



## I. THE INDIAN NATIONAL MOVEMENT (1857-1917)

### CHAPTER 1

#### The First War of Independence, 1857

##### Syllabus

###### The Indian National Movement (1857-1917)

###### The First War of Independence, 1857

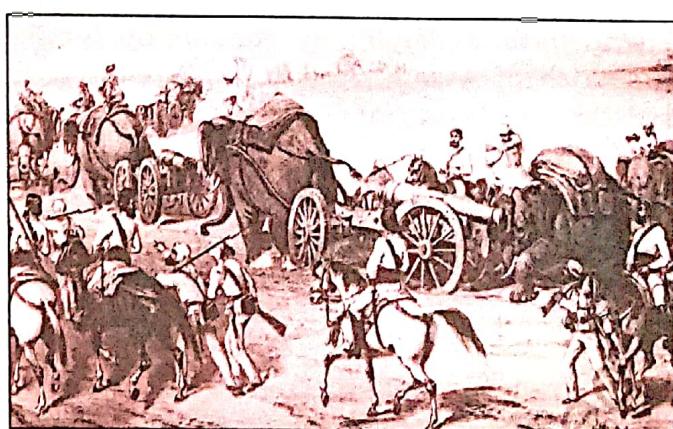
*Only the causes (political, socio-religious, economic and military) and consequences – (Only changes in the administration, Queen Victoria's Proclamation, Relation with Princely states and Changes in the Army) will be tested. [The events, however, need to be mentioned in order to maintain continuity and for a more comprehensive understanding.]*

The process of the British conquest of India which began from mid-18th century and the subsequent consolidation of British rule was resented by the Indians belonging to all the segments of Indian society — kings, queens, peasants, landlords, tribals and soldiers. Hardly a year passed before 1857 without some part of the country or the other rising in revolt against the policies and actions of the British that harmed their interests or went against their sentiments. However, these rebellions were local, scattered and isolated. They did not pose a serious threat to the British. Nonetheless, these revolts established a local tradition of struggle against the foreign rule.

This resentment to the British rule culminated in the *First War of Independence* in 1857, in which millions of peasants, artisans and soldiers participated. It shook the British government to its very foundation.

#### CAUSES OF THE FIRST WAR OF INDEPENDENCE

The first hundred years of the British rule in India i.e., from 1757 to 1857, were marked by British conquests and rapid expansion of their dominion in India. The combined effect of the British expansionist policies, economic exploitation and administrative changes adversely affected all segments of Indian society. The ruling classes were dispossessed of their power; the peasantry was deprived of its land rights; and the artisans lost their livelihood. The middle and upper-classes of Indian society, particularly in northern India, were annoyed because of their exclusion from the well-paid higher posts in the administration. Men who followed cultural or religious activities, like priests and scholars, found themselves without income as they lost their patrons — the Indian rulers, princes and zamindars, who had themselves lost their authority. The Company's Indian soldiers were discontent with their low salary, hard life and



■ An Artist's Impression of The First War of Independence

the ill-treatment meted out to them by the British officers. Thus, by 1857, conditions were ripe for a mass uprising and the accumulated grievances of the people burst forth in the form of the *First War of Independence*.

### Political Causes

The political reasons which antagonised the Indian rulers were the following:

**1. Policy of Expansion:** The British policy of territorial expansion and gradual annexation of the native Indian States was one of the major grievances of the Indian rulers. Ever since the *Battle of Plassey* (June 1757), the East India Company's territorial power increased rapidly. The British tried to expand their political power in India by four ways, i.e., by *outright wars*, by the system of *Subsidiary Alliance*, by adopting the *Doctrine of Lapse* and on the pretext of *alleged misrule*.

**(a) By Outright Wars:** To expand their territorial power in India and to safeguard their economic and political interests the British waged many wars against the Indian rulers of different states. *The Battle of Buxar* (1764) established the British as masters of Bengal, Bihar and Odisha. As a result of their success in *Anglo-Mysore Wars* (1767 to 1799), the East India Company annexed most of the territories of the Mysore State. After the *Third Anglo-Maratha War* (1817-18), the Peshwa's entire dominions and all Maratha territory north and south of the Narmada river were acquired by the British. The Punjab was annexed in 1849 after the Sikhs were defeated in the *Second Anglo-Sikh War*. From 1823 to 1856, the British further extended their empire by conquering Sindh, territories of Assam, Arakan and Tenasserim and Pegu in Myanmar.

**(b) By Subsidiary Alliance:** Some Indian States were brought under the British control without actually annexing them. This was done by following the *Subsidiary Alliance*, introduced by Lord Wellesley. *Subsidiary Alliance was an agreement between the British East India Company and the Indian Princely States by virtue of which these states lost their sovereignty (the power of a ruler to rule independently without*

*any outside interference) to the British.* Under this system, the Indian rulers, who agreed to the *Subsidiary Alliance* —

- (i) accepted the British as the supreme power;
- (ii) surrendered their foreign relations to the East India Company and agreed that they would not enter into any alliance with any other power and would not wage wars;
- (iii) accepted a British Resident at their headquarters and agreed not to employ any European in their service without consulting the Company;
- (iv) agreed to maintain British troops at their own cost; and
- (v) virtually lost their independence.

The kingdom of *Awadh* (Oudh) was the first to enter into an alliance like this through the Treaty of Allahabad in 1765 by which the Company undertook to defend the frontiers of Awadh on the condition that the Nawab of Awadh would pay for the expenses of such defence. However, Awadh was annexed on the pretext of misrule in 1856. The other rulers which accepted the *Subsidiary Alliance* were the Nizam of *Hyderabad*, the ruler of *Mysore*, the Raja of *Tanjore*, the *Sindhia* and the Rajput States of *Jodhpur*, *Jaipur*, *Macheri*, *Bundi* and the Ruler of *Bharatpur*.

**(c) By Using the Doctrine of Lapse:** Lord Dalhousie, the Governor-General of India, annexed many Indian States to the Company using the *Doctrine of Lapse*. According to this *Doctrine*, if an Indian ruler died without a male heir, his kingdom would 'lapse', that is, it would come under the Company's territory in India.



