- Threatened by the expansion of British rule, many of them felt that if the Mughal emperor could rule again they too would be able to rule their own territories once more, under Mughal authority.

❖ **From Meerut to Delhi:**

- On 29 March 1857, Mangal Pandey, a young soldier, was hanged to death for attacking his officers in Barrackpore.
- After some days of this incident some sepoy at Meerut refused to use the fat greased cartridges.
- Therefore, 85 sepoy were dismissed from service and on 9 May 1857 they were sentenced to 10 years in jail for disobeying their officers.
- On 10th May the soldiers marched to the Meerut jail and released the imprisoned sepoy.
- The sepoy were determined to bring an end to the Company's rule.
- The sepoy rode all night of 10 May to reach Delhi.
- The regiments stationed in Delhi also rose up in rebellion and many British officers were killed, arms and ammunition seized, buildings set on fire.
- The soldiers forcibly met Bahadur Shah Zafar and proclaimed him as their leader.
- The Mughal emperor got support from the rulers and chiefs of the country and together they rose against the British power.
- This was too much for the sepoy. They refused to do the army drill using the new cartridges, which were suspected of being coated with the fat of cows and pigs. Thus, tension grew between the Company and sepoy.
- The British thought that the disturbance caused by the issue of the cartridges would die down. But the entire situation changed dramatically by the decision of Bahadur Shah Zafar.