

Chapter 5: When People Rebel 1857 and After

Activity:1

Question: Imagine you are a sepoy in the Company army, advising your nephew not to take employment in the army. What reasons would you give?

Answer:

- A sepoy has a life full of trouble. He has to wander here and there frequently.
- His social mobility is almost lost. He cannot spend much time with his family.
- He does the duties of a sepoy at the cost of his family duties. He has no time to take care of his old parents.
- His life is always at risks. His sudden death shatters the lives of many in his family.

Activity:2

Question 1: What were the important concerns in the minds of the people according to Sitaram and according to Vishnubhatt?

Answer:

- According to Sitaram – People were mostly annoyed due to the seizing of Oudh. However, the news of the use of grease made using fat of cow and pig in the rifle was also an important concern in the minds of the people.
- According to Vishnubhatt – People feared that the British were determined to wipe out the religions of the Hindus and the Muslims so as to make them Christians.

Question 2: What role did they think the rulers were playing? What role did the sepoys seem to play?

Answer:

- The rulers were provoking the sepoys in the name of religion to stage a mutiny against the British. They were making lies and false promises to persuade the sepoy to revolt.
- The sepoy was spreading the news of interference in the religious matter among the fellows of other cantonments. They were making plans to revolt against the British to save their religion.

Activity:3

Question 1: Why did the Mughal emperor agree to support the rebels?

Answer: After capturing the Meerut cantonment, the sepoy marched to Delhi. The sepoy from Delhi Cantonment also revolted and killed the officials. These sepoys entered the red fort and proclaimed Bahadur Shah as their leader. So, Bahadur Shah, however, was not willing, had to agree to support the rebels.

Question 2: Write a paragraph on the assessment he may have made before accepting the offer of the sepoys.

Answer: Bahadur Shah knew that he was old enough to lead the rebels. He was not able to move here and there which was inevitable. He was aware of the might and strength of the British. At the same time, he knew the value of the name of his dynasty. He was aware of the initial victory of the rebels. He might have presumed that most of the sepoys would revolt and this way the British would become weakened itself. He also knew that the rulers who had lost their regions to the British would definitely come ahead to support them.

Activity:4

Question 2: Make a list of places where the uprising took place in May, June, and July 1857

Answer:

May-1857 – Meerut, Delhi

June – Kanpur

July – Lucknow.

Let's imagine

Question 2: Imagine you are a British officer in Awadh during the rebellion. What would you do to keep your plans of fighting the rebels a top-secret?

Answer:

1. I would do personal meetings with the higher British officials.
2. I would convey all the messages to the concerned British authorities through English men and not through the Indians. They might leak the message.
3. I would try to discuss my plans personally and sitting face to face and not through the papers that might fall into the hands of rebels.

Let's recall

Question 1: What was the demand of Rani Lakshmibai of Jhansi that was refused by the British?

Answer: Rani Lakshmibai of Jhansi wanted the Company to recognize her adopted son as the heir to the kingdom after the death of her husband.

Question 2: What did the British do to protect the interests of those who converted to Christianity?

Answer: In 1850, the British passed a new law to make conversion to Christianity easier. This law allowed an Indian who had converted to Christianity to inherit the property of his ancestors.

Question 3: What objections did the sepoys have to the new cartridges that they were asked to use?

Answer: The cartridges were greased with the fats of cow and pig. The use of these things was against the religious sentiments of Hindus and Muslims. So, the sepoys from these religions objected.

Question 4: How did the last Mughal emperor live the last years of his life?

Answer: Last Years of Life of the Mughal Emperor:

Bahadur Shah Zafar was the last emperor of the Mughal dynasty. He played an important role in the revolt of 1857 against the British. In September 1857 the British established their control over Delhi and Bahadur Shah was imprisoned. He was sent to Rangoon along with his wife Begum Zinat Mahal. In 1862, he died in Rangoon.

Let's discuss

Question 5: What could be the reasons for the confidence of the British rulers about their position in India before May 1857?

Answer:

- They supposed that the Indian soldiers are faithful to them. They are very loyal servants.
- They knew that many of the kings and zamindars are their supporters.
- Before 1857, they have won many wars and suppressed many revolts successfully. So, they were confident of their military strength.

Question 6: What impact did Bahadur Shah Zafar's support of the rebellion have on the people and the ruling families?

Answer: Bahadur Shah's support for the rebellion changed the scene:

- A large part of the country was ruled by chiefs under the Mughal rule and threatened by the British. They thought if Mughal could be powerful again, they too could rule again, under Mughal authority.

- Emperor's blessing to the rebels gave an alternative and filled people with courage and enthusiasm to fight.

Question 7: How did the British succeed in securing the submission of the rebel landowners of Awadh?