Rani Laxmi Bai

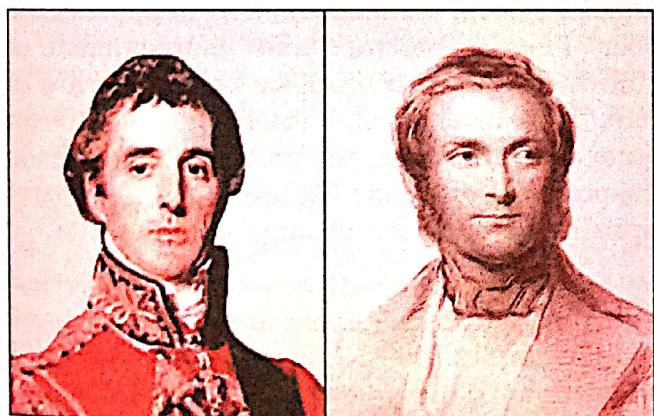
When the ruler of Jhansi died in 1853, leaving no natural heir, the widowed Rani was pensioned and their adopted son, Anand Rao, was not recognised as a lawful successor to the throne. The other prominent States which were annexed by applying this Doctrine were *Satara*, *Jaitpur*, *Sambalpur*, *Udaipur* and *Nagpur*. The principle of Lapse was also applied to take away the titles and pensions of the rulers of some States. Regal titles of the Nawabs of Carnatic and Tanjore were taken away. This caused discontent among the rulers as well as among the people in general.

The rulers of Indian States believed that their States were annexed not by the application of Doctrine of Lapse but by the '*lapse of all morals*' on the part of the British.

**(d) On the Pretext of Alleged Misrule:** In 1856, Lord Dalhousie annexed Awadh to the Company's dominions on the pretext of alleged misrule. He declared that Awadh was being misgoverned and British rule was needed to ensure proper administration.

Lord Dalhousie justified the annexation of Awadh on the pretext of "*the good of the governed*." On the contrary, the people of Awadh, had to face more hardships.

- They had to pay higher land revenue and additional taxes on food, houses and ferries.
- The dissolution of the Nawab of Awadh's army and administration threw thousands of nobles, officials and soldiers out of jobs.
- The British confiscated the estates of the taluqdars or zamindars. The dispossessed



■ Lord Wellesley

■ Lord Dalhousie



■ Bahadur Shah Zafar

■ Zeenat Mahal

taluqdars became the opponents of the British rule.

- The Company's sepoys, of whom 75,000 were from Awadh, were the worst affected. These soldiers had helped the British to conquer the rest of India. But they resented the fact that their homelands had come under foreign rule. The annexation of Awadh also affected the soldier's financial position. They had to pay higher taxes on the land their families held in Awadh.

Enraged by the humiliating way in which the Nawab of Awadh was deposed, the people of Awadh joined the uprising that broke in 1857. Awadh played a major role in the Uprising of 1857.

## 2. Disrespect Shown to Bahadur Shah:

Bahadur Shah Zafar, the Mughal ruler, was under the protection of the Company and received a pension from the British. The name of the Mughal King was removed from the coins minted by the Company.

In 1849, Lord Dalhousie announced that successors of Bahadur Shah Zafar would not be permitted to use the Red Fort as their palace. They were required to shift to a place near the Qutab Minar.

In 1856, Lord Canning announced that after the death of Bahadur Shah, his successors would not be allowed to use the imperial titles with their names and would be known as mere princes. This decision of the British hurt the feelings of the Mughals. Consequently, Zeenat Mahal, the wife of Bahadur Shah, began plotting against them.

**3. Treatment Given to Nana Saheb:** Nana Saheb was the adopted son of Baji Rao II, the last Peshwa. The British refused to grant Nana Saheb the pension they were paying to Baji Rao II. Nana Saheb was forced to live at Kanpur, far away from his family seat at Poona (Pune). This was widely resented in the Maratha region. Nana Saheb had inherited wealth from the former Peshwa, which he utilised in sending emissaries to different parts of the country for generating awareness among the Indians about the British policies. Nana Saheb also travelled between Delhi and Lucknow to gather support for the movement.

Other Indian rulers, who were not adversely affected, also became suspicious of their future.

**4. Absentee Sovereignty of the British:** *Absentee Sovereignty of the British means that India was being ruled by the British government from England, at a distance of thousands of miles.* This was resented by the Indians. The earlier rulers like the Mughals, who had conquered India, had in course of time settled in India. The revenues they collected from the Indians were spent in India only. But in the case of Britain, the Indians felt that they were being ruled from England and India's wealth was being drained to England and not utilised for their welfare.

### Socio-Religious Causes

The British government's attempt to interfere in the social and religious life of the Indians led to widespread fear among the masses.

**1. Interference with Social Customs:** Some of the social reforms introduced by the British in India were aimed at improving the conditions of the people. However, while introducing such reforms the feelings of the people were not taken into consideration. The result was that the reforms like the *Abolition of Sati* (1829), the introduction of the *Widow Remarriage Act* (1856) and the opening of Western education to girls were not welcomed by the masses.

**2. Apprehensions about Modern Innovations:** People were suspicious of introduction of modern innovations like railways and telegraph. There were rumours



■ Baji Rao II

■ Nana Saheb

that telegraph poles were erected to hang those who were against the British rule. Similarly, orthodox Indians noted that in the railway compartments the higher castes and the lower castes were made to sit side by side. They believed that the British had introduced such practices to defy their caste and religion.

**3. Policy of Racial Discrimination:** The British officers were rude and arrogant towards the Indians. They believed that they were superior to Indians and followed a policy of contempt towards them. They dubbed the Mughals as cruel and unfaithful. Some European officers ill-treated and insulted Indians. Such acts of unjust discrimination alienated the British from the Indian masses.

**4. Corruption in Administration:** The police and petty officials of the British East India Company were corrupt. The rich got away with crime but the common man was looted, oppressed and tortured.

**5. Oppression of the Poor:** The complex judicial system enabled the rich to oppress the poor. Flogging, torture and imprisonment of cultivators for their inability to pay arrears of rent, land revenue and interest on debt were quite common. Thus, the growing poverty made the poor desperate and led them to join a general uprising in the hope of improving their lot.

**6. Activities of Missionaries:** The British were different from Indians in race, religion and sentiments. In the 18th century, the British showed a friendly attitude towards Indian religions. They had no particular zeal for their

own religion and the Company even acted as trustees of some Hindu temples. However, in the 19th century, this attitude underwent a change. The British began to interfere with the local religious and social customs. They denounced idol worship and dubbed local beliefs as ignorance.

