

Lesson- 9

The Revolt of 1857



Learning outcomes :

Students will–

- ✦ get an idea about the revolt of 1857 A.D. - its reasons and expansion.
- ✦ know about the leaders of this revolt.
- ✦ know about the role of Assam in this revolt.
- ✦ be introduced to the peasants' revolt in Assam that followed the revolt of 1857.
- ✦ understand the nature of this revolt.



Pic-9.1 Combined revolt of the Sepoys and peasants of North India

You have already learnt how the British consolidated their position in India by seizing the powers of the Indian rulers and began to control Indian politics and economy. You have also read how the colonial policy of the British harmed all sections of Indians. In this chapter we will concentrate on how the Indians rose in protest against the British and their unsympathetic policies. Look at the adjacent picture. It shows how the soldiers and peasants of North India had revolted.

against the British.

If we analyze the nature of the revolt of 1857, we see that it was not a rebellion by a particular class but a mass uprising against the hundred years of British exploitation. This revolt reflected years of suppressed anger, deprivation, deception and misery of the people of India.

The Causes of the Revolt:

There were many causes like socio-economic, political, military, religious, etc behind the revolt of 1857 A.D. India of the pre- British era was an agricultural country. We did not have big industries but had many cottage industries which made the villagers self sufficient. Regarding land also there was no strict mode of revenue collection.

Let us know :

- ★ When people settle in groups in a foreign land to conduct trade and business or for some other reason, it is called a colony. The political or economic policy associated with colonialism is known as colonial policy.

When the British arrived in India, they enforced certain economic policies which were completely against the traditional Indian economy. From the mid 18th century, the East India Company tried to dominate the economic and political scene of India.

Their victory at the Battle of Plassey in 1757 A.D. and the industrial revolution of England made this process even



Pic-9.2 Images of 19th Century famines in India

faster. Consequently, by the second half of the 18th century, India was transformed into a British colony.

The English imported raw materials from India and sold the finished products in Indian markets. This economic policy of the British had brought great misery and destruction to the common man's life. As a result, there occurred many famines in India in the first half of the 19th century. We have learnt that India was an agricultural country but the Company government did not take any step for the development of this sector. Rather, they had increased the land revenue. The peasants were also exploited by the middlemen and moneylenders. In fact, it was common occurrence among the peasants to be burdened with loans from birth till death.

Activity :

- ★ What is meant by British colonial rule? Make a short note about its impact in India. (Take help from the teacher)

The administrative policies of the British had affected the aristocracy, the common middle class and people in the armed forces alike. They too faced financial crisis and were deprived of many earlier facilities provided to them. Besides, many qualified Indians were deprived of their jobs due to British racism. This discrimination created a deep seated hatred among many. Meanwhile from the beginning of the 19th century, the British had tried to modernize the Indian society in its own colonial interests. Therefore, they had tried to provide amenities like good roads, education, etc. They had also tried to eradicate the evil practices and superstitions from the Indian society. The conservative Indians had, however, protested against this. On the whole, the conflicts and differences between the Indians and the British were signaling worse things to come.

If we analyze the political side, we can see that the imperial policies adopted by the British had far reaching effects. The beginning and end of this expansion policy had been

initiated during the time of Lord Dalhousie. You have read about the Doctrine of Lapse. Dalhousie had annexed many kingdoms by using this policy. This created doubt, fear and mistrust among the Indians. Dalhousie had also seized the titles, thrones and even pensions of many Indian kings by applying this policy. The British had annexed Ayodhya by saying that it was not ruled well. This was a grave mistake on their part. Dalhousie also wanted to remove the Mughal Emperor but the company intervened at this point and stopped him. Still, he declared that after the death of the emperor, his family would be banished from the Red Fort. These activities had created hatred against the British.

Activity :

- ✦ Taking the help of the earlier chapters make a list of the kingdoms annexed by Dalhousie using the Doctrine of Lapse.

The problems within the army and the discrimination against the Indian soldiers also played a major role in the Revolt of 1857. The main force behind this revolt was actually the Indian soldiers. Majority of the soldiers under the Company were Indians but their traditional

Let us know :

- ✦ The word *sepoys* was used by the British to refer to the soldiers.

values were never given any importance. They were forced to give up their culture and tradition in the name of discipline. The Indian soldiers had wanted to protect their religious beliefs even in the army. In 1856 A.D. the British passed a law making sea travel compulsory for the soldiers. This created dissatisfaction among the soldiers as sea travel was prohibited by the Hindu religion. The salary of the Indian soldiers was not equal with the British soldiers. They were not given promotions

and the special allowances for service in a foreign country. These factors had combined to make the soldiers rebellious and the result was the Revolt of 1857.