Answer:

- The British tried and hanged many nawabs and rajas. This spread the terror.
- The British announced that the loyal landholders would be allowed to continue to enjoy traditional rights over their lands.
- Those who have rebelled were told that if they submitted to the British, and if they had not killed any white people, they would remain safe and their rights and claims to land would not be denied.

Question 8: In what ways did the British change their policies as a result of the rebellion of 1857?

Answer: As a result of the rebellion of 1857, the British changed their policies. Following are the important changes that the British made:

1. The powers of the East India Company were transferred to the British Crown in order to ensure more responsible management of Indian affairs.
2. The Governor-General of India was given the title of Viceroy, that is, a personal representative of the Crown.
3. All ruling chiefs of the country were assured that their territory would never be annexed in the future. They were allowed to pass on their kingdoms to their heirs, including an adopted son. But they had to acknowledge the British queen as their Sovereign Paramount.
4. It was decided that the proportion of Indian soldiers in the army would be reduced and the number of European soldiers would be increased. It was also decided that instead of recruiting soldiers from Awadh, Bihar, Central India, and South India more soldiers would be recruited from among the Gorkhas, Sikhs, and Pathans.
5. The British decided to respect the customary religions and social practices of the people in India.

Let's do

Question 9: Find out stories and songs remembered by people in your area or your family about San Sattavan ki Ladaai. What memories do people cherish about the great uprising?

Answer:

(1) There are several stories about the brave works of some people during San Sattavan ki Ladaai.

"There was a Courtesan in Kanpur. He was linked to a Hindu Military Subedar who rebelled in 1857. When during the course of the revolt, the rebel Subedar fell to the bullets of the British, the Courtesan Azizun Nisa mobilised women to form a band of troops. She represented this band as its military Commander and participated in the war of independence with full vigour along with Begam Hazrat Mahal and Tantia Tope."

(2) Many of our elders say that they came to know from their grandfather about the Hindu-Muslim unity during the war of independence of 1857. There was a Hindu priest, who did not allow even Hindus from lower castes to enter the temple premises. But, during the fight of 1857 several Muslim rebel soldiers found their shelter in his temple. He personally took care of these soldiers. He told that service to the motherland was superior to everything. Even today people cherish this incident in our area.

Below is given the immortal flag song of 1857 :

We are its flowers, Hindustan is ours Our nation is sacred, dearer than heaven World is aglow with the light of its soul How old, how new, best of all world Our very own, Hindustan is ours Flow of Ganga and Yamuna, makes our land fertile Overhead snow-clad mountains—Our sentry towering Below, trumpets of Sea, beating against coasts From mines gold and diamond overflow Our pomp and splendor, best in the world Then came firangi from far land Cast a magical spell Looted our dear land with both hands Today, the martyrs call upon the whole nation— Break the shackles of slavery, pour out fire Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, all beloved brothers This is the flag of our Freedom Hail and salute it.

Question 10: Find out more about Rani Lakshmibai of Jhansi. In what ways would she have been an unusual woman for her time?

Answer: Rani Laxmibai was born sometime around 1828 in Varanasi. His father Moropant Tambey was a Marathi Brahmin. Her mother Bhagirathibai was a cultured religious woman. She was raised in the Court of Baji Rao II, the last of the Maratha Peshwas. At the age of 14, she was married to Raja Gangadhar Rao of Jhansi. Here she was given a new name, Laxmibai. She gave birth to a son but soon he died. In 1853 Gangadhar Rao fell ill.

He was persuaded to adopt a child as his heir. He adopted Damodar Rao, a little child. The next day he died. Rani claimed that Damodar Rao was their legal Heir. The British rule rejected Rani's claim and decided to annex Jhansi under the Doctrine of Lapse. Rani sought the advice of a British lawyer and fought her case in London. Her petition was ultimately rejected. The British confiscated the state jewels and deducted her husband's debt from her annual pension.

She was asked to leave Jhansi fort. Laxmibai was determined to defend Jhansi. She proclaimed her decision with the famous words "Mi Mahji Jhansi Nahi dehnar (I will not give up my Jhansi). She raised a volunteer army in which both men and women were recruited. She fought for two weeks but the Fort of Jhansi was lost to the British. Rani escaped in the guise of a man with a few of her supporters with her son tied behind her back and a sword in her hand. She regrouped her force and moved towards Gwalior. She fought for a week but finally became a victim of a bullet on the battlefield in 1858.

It was not easy for a woman to be the head of State at that time. Rani faced many difficulties but she ran the kingdom well. She mastered martial arts and inspired Jhansi's women to join the army and take a more active role in defending the country. All these made her an unusual woman for her times.