The Charter Act (1813) led to an increase both in the numbers and activities of the Christian missionaries. The Indians thought that the Government was supporting missionaries who would convert them to Christianity.

#### **7. Fears Regarding Western Education:**

The Western system of education was introduced in a number of schools. In 1829, the Bengal Government established an English class in the Calcutta Madrasa, which was a Muslim institution. Later, English classes were introduced in Benaras Sanskrit College. The shifting of emphasis from oriental learning to Western education was not received well by the people, especially the *Pandits* and the *Maulvis*. They saw in it an attempt to discourage traditional Islamic and Hindu studies. People started suspecting that the aim of Western education was not to promote literature and sciences but to encourage their children to become Christians.

**8. Taxing Religious Places:** Religious sentiments of the Indians were hurt by the official policy of taxing lands belonging to temples and mosques. Such lands had been exempted from taxation by previous Indian rulers. The families dependent on these lands, began to propagate that the British were trying to undermine the religions of India.

**9. Law of Property:** The Religious Disabilities Act of 1850 changed the Hindu Law of Property. It enabled a convert from Hinduism to other religions to inherit the property of his father. The Hindus regarded this as an incentive to give up one's religious faith.

#### **Economic Causes**

The most important reason for the popular discontent was the economic exploitation by the British. The economic exploitation took the following forms:

**1. Exploitation of Economic Resources:** The British exploited the Indian resources for

their own benefits. They made agricultural India an economic colony to serve the interests of industrial England. India was forced to export, at cheaper rates, raw materials like raw cotton and raw silk that the British industries needed urgently; plantation products (like indigo and tea); and food grains which were in short supply in Britain.

India was made to accept readymade British goods either duty-free or at nominal duty rates, while Indian products were subjected to high import duties in England. The Indian handmade goods were unable to compete with the cheaper, machine-made British products. This ruined the Indian industry, deprived the artisans of their income and reduced the avenues of employment for labour. On the other hand, export of raw materials and food grains deprived India of her agricultural surplus and raised the prices of raw materials. Thus, the change in the nature of India's trade became an instrument for exploiting India's resources.

**2. Drain of Wealth:** Till the Battle of Plassey (1757), the European traders used to bring gold into India to buy Indian cotton and silk. However, after the conquest of Bengal, the British stopped getting gold into India. They began to purchase raw material for their industries in England from the surplus revenues of Bengal and profits from duty-free inland-trade. Thus, began the process of plundering India's raw materials, resources and wealth by Britain. *The transfer of wealth from India to England for which India got no proportionate economic return, is called the Drain of Wealth.* The drain included the salaries, incomes and savings of Englishmen, the British expenditure in India on the purchase of military goods, office establishment, interest on debts, unnecessary expenditure on the army, etc.

**3. Decay of Cottage Industries and Handicrafts:** Heavy duties on Indian silk and cotton textiles in Britain destroyed Indian industries. On the other hand, British goods were imported into India at a nominal duty. By the middle of the 19th century, export of cotton and silk goods from India practically ceased. The art of spinning and weaving, which

for ages had given employment to thousands of artisans, became extinct.

The misery of the artisans was further compounded by the disappearance of their traditional patrons and buyers—the princes, chieftains and zamindars.

**4. Economic Decline of Peasantry:** The peasants were discontent with the official land revenue policy and the consequent loss of their land. In fact, it was the peasantry that bore the heavy burden of taxes to provide money for the trade of the Company, for the cost of administration and the wars of British expansion in India. For example, in Bengal, the land revenue was double the amount collected under the Mughals. Not even a part of this revenue was spent on the development of agriculture or on the welfare of the cultivator. Increase in the land revenue forced many peasants into indebtedness or into selling their lands. The traditional zamindars were replaced by merchants and moneylenders. These new landowners had no concern for the peasants. They pushed rents to exorbitant levels and evicted their tenants in case of non-payment. The economic decline of the peasants affected cultivation and led to many famines.

**5. Growing Unemployment:** The traditional rulers had given financial support to scholars,

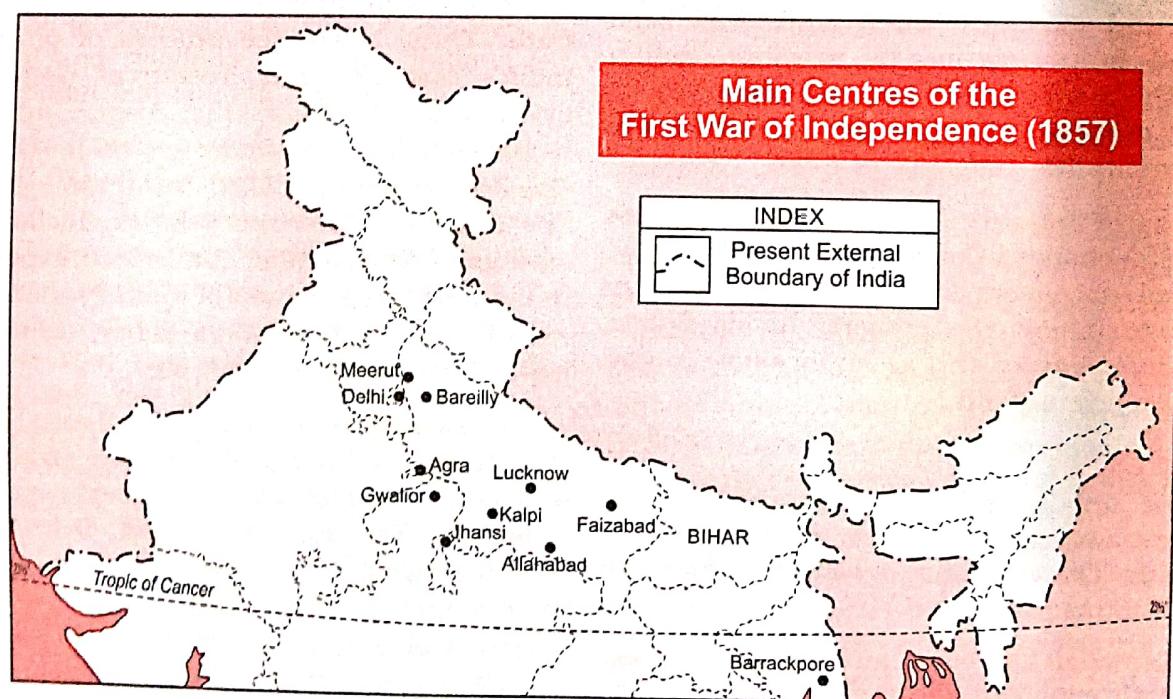
preachers and men of arts. The coming of the British led to the decline of such rulers and gradually their patronage came to an end. Thus, all those who depended on their patronage were impoverished.

