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REBELS AND THE RAJ : *The Revolt of 1857 and its Representations*

I. SOME IMPORTANT TERMS AND DATES

- ✓ 1. **Bania.** Moneylender.
- ✓ 2. **Ilāqa.** Area of land.
- ✓ 3. **Lineage.** Ancestral.
- ✓ 4. **Pattidar.** Joint ownership of village.
- ✓ 5. **Taluqdar.** Holder of taluq (estate in which the holder is responsible for revenue collection from a number of dependent villages).
- ✓ 6. **Bell of Arms :** A store room in which weapons are kept.
- ✓ 7. **Resident.** Designation of a representative of the Governor General who lived in a state which was not under direct British rule.
- ✓ 8. **1801.** Subsidiary Alliance introduced by Wellesley in Awadh.
- ✓ 9. **1856.** Nawab Wajid Ali Shah deposed and Awadh annexed.
- ✓ 10. **1856-57.** Summary revenue settlements introduced in Awadh by the British.
- ✓ 11. **1857 (10 May).** Mutiny starts in Meerut.
- ✓ 12. **1857 (11-12 May).** Delhi garrison revolts : Bahadur Shah accepts nominal leadership.
- ✓ 13. **1857 (20 to 27 May).** Sepoy mutiny in Aligarh, Etawah, Mainpuri, Etah.
- ✓ 14. **1857 (30 May).** Rising in Lucknow.
- ✓ 15. **1857 (May-June).** Mutiny turns into a general revolt of the people.
- ✓ 16. **1857 (30 June).** British suffer defeat at the battle of Chinhat
- ✓ 17. **1857 (Sept 25).** British forces under Havelock and Outram enter Residency in Lucknow.
- ✓ 18. **1857 (July).** Shah Mal killed in battle.
- ✓ 19. **1858 (June).** Rani Jhansi killed in battle.

III. ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS

(a) **Very Short Answer Type Questions** (2 Marks—30 Words)

✓ **Q. 1. When where and by whom was the revolt of 1857 started ?**

Ans. The revolt of 1857 started on 10th May 1857, in the cantonment of Meerut, by the sepoys of the Native Infantry.

✓ **Q. 2. Name some important leaders who played a significant role in the upheaval of 1857.**

Ans. (i) Bahadur Shah II (Delhi) (ii) Rani of Jhansi (Jhansi)
(iii) Nana Sahib (Kanpur) (iv) Begum Hazrat Mahal (Awadh)
(v) Azimullah Khan (Faizabad) (vi) Tantia Tope
(vii) Kunwar Singh (Jagishpur).

✓ **Q. 3. List some of the important centres of revolt.**

Ans. The most prominent centres were :

(i) Delhi (ii) Bareilly (iii) Kanpur (iv) Lucknow (v) Azamgarh (vi) Jhansi.

Some other important centres were :

(i) Meerut (ii) Allahabad (iii) Banaras (iv) Barrackpur (v) Satara (vi) Jabalpur
(vii) Saharanpur (viii) Calcutta.

✓ **Q. 4. Give the extent of the revolt of 1857.**

Ans. The revolt which began at Meerut, cut across Northern India and embraced vast area from Punjab in the North and the Narmada in the South to Bihar in the East and Rajputana in the West.

✓ **Q. 5. What was the immediate cause or spark which provoked the revolt of 1857 ?**

Ans. The issue of greased cartridges provided the immediate cause/spark, to the culmination of popular discontent with British policies and imperialist exploitation.

✓ **Q. 6. What are the main sources for the reconstruction of the revolt of 1857 ?**

Ans. (a) Main sources are British records — official accounts and accounts by the British.

Ans. These words were spoken by Governor General Lord Dalhousie in 1851 in reference to the kingdom of Awadh. In 1856 the kingdom was formally annexed to the British Empire.

