

Glimpses of the Past

1757-1849

In India of 1757, the East India Company was in a strong position. Compared to the Indian Princes, they had superior weapons. Besides Indian Princes were short-sighted in their approach to the events of the time. Indian princes were fighting each other. They often sought the help of the Company to defeat other princes. This worked in favour of the company. It could easily subdue these princes one after the other. However, the brave Tipu Sultan of Mysore fought the British. He died in the battle-field fighting the English.

The general reaction to the British rule was not the same everywhere in India. There were some who thanked British for ushering in an era of peace. Others bemoaned that the country was subjected to foreign rule.

1765-1836

The social fabric was in bad shape. Religious leaders preached absurd practices like untouchability and child-marriage. In truth Indians had lost their self-respect. The British scorned them. The farmers and the artisans were the worst hit. Heavy taxes ruined the farmers. The British cut the thumbs of expert artisans. The British used every method to make maximum profits. The imports from England became tax-free.

Raja Ram Mohan Roy (1772-1833)

Ram Mohan Roy understood what was wrong with the country. He tried to reform the society. He taught people that the main precepts of all religions were the same. He emphasised the practical use of knowledge. He went to England. There he reminded the British that rulers too had a duty towards their subjects. He started newspapers in India. The suspicious British stopped them in 1823.

Oppression (1765-1835)

In 1818, a resolution was passed. Under it an Indian could be jailed without trial in a court. The British officers drew large salaries. Besides, they made fortunes in business. By 1829, Britain was exporting goods worth seven crore rupees to India. Even the British Governor General of India, Bentinck reported to England. "The bones of cotton weavers are bleaching the plains of India." Thus the British prospered on the ruins of Indian industry.

Dissatisfaction (1835-56)

In 1835, Lord Macaulay suggested that the medium of education in India should be English. The proposal was carried. The aim was to produce an army of clerks to assist the British. It happened but it also produced a new generation of intellectuals. Some of them tried to educate the masses. Some decided to convey the grievances of the people to the British Parliament.

By 1856, the British were ruling the whole of India. Now they cared little about Indians' needs. The dissatisfaction in the public began to grow. People wanted to get rid of the British. The Sparks (1855-57)

Under the new rules Santhals had become desperate. In 1855 they rose in rebellion and killed the Europeans and their servants alike. The discontent was brewing in the East India Company's army too. Sepoy Mangal Pandey attacked the adjutant of his regiment. And he was executed. The English did not care about Indian customs. Chapaties were sent from village to village. With them was the message that their native emperor would want their services. Similarly a lotus flower was circulated among Indian soldiers. The masses also gave all help and support.

Revolt 1857

The revolt started at Meerut.

The sepoys who had revolted marched to Delhi. They were shouting slogans in favour of Bahadur Shah Jafar. The rebellion spread wider. Many landlords had lost their lands. They helped the revolt.

The Fight for Freedom 1857

Many rulers like Hazrat Mahal of Lucknow were bitter. The English had taken away their kingdom. Popular leaders like Maulvi Ahmadullah of Faizabad urged the common man to revolt. Azimulla Khan told Tatya Tope to make Nana Sahib the leader of that war of Independence. All over North India the people fought pitched battles against the British. Eighty-year-old Kunwar Singh of Bihar received a bullet in his wrist. He just cut it off. Throwing it into the Ganga, he said that it was his last offering.