When the native states were annexed to the British dominion, thousands of soldiers and officials in administrative, military and judicial posts became unemployed because British policies excluded Indians from high posts. All these people became bitter enemies of the British rule in India.

#### **6. Inhuman Treatment of Indigo Cultivators:**

Indigo trade was highly profitable to the British but the conditions under which the peasants had to work were inhuman. The peasants were forced to cultivate only indigo in the fields chosen by the British planters. If they planted anything else, their crops were destroyed, and their cattle were carried off as punishment.

**7. Poverty and Famines:** British economic exploitation, decay of indigenous industries, high taxation, the drain of wealth, stagnation of agriculture and exploitation of the poor peasants reduced the Indians to extreme poverty. Famines ravaged the country in the second half of the 19th century. There were four major and numerous minor famines between 1765 and 1857. The famines were the result



of drought, other natural calamities as well as bad administration. The British government did nothing to lessen people's misery.

**8. Decline of Landed Aristocracy:** The landed aristocracy which included the taluqdars and the hereditary landlords were deprived of their estates. According to the provisions of the *Inam Commission* (1852), 20,000 estates were confiscated when the landlords failed to produce evidence like title-deeds by which they held the land. These confiscated lands were sold by public auction to the highest bidders. Such estates were usually purchased by merchants and moneylenders who did not understand the needs of the tenants and exploited them. This drove the landed aristocracy to poverty without benefiting the peasantry which suffered under the weight of exorbitant land revenue.

### Military Causes

Several factors contributed to the change in the attitude of the Indian soldiers towards the Company. These included the following:

**1. Ill-treatment of Indian soldiers:** The East India Company established the British Empire in India with the help of Indian soldiers. Despite the fact that Indian soldiers were as efficient as their British counterparts, they were poorly paid, ill-fed and badly housed. British military authorities forbade the sepoys from wearing caste or sectarian marks, beards or turbans; and they showed disregard for the sentiments of the sepoys.

**2. General Service Enlistment Act:** According to traditional belief, it was a taboo

for a Brahmin to cross the seas. The British Parliament passed the *General Service Enlistment Act* in 1856. As per this Act, Indian soldiers could be sent overseas on duty. The Act did not take into account the sentiment of the Indian soldiers. The Brahmin soldiers saw in this a danger to their caste. This led to a feeling of resentment among them.

**3. Larger Proportion of Indians in the British Army:** The number of British troops in India was never very large with the British in the ratio as low as one in four thousand. Dalhousie had recommended that more British soldiers should be recruited in the army. This could not come through. Thus, it made it easier for the large number of Indian soldiers to take up arms against the British.

**4. Bleak Prospects of Promotions:** All higher positions in employment were reserved for the British, irrespective of their performance. Even the Indian soldiers formerly occupying high positions in the armies of native princes could not rise above the rank of a *Subedar*. The future of the Indian soldiers was bleak without chances of promotions.

**5. Deprivation of Allowances:** The extension of British dominion in India adversely affected the service conditions of the sepoys. They were required to serve in areas away from their homes without extra payment and additional *Bhatta* (foreign service allowance). The *Post Office Act* of 1854 withdrew the privilege of free postage enjoyed by sepoys.

**6. Faulty Distribution of Troops:** Places of strategic importance like Delhi and Allahabad had no British armies and were wholly held by the Indian soldiers. Besides, England was engaged in several wars outside India, e.g., the Persian (Iranian) War, the Crimean War and the Chinese War. Indian soldiers had the feeling that the British were in difficulty and the safety of their Indian empire depended on them. They were, therefore, determined to strike at them at a suitable time.

**7. Poor Performance of British Troops:** The British army suffered major reverses in the First Afghan War (1839-42), in the Punjab Wars (1845-49) and in the Crimean War (1853-56).



■ Artist's impression of Indian Sepoys in the British Army

In 1855-56, the Santhal tribesmen of Bihar and Bengal armed with axes and bows rose up against the British, temporarily sweeping away the British rule from their area. Though the British suppressed the Santhal Uprising, the disasters they suffered broke the myth that the British were invincible. It further revealed to the Indian soldiers that the British army could be defeated by the determined Indian army.

**8. Lower Salaries:** The wages of the Indian soldiers were inadequate to support their families. On the other hand, the British soldiers received more than eight times the salary of the Indian soldiers.

### IMMEDIATE CAUSE

#### Introduction of the Enfield Rifle

In 1856, the British authorities decided to replace the old fashioned musket, (called the 'Brown Bess') by the new 'Enfield rifle'. The loading process of the Enfield rifle involved bringing the cartridge to the mouth and biting off the top greased paper with the teeth.

In January 1857, there was a rumour in the Bengal regiments that the greased cartridge had the fat of cow or pig. The sepoys were now convinced that the introduction of greased cartridges was a deliberate move to defile Hindu and Muslim religions as the cow is sacred to Hindus and the pig is a taboo to Muslims. So, both Hindu and Muslim soldiers refused to use these cartridges and staged an uprising when they were forced to use them.

#### BEGINNING OF THE UPRISEING

On February 26, 1857, the 19th Native Infantry at Berhampur in Bengal, refused to accept the cartridges given to them. The regiment was disbanded as a warning to other regiments.



The sepoys feared loss of their caste and religion if they accepted the greased cartridges. As a result Mangal Pandey, a sepoy, led an attack on the Adjutant of the 34th Native Infantry at Barrackpore on March 29, 1857. Mangal



■ Begum Hazrat Mahal

■ Tantia Tope

Pandey was executed after a court-martial. For his fellow sepoys he became a martyr.

#### \*MAIN EVENTS

**Events at Meerut:** News of the events in Bengal spread like a wild fire. On May 9, eighty-five sepoys refused to touch the cartridges on the parade ground. They were sentenced to 10 years of rigorous imprisonment. On May 10 all the sepoys at Meerut rushed to the jail and set free their comrades and other convicts.