✓ **Q. 8. Give two reasons which prompted British annexation of Awadh.**

Ans. The conquest of Awadh happened in stages but the reasons which prompted annexation in 1856 were :

- (i) It was seen as a source of not just additional revenue, but its soil as ideally suited for investment of private capital for cultivation of indigo and cotton.
- (ii) The region was ideally located as a potential market for upper India.

✓ **Q. 9. On what pretext was Awadh annexed ?**

Ans. Awadh was annexed on the grounds of/pretext of misgovernment.

✓ **Q. 10. Give two features of Dalhousie's Doctrine of Lapse.**

Ans. Doctrine of Lapse was the chief instrument of Dalhousie's policy of annexation.

Features : (i) When a ruler of a protected state died without a natural heir, the state was not to pass on to the adopted heir, as sanctioned by age old traditions in the country.

(ii) The state was to be annexed to British India unless the adoption was approved by the British. *Examples :* (i) Jhansi in 1854. (ii) Awadh in 1856.

Q. 11. How did participation of the ordinary people change the face of the revolt of 1857. Give two points.

Ans. When ordinary people began joining the revolt targets of attack widened, for example, in major towns like Lucknow, Kanpur and Bareilly moneylenders and the rich also became objects of rebel wrath. There was a general defiance of all kinds of authority and hierarchy.

✓ **Q. 12. Why did moneylenders and rich people become objects of rebel wrath during the revolt of 1857 ? Give reasons.**

Ans. Moneylenders and rich people along with the *white* became objects of rebel wrath during the revolt of 1857 because :

- (i) Peasants saw them along with the white as oppressors and source of injustice.
- (ii) They were seen as allies of the British. Thus everything and everybody connected with the *white* became rebel target.

(iii) This reflected an attempt to overturn traditional hierarchies.

Q. 13. Why was the revolt most widespread in the months of May and June of 1857 ? Give reasons.

Ans. The revolt was most widespread in the months of May and June of 1857 because :

(i) The British had no answer to the actions of the rebels.

(ii) British individual were two engaged in saving their own lives and lives of their families.

Q. 14. The pattern of the mutinies and pieces of evidence suggest some sort of planning on the part of the mutineers. How were the plans made ?

Ans. It is difficult to provide direct answers on the basis of available documents as to how plans were made. But on the basis of incident of Charles Hearsey of Awadh Military Police and findings of Charles Ball who wrote earliest histories of the uprising

historians have corroborated panchayats which were a nightly occurrence in Kanpur sepoy lines, where decisions taken collectively were points/area of planning.

Q. 15. Who were the planners of the rebellion of 1857 ? Give reason in support.

Ans. The sepoys were the makers of their own rebellion because :

- (i) The bulk of the sepoys were upper caste Hindus from North Western Provinces and Awadh.
- (ii) They shared a common lifestyle and in this sense formed a homogenous group within the army.
- (iii) Moreover, nearly 1/3rd of the sepoys came from Awadh.
- (iv) Over the years the upper caste sepoys had found their religious beliefs in conflict with their service conditions *e.g.*, crossing of the sea which amounted to loss of caste, replacement of the turban by a leather cockade.
- (v) In addition there was professional discontent *e.g.*, social discrimination, annexations deprived sepoys of batta for foreign service.

Q. 16. Why was Shah Mal able to mobilise cultivators and headmen of 'chaurasees' ? Give two reasons.

Ans. Shah Mal succeeded in mobilising and moving people to action of *chaurasees* because :

- (i) Despite the land being fertile and prosperous the cultivators were suffering under the oppressive land revenue system. The revenue demand was high and its collection inflexible.
- (ii) Cultivators much to their distress were losing land to outsiders — traders and moneylenders.

Q. 17. Who was Danka Shah ? Why was he so named ?

Ans. Maulvi Ahmadullah Shah who played an important role in the revolt of 1857 was popularly called Danka Shah. He was so named because he moved in a palanquin, with drum beaters in front and followers at the rear, while preaching jehad against the British and urging people to rebel.

Q. 18. What factors contributed to the authority of Maulvi Ahmadullah Shah in the revolt of 1857 ?

Ans. (i) Popularity among the muslims.