The Indians were also becoming suspicious of the religious policies of the British. The rapid spread of christianity by the missionaries, the abolition of certain Indian religious customs, allowing the converted persons to keep their property, establishment of schools, hospitals and churches in the name of welfare activities, changing the medium of education to English etc, made many Indians think that the British were trying to turn India into Christian country.

The immediate cause of the Revolt of 1857, was however, the use of the bullet of the Enfield rifle. The packet of this bullet had to be bitten off before it could be put in the rifle. A fatty substance was mixed in the bullets. Somehow a rumour spread that this fat was a mixture of cow and pig fat. Since pig and cow's meat were prohibited for the Muslims and Hindus respectively, the Indian soldiers were unwilling to use these bullets. They were convinced that the British wanted to defile their religion.

On 23 January, 1857 the Indian sepoys first protested against the use of these bullets in Dumdum army barrack. On 29 March, the soldiers were ordered to use these bullets in the

Barrackpur army barrack. Mangal Pandey, an Indian soldier attacked a British army officer which made the situation tense. Mangal Pandey and his associate Ishwari Pandey were hanged and the British tried to manage the situation by dissolving the infantry unit.

But the situation did not improve. The news soon travelled to Meerut in Uttar Pradesh. On 10 May the soldiers of the Meerut barrack freed the prisoners from Meerut jail and killed some British officers and took away their arms.

The same day the rebels reached Delhi from Meerut and declared the Mughal Emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar II as the Emperor of India.

It is significant that the emperor was projected as the symbol of Indian unity and integrity.



Pic-9.3 Rebel sepoys at Meerut attack police officer, enter their homes and set fire to buildings

Write Answer :

- ✦ What are the activities of the British that had made the Indian soldiers unhappy?
- ✦ Write the names of three army barracks during the time of the revolt.

Within a short time, the revolt spread to many places of North India, Central India and South India. In south India the revolt spread to one or two cities only. It is true that the revolt turned violent in some areas as it was an unorganized uprising without proper leadership.

The revolt of 1857 was not an ordinary protest against the British. It was a milestone in Indian history. We have read that the main force behind this revolt were the Indian soldiers.



Pic-9.4 Bahadur Shah Zafar II

Later, they were supported by the rulers who had lost their power like the nawabs, zamindars, the aristocracy, peasants, priests, *maulavis* and *mullahs* etc.

The Revolt of 1857 was not successful but it was a significant event for many reasons. In 1858 A.D., the Company lost its power to rule and India went directly under the British Empress Queen Victoria.

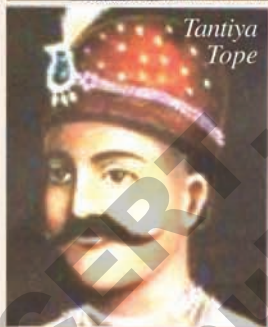
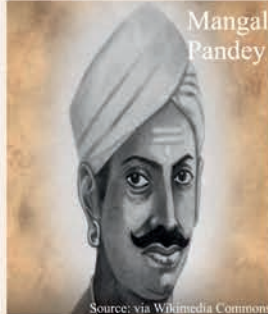
The Role of Assam in the Revolt of 1857:

We know that the people of Assam had invited the British to save them from the Burmese. The British came but did not go back. They freed Assam from the Burmese but brought her under the Company Government. From the beginning, the people of the hills and plains of Assam were

Let us know :

- ✦ Mangal Pandey was the first martyr of the Revolt of 1857.
- ✦ Who led the revolt and where

Where	Who led the revolt
1. Delhi	Bahadur Shah Zafar, Bakht Khan
2. Kanpur	Nana Saheb
3. Ayodhya	Begum Hajrat Mahal
4. Bihar	Kanwar singh, Amar singh
5. Sambalpur	Surendra Chhatri, Ujjal Shahi
6. Allahabad	Maulavi Liyaqat Ali
7. Faizabad in UP	Rana Beni madhav Singh
8. Gorakhpur	Gajadhar Singh nad Mohammad Hassan Khan
9. Bareilli, Rampur, Muradabad	Nawab Tafajjul Hussein Khan
10. Sindh Pradesh	Shazada Peer Mohammad, Imam Baksh, etc.
11. Gwalior	Tantiya Tope
12. Jhansi	Rani Lakshmi bai
13. Assam	Maniram Dewan



Pic-9.5 Maniram Dewan

unhappy at British colonialism. We must remember that compared to the other states, Assam became a victim of the economic policy of the British very early. Their divide and rule policy, economic exploitation, increased land revenue had turned the Assamese against them. As a result, there were several rebellions against them within two years of their colonization. In 1828 itself, Gomadhar Konwar, an Ahom prince had revolted demanding the Ahom throne.