**Events at Delhi:** The soldiers from Meerut came to Delhi the next morning. They were joined by the local infantry. They seized the city and proclaimed the aged Mughal Emperor Bahadur Shah the emperor of India. He was coerced to write letters to all chiefs and rulers of India urging them to organise a confederacy of Indian States to fight against the British regime. In the process the British lost Delhi.

Sir John Nicholson surrounded Delhi and after four months of attack captured Delhi. The old emperor Bahadur Shah was found guilty of aiding the movement.

**Events at Lucknow:** Begum Hazrat Mahal, the wife of the Nawab of Awadh led the Uprising at Lucknow on May 30, 1857. The city was recaptured by the British in March 1858. Begum Hazrat Mahal fled towards the Nepal frontier.

**Events at Kanpur:** Nana Saheb led the struggle for independence at Kanpur. The British surrendered in June 1857. A large number of Englishmen, women and children were captured by an infuriated mob.

The British defeated Nana Saheb in December, 1857. Nana Saheb fled towards Nepal. His general, Tantia Tope, escaped to Kalpi.

**Events in Central India (Jhansi and Gwalior):** The battle began at Jhansi early in June, 1857. Sir Hugh Rose laid siege to the fortress of Jhansi in March 1858. Rani Laxmi Bai resisted but Jhansi was captured by the British when traitors opened the gates of the fortress for them. The Rani escaped from the fortress on the night of April 4, 1858 to join Tantia Tope at Kalpi.

The Rani died fighting the British on June 17, 1858 at Gwalior. Tantia Tope was betrayed by the Gwalior Chief, Man Singh and was hanged on April 18, 1859.

**Events at Other Centres:** At Bareilly, Khan Bahadur, a descendant of the former ruler of Rohilkhand, took command of the movement.

In Bihar, the struggle was led by Kunwar Singh, the zamindar of Jagdishpur. He had been deprived of his estates by the British.

At Faizabad, the leadership was taken by Maulvi Ahmadullah, who aroused the Muslim community against the British rule.

In several States in India, the rulers remained loyal to the British Government but their soldiers rose against the British. In most of these places, common people rose up in arms and fought with their axes and spears, bows and arrows.

### CONSEQUENCES OF THE FIRST WAR OF INDEPENDENCE

Even though the Uprising of 1857 was suppressed, it shook the British rule in India to its very foundation. It brought about far reaching effects on Indian socio-political life.

#### Changes in Administration

**End of the Company's Rule:** The most significant result of the Uprising of 1857 was the end of the rule of the East India Company and assumption of the Government of India directly by the Crown. This was done by *the Government of India Act of 1858* which had the following provisions:

- (i) It transferred the power to govern India from the East India Company to the British Crown.
- (ii) The Company's Board of Control and Court of Directors were abolished. A member of

#### Chronology of Events

**February 26, 1857:** Unrest among the soldiers at Berhampur, Bengal.

**March 29, 1857:** Resentment by Mangal Pandey at Barrackpore.

**May 9, 1857:** Resentment by 85 sepoys of the Third Cavalry at Meerut.

**May 10, 1857:** The Sepoys at Meerut broke out openly against the British and headed towards Delhi.

**May 11-30, 1857:** Outbreaks in Delhi, Ferozepur, Bombay, Bareilly, Aligarh, Etawah, Bulandshahr, Lucknow. The Mughal Emperor proclaimed as the Emperor of India.

**June 1857:** Uprising at Gwalior, Bharatpur, Jhansi, Allahabad, Faizabad.

**August 1857:** Uprising at Indore, Mhow, Saugar, Jhelum, Sialkot, etc.

**September 1857:** Recapture of Delhi by the English.

**June 1857:** Defeat of the British at Kanpur.

**December 1857:** Victory of the British at Kanpur, escape of Tantia Tope.

**March 1858:** Recapture of Lucknow by the British.

**April 1858:** Victory of the British at Jhansi. Uprising in Bihar by Kunwar Singh.

**June 17, 1858:** Death of Rani of Jhansi.

**July-December 1858:** Re-establishment of British Authority in India.

**April 1859:** Tantia Tope captured and hanged to death.

the British Cabinet was appointed Secretary of State for India and made responsible for all matters related to the governance of India. He was given a Council to advise him, called the *Indian Council*. Thus, the ultimate power over India remained with the British Parliament.

- (iii) Actual governance was to be carried on, as before, by the *Governor-General* who was also given the title of *Viceroy*, that is, a personal representative of the Crown. Lord Canning was appointed as the first Viceroy under this Act.

- (iv) Appointments to the Civil Service were to be made by open competition under rules made by the Secretary of State.

**Policy of Divide and Rule:** After 1858, the British continued their policy of 'divide and rule' by turning the princes against the people, province against province, caste against caste, group against group and above all, Hindus against Muslims. They alienated the people from their rulers by giving them special protection and concessions.

During the First War of Independence, both the Hindus and the Muslims showed great enthusiasm and zeal to fight against the alien government. But after the Uprising, the gulf between the two communities widened. This was the consequence of the British policy of 'Divide and Rule' by which they sowed the seeds of dissension between the two communities. It was a deliberate attempt so that the two communities might never come together to pose a threat to the British rule in India.

The Government cleverly used the attractions of government service to create a split along religious lines among the educated Indians. The British also encouraged hatred and ill-feeling among the Hindus and the Muslims so that they could never challenge the British Empire in India.

**Racial Antagonism:** The British believed in their racial superiority and they thought that a social distance was to be maintained to preserve their authority over the Indians. Railway compartments, parks, hotels, clubs, etc., reserved for 'Europeans only' were visible manifestations of this racism.

After the Uprising of 1857, racial bitterness increased. The British dubbed all Indians as unworthy of trust and subjected them to insults and humiliation. In fact, the entire structure of the Indian government was remodelled and based on the idea of a superior race.

**Foreign Policy:** India's foreign policy was dictated by the interests of the British Government. It fulfilled the two aims of the British – (a) protection of its Indian Empire; and (b) expansion of British economic and commercial interests in Asia and Africa.

The cost of implementation of these policies

was borne by the Indians. For instance, India under the British had to wage wars with her neighbours like Nepal and Burma (Myanmar) in which Indian soldiers had to shed their blood and the Indian taxpayers had to meet the heavy cost of the war.

**Religious Changes:** The British rulers declared emphatically their policy of non-interference in the religious affairs, customs and traditions of the Indians.