(ii) Muslims believed he had magical power and began seeing him as an inspired prophet.

(iii) Conviction that he was invincible and could not be killed by the British.

(iv) His courage and power *e.g.*, in the famous battle of Chinhat he defeated the British forces led by Henry Lawrence.

Q. 19. Rumours and prophecies played an important role in moving people to action in 1857. Support the statement by giving two such examples.

Ans. The rumours and prophecies which moved people to action were :

(i) The rumour that new cartridges were greased with the fat of cows and pigs and atta was mixed with the bone dust of cows and pigs to corrupt the caste and religions of Hindus and Muslims.

(ii) The prophecy that British rule would come to an end on the centenary of the Battle of Plassay on June 23rd, 1857.

✓ **Q. 27. Why are official accounts an important source material for historians to recount the events of 1857 ? Give reasons.**

Ans. Official accounts constitute an important source material for historians to recount the events of 1857 because :

- (i) Except for a few rebel proclamations and notifications and some letters of rebel leaders, we have few records on the rebels point of view, while official records abound.
- (ii) These accounts enable historians to gauge the official mindset and changing British attitudes.
- (iii) Tell us about the fears and anxieties of officials and their perception of the rebels.

Q. 28. What are the primary sources for reconstruction of the event of 1857 ?

- ✓ **Ans.**
- (i) Records on rebel point of view : rebel proclamations and notifications, and also some letters of rebel leaders.
 - (ii) Official accounts : memo's and notes of officials, versions of colonial administrators and military men in letters, diaries, autobiographies and official histories.
 - (iii) Stories of the revolt published in British newspapers, and magazines.
 - (iv) Pictorial images produced by the British and Indians paintings, pencil drawings, etchings, posters, cartoons, bazaar prints.

Q. 29. Sum up the reasons for sepoy grievances.

Or

What factors led the sepoys to spearhead the revolt against the British?

Or

Describe the grievances of the Indian sepoys against the British rule before the revolt of 1857.

(CBSE 2008)

Ans. The revolt of 1857 began with the mutiny of the Meerut sepoys on 10 May 1857. The factors contributing to the revolt of the sepoys can be grouped into religious and professional.

Professional : For decades the sepoys had complained of :

- (i) Low levels of pay.
- (ii) Difficulty in getting leave.
- (iii) Preceding the uprising in the 1840's there was a change in the attitude of British officers towards the Indian sepoys — they were treated as racial inferiors, subject to abuse, and physical violence. Trust was replaced by suspicion.
- (iv) There was racial discrimination in matters of promotion, pension and terms of service.
- (v) Annexations had deprived sepoys of *batta* (extra pay) for foreign service.
- (vi) There was fear of being edged out by new recruits from Punjab.
- (vii) In July 1856, great uneasiness was caused by Canning's new law (General Service Enlistment Act) under which all the recruits had to march were ever ordered.

Religious : The bulk of the sepoys were upper caste Hindus from North Western Provinces and Awadh. Over the years the upper caste sepoys had found their religious beliefs in conflict with their service conditions.

all a creation of the British.

Q. 4. Give measures of the British which hurt the sentiments of the conservative Indians.

Ans. The conservative religious and social sentiments of the people were hurt by the humanitarian measures undertaken by the British. Among them were :

- (i) Interference of Christian missionaries in their religion and customs, and attempts to convert Indians to an alien faith.
- (ii) The abolition of sati, the legislation to enable widow remarriage and opening of western education to girls, were regarded as undue interference in social matters.
- (iii) Religious sentiments were also hurt by the official policy of taxing lands belonging to temples, mosques, charitable institutions. These were exempted from taxation by previous Indian rulers.

All these measures were looked upon as an attempt to undermine Indian religious and social institutions.

Q. 5. Give two weaknesses/limitations and strengths of the revolt of 1857.

Ans. (i) Individually, Indian leaders were patriotic and made tremendous sacrifice but they lacked collective and coordinated military action plan.