Maniram Dutta Borbhandar Baruah Dewan, shortly Maniram Dewan was the central figure from Assam to take part in the Revolt of 1857, he was a shrewd politician and administrator. Initially, he supported the British but turned against them when he became a victim of their discrimination. He resigned from

the British job of a Dewan and opened two tea gardens at **Cinnamora** and **Seleng** near Jorhat. Maniram was the first Indian tea planter. The British did not like this and began to harass him. Wanting to free himself and also the Assamese people, Maniram Dewan tried to make Kandarpeswar Singha the Ahom king again. But his appeals to the British failed and he joined the revolt of 1857. He was secretly preparing an armed uprising and contacted his associates like Kandarpeswar Singha, Piyali Baruah, etc. from Calcutta. Many dissatisfied Assamese united against the British and the residence of the *Charingiya* king Kandarpeswar Singha became the meeting place of these rebels. However, the British found some documents relating to the revolt and they immediately arrested Maniram Dewan and others. Without giving them a

chance to defend themselves, Maniram Dewan and Piyali Baruah were hanged on 26 February 1858. Kandarpeswar Singha was released because of his young age but kept under house arrest in Guwahati with a pension. Some others were given life imprisonment, rigorous imprisonment and the property of many were seized and their pensions stopped.

Activity :

- ★ Who was the first Assamese to revolt against the British?
- ★ Why did the British harass Maniram Dewan?

Although the revolt against the British was not successful the anti-British feelings among the Assamese did not die down. The rebellions by the various tribes and peasant groups were a result of this revolt. After the revolt of 1857, India went under the direct control of the Queen of England but the conditions of the people did not improve. Rather, to make up for the losses incurred during the revolt, the British introduced many new policies which increased the burden of the Indian peasants. This led to a series of peasants' revolts from the 6 decade of the 19 century.

These revolts were given direction by the people's bodies or groups which formed under the care of the leaders of the society. People of all caste and creed joined these bodies and took stock of the social and economic issues. They were so powerful that sometimes they could even paralyze the functioning of the local government. The first peasant uprising of Assam took place in Phulguri in 1861 A.D. This is known as **Phulgurir Dhewa**. In January, 1894, similar protests were made in Rangiya, Nalbari and Barama against increased land revenue. In Lachima of Sorukhetri, Gobindapur of Bajali and the revolt of Patharughat under the Mangaldoi subdivision in January, 1894 had frightened the British. The **Battle of Patharughat** was the last phase of peasants' revolt in Assam.

The revolts discussed above were crushed by the British but they could not finish it. It is worth noting that although similar uprisings had taken place in south India, Bengal and Chhota Nagpur of Bihar at the same time, only the Assamese peasants had confronted with the British in a direct battle.

Activity :

- ★ Why did the peasants of Assam rise in revolt against the British?
- ★ Draw a map of India and plot the places where the peasants' uprising had taken place.

Nature of the Revolt :

There are differences of opinion noticed regarding the Revolt of 1857. Some say that it is a sepoy mutiny resulting from a single incident in an army barrack. It was neither planned nor did it have an ideological base. According to them, out of the three Presidency cities, only one

army barrack had revolted and all Indian soldiers were not involved. The English have also termed this uprising as an ordinary sepoy mutiny. Although the rebels were supported by a large number of exploited Indians, the whole country had not joined in this revolt nor was this the first revolt against the British.

Another view maintains that the Revolt of 1857 was a planned and widespread uprising. The distribution of red lotus and *chapattis* as a symbolic message of the revolt among the people proves this.

Again, some regards the Revolt of 1857 as the first Indian war of Independence. They believe that, although it was not a fullfledged freedom struggle for independence, yet through this rebellion, they could lay the foundation of the struggle for India's independence from the British. Besides, after this revolt there were major changes in British administration. The modern historians however disagree this view. They say that the nationalism of Indians noticed in the freedom struggle was missing in the Revolt of 1857. That is why most people of south India had stayed away from this revolt. Moreover, the Gorkhas, Sikh, Zamindars and the intellectuals had also not joined this revolt. However, it must be acknowledged that the Hindu, Muslim unity had also posed a challenge to the imperialist British. The Revolt of 1857 thus, stands as an example of the unity, courage and sacrifice of a people long suffering under suppression, exploitation and torture.