**Economic Exploitation:** The Uprising of 1857 ended the era of territorial expansion and ushered in the era of economic exploitation in the following manner:

- (i) India was turned into a typical colonial economy, exporting raw materials and importing finished goods.
- (ii) The salary and allowances of the Secretary of State and members of the India Council, the civil servants and military officers were a large drain on the country's resources.
- (iii) Peasants were impoverished under the British rule. The indigo peasants of Bihar revolted on a large scale in 1866-68.
- (iv) Rural artisan industries such as handicrafts, spinning and weaving collapsed.
- (v) The Indians had to pay heavy interests and dividends on the British capital invested in India. The British invested their surplus capital in India in railways, plantations, coal mines, jute mills, shipping, etc.

### Queen Victoria's Proclamation

The Queen's Proclamation incorporating the transfer of governance from East India Company to the British Crown was made public at Allahabad, on November 1, 1858, by Lord Canning, the first Viceroy of India. The proclamation promised that the Government of India would—

- (i) follow a policy of non-intervention in social and religious matters of Indians;
- (ii) treat all subjects—Indians and Europeans—as equals (education and ability would be the basis of all appointments);
- (iii) grant a general pardon to all those who had taken part in the War except those who were found guilty of murder of British subjects;



■ Queen Victoria

- (iv) do its best to advance the industries in India; and
- (v) promote works of public utility in India so as to ensure the material as well as the moral progress of the people.

### Relations with Princely States

With the death of Bahadur Shah II, who was deported to Yangon, the Mughal dynasty came to an end. Nana Saheb, the last Peshwa, had taken an active part in the Uprising and had fled to Nepal after the failure of the Uprising. So the office of the Peshwa also came to an end. Thus, ended two of the most formidable foes of the British—the Marathas and the Mughals.

The Policy of Annexation and the Doctrine of Lapse were abandoned. Some of the Indian princes had remained loyal to the British and had helped them in suppressing the Uprising. Their loyalty was rewarded with the announcement that their right to adopt heirs would be respected and the integrity of their territories guaranteed against future annexation.

In 1876, Queen Victoria assumed the title of the "Empress of India." The Indian princes willingly became junior partners or agents of the British Crown because they were promised that they would continue as rulers of their States.

### Changes in the Army

The Indian army was reorganised after 1858, to prevent the reoccurrence of another uprising, in the following manner:

- (i) The strength of European troops in India was increased. The ratio of European to Indian troops was fixed at 1:2 (Bengal army) and 2:5 (Madras and Bombay armies). Practically the same ratio was maintained

till the First World War. The general principle adopted was that the number of Indian sepoys should not exceed twice that of the European troops.

- (ii) European troops were kept in key geographical and military positions.
- (iii) To desist the Indian soldiers from rising again against the British rule, the sophisticated weapons and ammunition were never placed under the charge of Indians. All Indian artillery units, with the exceptions of a few mountain units, were disbanded.
- (iv) Discrimination on the basis of caste, region and religion was practised in the recruitment to the army.
- (v) In order to discourage nationalism, measures such as introduction of caste and community in most regiments were taken.
- (vi) Newspapers, journals and nationalist publications were prevented from reaching the soldiers to keep the Indian army separated from the life of the rest of the population.

### THE DELHI DURBAR OF 1877

The 14-day grand extravaganza held at Delhi was attended by about 68,000 people including 63 Indian maharajas, nawabs, and other dignitaries gathered to pay homage to the British Crown. Each ruler received a gold commemorative banner and medal as a personal gift in commemoration of Queen Victoria's proclamation as Empress of India.

Queen Victoria did not attend the Delhi Durbar of 1877, her proclamation address as India's new sovereign was read aloud in English and Urdu to her British and Indian subjects. Lord Lytton, the Viceroy of India, explained the gracious intentions of Her Majesty in assuming the new title of *Qaisar-i-Hind* (Empress of India).

In the proclamation address, Queen Victoria promised that under her rule the principles of liberty, equity and justice would prevail. She wished and prayed for the well-being of her subjects and their health and happiness, which, she stated, was the most important thing in her heart. Above all she guaranteed them religious freedom, education, and civil and government jobs. They would be placed on equal terms with all other subjects of the British Crown.

## DRAWBACKS OF THE FIRST WAR OF INDEPENDENCE

The following were the drawbacks of the First War of Independence:

- (i) The movement did not have common plans of military action or a centralised leadership. The uprisings in different parts of the country were completely uncoordinated.
- (ii) The movement had no common goal before it except for the anti-foreign sentiments.
- (iii) The East India Company had the services of men of exceptional abilities like Lawrence, Nicholson, Havelock, Outram, Campbell, etc. They fought the toughest battles in the initial stages of the Uprising and controlled the situation till reinforcements were received from abroad.
- (iv) The British Empire had far superior resources in terms of men, money and materials to the Indians.
- (v) The movement did not have nationwide dimensions. It could not spread much to South India and most of Eastern or Western India. Sind and Rajasthan remained quiet. Nepal helped in the suppression of the movement. Bombay and Madras armies remained loyal to the British.
- (vi) Some of the rulers of the Indian States and the big zamindars refused to join the movement.
- (vii) Some sections of the Indian society were hostile to the Uprising. For example, the moneylenders and the big merchants of Mumbai, Kolkata and Chennai, whose main profits came from economic connections with the British merchants.

Besides, some zamindars of Bengal were loyal to the British.

Some sections of the educated Indians did not support the cause as they had the wrong notion that the British rule would help them accomplish the task of modernisation while those opposing the British government would take the country backward.

- (viii) The Uprising was supposed to begin on May 31, 1857. But due to the greased cartridges incident, it began much before the fixed date. So the whole plan remained disorganised.

## Nature of the War

Historians and scholars have different views about the nature of the outbreak of 1857. Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, in his book *The Indian War of Independence* described it as "a planned war of national independence". Noted historian S.N. Sen also believes that the Uprising of 1857 was a war of independence. According to him, the Uprising began as a fight for religion and ended as a War of Independence as the revolutionaries wanted to get rid of the alien government and restore the old order of which the King of Delhi was the rightful representative. Whatever be the nature of the Uprising of 1857, it is generally hailed as the First War of Independence, because:

- (i) It was the first mass Uprising in which a large number of sections of Indian society participated against a common enemy, i.e., the British.
- (ii) It paved the way for the rise of modern national movement. The sacrifices made by Rani Laxmi Bai, Nana Saheb and Mangal Pandey served as a source of inspiration to the leaders and people to fight for the independence of India from the British rule.