(ii) Though the revolt of 1857 was widely popular involving the people of Bihar, Bengal, UP, and Central India, it did not embrace the whole country. South India and Eastern India did not join the revolt.

(iii) It did not involve all the groups—the merchants, moneylenders and the zamindars of Bengal and large majority of Indian rulers remained loyal to the British.

(iv) Neither the leaders nor the sepoys were inspired by any high ideals of patriotism and nationalism. They were suspicious and jealous of each other. They fought for their own selfish ends and were not willing to extent cooperation to each other.

(Any two)

Strength

(i) There was complete cooperation between Hindus and Muslims thus highlighting the fact that people and politics in medieval India were not basically communal.

(ii) The common people also revolted against the British, fighting with whatever weapons they possessed be it spears, axes, sickles and muskets.

(c) Long Answer Type Questions (8 Marks—250 Words)**Q. 1. Mention the causes for the Revolt of 1857.**

Ans. Although the revolt began as a military uprising, its causes were deeply rooted in the changing conditions, and drew its strength from several elements of discontent against British Rule.

A. Political Causes :

- (i) The policy of annexation during the administration of Lord Dalhousie was especially resented :
 - (a) The policy of lapse by which the states of Hindu princes *e.g.*, Rani of Jhansi, Nana Saheb was taken over in the absence of natural heirs.
 - (b) Chronic misgovernance as a valid plea for annexation *e.g.*, Awadh.
 - (c) British proposal to remove the titular head, the Mughal Emperor Bahadur Shah II from his ancestral palace in Delhi.
- (ii) The deliberate policy of exclusion of Indians from all high offices was another potent cause of discontent.
- (iii) Racial discrimination and arrogance.

B. Economic Causes :

- (i) Economic exploitation of the country in general.
- (ii) Drain of wealth and destruction of industry due to flooding of British machine made goods.
- (iii) Oppressive agrarian system and exorbitant land revenue — ruin of peasantry.
- (iv) Taluqdars/Zamindars.
- (v) Apathy towards famines etc.

C. Social and Religious Causes :

- (i) Western education.
- (ii) Christian missionaries — conversion of Indians.
- (iii) Social legislations.
- (iv) Interference in religious and cultural practices.

Q. 2. Why did the Revolt of 1857 fail ? Discuss.

Ans. Among the causes for the failure of the revolt of 1857 were :

- (i) The revolt lacked universal support. Various sections of the society remained alienated — zamindars, princes, merchants, intelligentsia were not participants in the revolt. Even in the case of the sepoys not all regiments revolted.
- (ii) The revolt lacked central and effective leadership. The strength and energy of the insurgents could not be channelised. The protest happened to turn disorganised and directionless and the vigour of the participants petered out.
- (iii) Unity forged during the revolt was not strong and enduring. People joined with different motives and interests, at times devoid of trust of one another.
- (iv) The revolt was retrogressive in character, leaders were devoid of a modern outlook. Elements of feudalism and medievalism were conspicuous — which the British used to their advantage.
- (v) The only thing common in all the rebel leaders was their hatred for the British. Once they captured power; they did not know what sort of political

institutions to create. Similarly peasants after settling scores with moneylenders—destroying records, and books became passive.

(vi) Emperor Bahadur Shah was the weakest link in the chain of leadership. His lack of leadership qualities created political weakness at the nerve centre of the revolt.

In the absence of an all India consciousness and interests, or modern nationalism, patriotism merely meant regionalism.

The British were powerful. They had a well equipped army, had military strategists and able generals like Outram. Their better planning, organisation, and effective use of modern communication network facilitated prompt action, and effective measures and control worked to their advantage.

However, it need be noted the rebels were far sighted in the sense that they knew foreign rule was incapable of modernising the country, and inimicable to Indian interests. But the rebels failed in the sense that they did not see national salvation lay not in going back to the old feudal monarchy but in going forward to a modern society with modern economy, scientific education and modern political institutions.