Let us remember:

- ✦ The revolt of 1857 was a mass uprising against the hundred years of British exploitation.
- ✦ The revolt was caused by economic, social, political, military, religious and other issues.
- ✦ The immediate cause of the revolt was the use of the bullets of enfield rifles.
- ✦ Mangal Pandey was the first martyr of the Revolt of 1857.
- ✦ The sepoy mutiny had spread to North, South and Central India within a very short time.
- ✦ After the revolt, India went under the direct rule of the British Crown.
- ✦ Maniram Dewan led the revolt against the British.
- ✦ The Peasants' Revolt of Assam that began in the 6 decade of the 19 century was led by people's groups.
- ✦ The historians do not hold a single view on the Revolt of 1857.

Exercise:

1. Write Answer-
 - (a) When did India became colony of East India Company completely?
 - (b) During which Governor General's rule official title, status and pension of Indians were seized?

- (c) Who was the first martyr of sepoy mutiny?
- (d) Name the leader who was hanged along with Maniram Dewan.
- (e) Who led the peasants' revolt in Assam?

2. Match the following–

Group 'A'	Group 'B'
(a) Act of 1856	attack of Army officers by Mangal Pandey
(b) 29 March 1857	rebellion of Gomdhar Konwar
(c) 1858 A.D	Phulagurir Dhewa
(d) 1828 A.D	compulsory sea travel
(e) 1861 AD.	administrative control of India by Queen Victoria

3. Write true or false–

- (a) There were many causes like social, economic, political, military, religious, etc. behind the revolt of 1857.
- (b) Immediate cause of sepoy mutiny of 1857 was hanging of Mangal Pandey.
- (c) In the mutiny of 1857, the Mughal Emperor Bahadur Shah II was declared the Emperor of India.
- (d) Maniram Dewan pleaded the British to hand over administration of the Ahom Kingdom to Purandar Singha.
- (e) The peasant rebellion at Rangia, Nalbari and Barama took place against the British policy to enhance rate of tax.

4. Write short note–

- (a) Maniram Dewan, (b) Phulgurir Dhewa, (c) Immediate cause of sepoy mutiny

- 5. The causes of sepoy mutiny can be divided into many out of which prepare a note on any one.
- 6. How far was the policy adopted by Lord Dalhousie responsible for outbreak of sepoy mutiny?
- 7. Why sepoy mutiny can not be termed as first war of Independence?
- 8. Prepared a album of the leaders of sepoy mutiny.
- 9. Draw a map of India and spot the places of sepoy mutiny on it.



Political Science Section

Our Political Life

PREFACE



Political activities of a nation are the most important among its other basic activities. Political Science states and explains about nation, government system, nation and government activities, nation's problems, relationship between individual and nation etc. As residents of a democratic country, the students should be aware about the political activities, movements, responsibilities, duties etc. from their young age. It is our duty to know, comment and take decisions, if needed, about the strengths or weaknesses of our country's political system and to realize how relevant it will be in the future. Hence, Political Science has been incorporated in the curriculum from the primary level to the post-graduation level, so that, the subject attracts the interest of the students from their young age.

Presently, in our state all the educational curriculums from primary stage to higher secondary stage have been developed in accordance with the guiding principles of NCF, 2005. This curriculum makes it easier for the students to learn about various sections of Geography, Science, History, Economics and Political Science. All the lessons on Political Science of this textbook for class VIII are based on chronological order of the subject concerned, So that both the teachers and students can enjoy during the entire process of teaching and learning. The lessons have been prepared carefully to achieve the predetermined Learning Outcomes without deviating from the description of the lessons.

Besides, while planning and developing the lessons, importance has been given to the continuous and holistic evaluation of the students, so that the students can achieve the Learning Outcomes easily and the teachers as well as the parents also do not have to face any difficulty while transacting the lessons both in the lesson rooms and at home respectively. We hope that the students will be aware of their political duties and responsibilities while acquiring knowledge about Political Science through this section, and will be able to establish themselves as a good and honest citizens of the society.

It is hoped that the students will be able to achieve the following Learning Outcomes through this section of the textbook-

- Learn about the constitution, its need, characteristics and importance
- Learn about the historical background of the Indian Constitution, role of Assam in the formation of the Constitution, the Preamble, Principles and the Characteristics of the Constitution
- Learn about the need and limitations of, fundamental rights and other rights
- Learn about the Fundamental Duties of an Indian citizen