## CHAPTER AT A GLANCE

### Causes of the First War of Independence

**Political:** (i) British Policies of Expansion; (ii) Doctrine of Lapse; (iii) Disrespect shown to Bahadur Shah; (iv) Annexation of Awadh; (v) Treatment meted out to Nana Saheb and Rani Laxmi Bai; and (vi) Absentee Sovereignty of the British.

**Socio-Religious:** (i) Interference with social customs; (ii) Apprehensions about Modern Innovations; (iii) Policy of Racial discrimination; (iv) Corruption in Administration; (v) Oppression of the Poor; (vi) Activities of the missionaries; (vii) Fears regarding Western education; (viii) Taxing religious places; and (ix) Law of Property.

**Economic:** (i) Exploitation of Economic Resources; (ii) Drain of Wealth from India; (iii) Decay of cottage industries and handicrafts; (iv) Economic decline of the peasantry; (v) Growing unemployment;

(vi) Annexation of Rent-free land and other estates; (vii) Inhuman treatment of indigo cultivators; and  
(viii) Poverty and famines.

**Military** (i) Ill-treatment of Indian soldiers; (ii) General Service Enlistment Act; (iii) Large proportion of Indians in the British Army; (iv) Bleak prospects of promotions to higher ranks (v) Deprivation of allowances to the Indian soldiers; (vi) Faulty distribution of troops; (vii) Poor performance of British troops; and (viii) Lower salaries of the Indian soldiers.

**Immediate Cause:** The cartridges used in the newly introduced Enfield rifle were said to be greased with the fat of cows or pigs. The greased paper of the cartridges had to be bitten off with the teeth before loading them in the rifle. This angered both the Hindu and Muslim sepoys.

**The consequences of the First War of Independence:** (i) Changes in Administration; (ii) Queen Victoria's Proclamation; (iii) Change in relations with Princely States; (iv) Changes in the Army;

**Drawbacks of the First War of Independence:** (i) Lack of planning, organisation and leadership; (ii) Lack of common cause; (iii) Lack of participation of all sections of society; (iv) Lack of Resources; (v) Lack of nationwide dimensions; and (vi) Beginning of the movement before the fixed date.

## EXERCISES

### I. Multiple-Choice Questions

#### A. Select the correct option.

1. The East India Company's territorial power began to increase rapidly in India after which of the following Battles?  
(a) The Battle of Buxar                          (b) The Battle of Plassey  
(c) The First Anglo-Mysore War                (d) The Third Anglo-Maratha War.
2. Who introduced the Subsidiary Alliance in India?  
(a) Lord Hastings    (b) Lord Amherst      (c) Lord Wellesley    (d) Lord Cornwallis
3. Subsidiary Alliance : Awadh :: Doctrine of Lapse : \_\_\_\_\_  
(a) Hyderabad      (b) Mysore                    (c) Tanjore                (d) Jhansi
4. Which was the first kingdom to sign the Subsidiary Alliance?  
(a) Mysore            (b) Awadh                    (c) Maratha                (d) Jhansi
5. Seventy-five thousand of the Company's sepoys belonged to which of the following state?  
(a) Jaipur            (b) Awadh                    (c) Mysore                (d) Sambalpur
6. Where was the family seat of Nana Saheb located?  
(a) Nagpur           (b) Lucknow                  (c) Poona                 (d) Kanpur
7. Which of the following reforms was resented by the Indians?  
(a) The Abolition of Sati                          (b) The Widow Remarriage Act  
(c) Opening of Girls' school                        (d) Both (a) and (b)
8. The Uprising of 1857 began from \_\_\_\_\_.  
(a) Meerut            (b) Plassey                    (c) Buxar                    (d) Delhi
9. After the initial success of the Uprising of 1857, the objective of the leaders of the Uprising included  
(a) restoring the former glory to the Mughal empire;  
(b) forming a Federation of Indian States;

- (c) eliminating foreign rule and return of the old order;  
(d) All of the above.

10. An effect of the Uprising of 1857 was that—

- (a) the spirit of rebellion in India was crushed  
(b) the British became totally demoralised  
(c) the British abandoned their repressive policies  
(d) unity was forged between the Hindus and Muslims.

11. Under the Government of India Act 1858, who gave up the direct administration of India?

- (a) The East India Company                                 (b) The British Crown  
(c) Lord Mountbatten   (d) The Mughal Emperor

12. Arrange the following events in chronological order

- (A) Battle of Plassey   (B) Queen Victoria's Proclamation  
(C) Lord Dalhousie annexed Awadh                          (D) Introduction of Enfield Rifle  
(a) (A), (B), (C), (D)   (b) (C), (A), (B), (D)  
(c) (A), (C), (D), (B)   (d) (A), (D), (C), (B)

13. Which was not a *drain of wealth* from India?

- (a) Salaries of Englishmen  
(b) Salaries of Sepoys  
(c) Establishment of British Officers  
(d) Savings of Englishmen

14. Choose the options that were not a part of the Queen Victoria's Proclamation

P: All subjects of the Queen would be treated as equals.

Q: A general pardon to all those who were a part of the 1857 uprising.

R: Policy of non-intervention in social and religious matters.

S: Continue political expansion with the Doctrine of Lapse and Subsidiary Alliance.

- (a) P and Q   (b) Q and R  
(c) R and S   (d) Q and S

**B. Select the option that shows the correct relationship between Statements (I) and (II).**

1. (I) Although these revolts were local, scattered and isolated, they established a local tradition of struggle against the foreign rule.

(II) From mid-18th century till 1857, one part of the country or the other rose in revolt against the British policies which harmed the interests of the Indians belonging to all the segments of Indian society.

- (a) (II) contradicts (I)   (b) (II) is the reason for (I)  
(c) (I) is true but (II) is false                                 (d) (I) and (II) are independent of each other.

2. (I) The British policy of territorial expansion and gradual annexation of the native Indian States was one of the major grievances of the Indian rulers.

(II) Some States were brought under British control without actually being annexed.

- (a) (II) contradicts (I)   (b) (II) is the reason for (I)  
(c) (I) is true but (II) is false                                 (d) (I) and (II) are independent of each other.

3. (I) Lord Dalhousie justified the annexation of Awadh as "for the good of the governed."  
(II) The people of Awadh had to pay higher land revenue and additional taxes on food, houses and ferries.  
(a) (II) contradicts (I)                          (b) (II) is the reason for (I)  
(c) (I) is true but (II) is false                (d) (I) and (II) are independent of each other.
4. (I) The British introduced modern innovations like railways and telegraph in India in the mid-19th century.  
(II) The British introduced these innovations to modernise India.  
(a) (II) contradicts (I)                          (b) (II) is the reason for (I)  
(c) (I) is true but (II) is false                (d) (I) and (II) are independent of each other.
5. (I) The Indian soldiers, who helped East India Company to establish the British Empire in India, were poorly paid, ill-fed and badly housed.  
(II) A large proportion of British Army consisted of Indian soldiers.  
(a) (II) contradicts (I)                          (b) (II) is the reason for (I)  
(c) (I) is true but (II) is false                (d) (I) and (II) are independent of each other.
6. (I) The Uprising of 1857 paved the way for the rise of the national movement.  
(II) Although the Uprising failed to achieve its objectives, it inspired the Indians to resist the British rule.  
(a) (II) contradicts (I)                          (b) (II) is the reason for (I)  
(c) (I) is true but (II) is false                (d) (I) and (II) are independent of each other.

## II. Short Answer Questions

1. Read the excerpt given below and answer the questions that follow:

*Originally formed in 1600 to trade with India, The East India Company purchased land from Indian rulers to build its factories (settlements) and recruited local armies to protect them. These evolved into the Bengal, Bombay, Madras armies. With the collapse of the Mughal Empire and victory over French forces while simultaneously getting involved in local politics, the East India Company emerged as a major political power in India.*

- (i) After which battle did the Company begin rapid territorial expansion in India?  
(ii) What was the result of the Great Uprising of 1857 on the Company's rule?
2. What was the nature of revolts against the British before the First War of Independence?
3. Why was the "War of 1857" hailed as the First War of Independence?
4. Mention two political causes of the First War of Independence.
5. Name two ways in which the British expanded their territorial power in India.
6. What was the Subsidiary Alliance? Name two Indian States brought under the British control using the Subsidiary Alliance.
7. Explain the term: *Doctrine of Lapse*. Name the two States annexed by the British using the Doctrine of Lapse.
8. Which policy was used by Lord Dalhousie to annex Jhansi? Why did Rani Laxmi Bai become a bitter enemy of the British?
9. State two announcements which adversely affected the Mughal dynasty in India.

10. Mention any two consequences of the annexation of Awadh.
11. State any two consequences of the disbanding of the armies of the annexed States by the British.
12. Give the meaning of *Absentee Sovereignty*. Why was it resented by the Indians?
13. What were the apprehensions of Indians about the introduction of the railways?
14. Mention any two social reforms advocated by the British which affected the religious traditions of the Indian people.
15. Mention any two measures which point to the policy of social discrimination followed by the British in India.
16. Give any two grievances of the peasantry against the British.
17. What did the British do to reduce the landed aristocracy to poverty?
18. What was the provision of the General Service Enlistment Act which was resented by the Indian soldiers? Why was it resented?
19. Mention any two grievances harboured by the Indian soldiers which created an atmosphere favourable to the First War of Independence.
20. State two effects of the defeat of the British in the first Afghan War and the Punjab Wars on the Indian soldiers.
21. What was the immediate cause of the First War of Independence?
22. Who was Mangal Pandey? What did he do?
23. State two consequences of the First War of Indian Independence on the East India Company.
24. How did the Queen's Proclamation affect India's foreign policy?
25. Mention any two drawbacks of the First War of Independence.

### III. Structured Questions

1. Read the excerpt given below and answer the questions that follow:

*"The sepoys are now enjoined to display communal harmony and exhorted to pray to their respective gods.... They are now called sipah-i-Hindostan (the Army of India) and there are appeals now to fellow countrymen "ahl-i watan", dear compatriots "aziz ham-watan" with specific exhortations for a united rallying of Hindus and Muslims."*

*— The Dehli Urdu Akhbar (the first Urdu weekly newspaper), June 1857*

- (a) What was the policy that the British followed to dispel 'the communal harmony'? Briefly explain how the British unwittingly led to the 'united rallying of Hindus and Muslims' by introducing the Enfield Rifle.
- (b) How was the British army reorganised to avoid another uprising of this kind?
- (c) How did the end of the East India Company's rule bring in grave economic perils in India?
2. Economic exploitation of the country produced discontent, resentment and resistance among the people that culminated in the Great Uprising of 1857.
  - (a) The ruin of trade and handicrafts
  - (b) Impoverishment of the cultivators
  - (c) Subordination of Indian economy to British interests (making India an agricultural colony of British capitalism)

3. Study the picture and answer the following questions:

- (a) Who are the persons in the picture? How were they treated by their British counterparts?
- (b) State any three grievances they had against the British.
- (c) What changes were brought in their status after the Uprising of 1857?



4. Read the excerpt given below and answer the questions that follow:

*These rebels of Delhi must be made an example to all their countrymen for ages to come of the consequences of such crimes, at the same time that every possible precaution is taken to do away with all temptation or provocation to future offences of a similar character.*  
— The Guardian, Manchester, June 30, 1857

- (a) Who are referred to as 'rebels of Delhi' in the excerpt above? When did they rebel and where?
- (b) What was the temptation or provocation being talked about in the excerpt?
- (c) What were the consequences of their alleged 'crimes'?

5. Study the picture and answer the following questions:

- (a) Identify the person in the picture. Name the proclamation made by her in 1858.
- (b) Where and by whom was this proclamation made public?
- (c) What assurance did this proclamation give to the Princely States in India?



#### IV. Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS)

1. Imagine you were present when the rulers of Indian States met at a common place before the Uprising of 1857. Each ruler voiced his grievance against the British. Make a list of the grievances of each of the rulers.
2. As a Subedar in the army hailing from a landed family from Awadh, state the grievances your father had against the British.
3. There were uprisings against the British in every corner of the country in the nineteenth century. Make a list of the uprisings in different States and manner in which the imperialists dealt with them.
4. Suppose the Uprising of 1857 had not taken place when it did. What would have happened then? Do you think India would still have gained Independence later. Why or why not?
5. India gained independence from the British rule 90 years after the First War of Independence. Why, do you think, it took so long for us to become an independent nation?

