

# 10. Rebels and The Raj

## 1. Why did the mutinous sepoys in many places turn to erstwhile rulers to provide leadership to the revolt?

**Ans:** Following are the major reasons to explain why the rebellious soldiers turned to native rulers for leadership:

1. East India company defeated native rulers to grab power in India. Many believed that the native Indian rulers had the legal and legitimate authority to regain power in the respective kingdoms. Therefore, it was natural that they became the leaders of the rebels and regain the lost status of rulers.
2. The erstwhile rulers had substantial resources at their command. They had wealth and private armies too. The rebels waited to get the support of resources from them, and by declaring them the leaders it was natural outcome.
3. Most of the erstwhile Indian rulers were popular at the local level. Their subjects often sympathized with them as they believed that the latter were unlawfully thrown out of power and even suffered humiliation. Choosing these native rulers was echoing the sentiments of the people and winning more support for the cause.

## 2. Discuss the evidence that indicates planning and coordination on the part of the rebels.

**Ans:** The evidence that indicates planning and coordination on the part of the rebels is as given below:

### 1. Lines of communication:

- There was communication between the sepoy lines of various cantonments. For example, after the 7th Awadh Irregular Cavalry had refused to use new cartridges, they wrote to the 48th Native Infantry that “they had acted for the faith and awaited the 48th’s orders.”

- Sepoys or their emissaries moved from one station to another.
2. Mutinies were organized is evident from the incident relating to protection given to captain Hearsey by his Indian subordinates during the mutiny. In this case, it was decided that the matter would be decided by a panchayat composed of native officers drawn from each regiment. It proves that the mutinies were well organized. Charles Ball has also noted that panchayats were a nightly occurrence in the Kanpur sepoy lines.

### **3. Discuss the extent to which religious beliefs shaped the events of 1857.**

**Ans:** People during the company rule felt that their religious sentiments are systemically hurt by the government. For them it was an attack on their religious freedom, and an insult. The religious causes for the Revolt are as follows:

1. Immediate cause: The soldiers were given cartridge greased with cow and pig fat. This angered Moslems and Hindus alike.
2. Reforms by Company: The Company introduced many religious and social reformers. Many Indians began to believe that it was an attempt on the part the government to deviate them from their own religion. Important of such reforms were prevention of sati system, widow remarriage, etc.
3. Activities of Christian Missionaries: During company rule involved in spread of education. But local people looked upon them with suspicion. Thus, the people plunged in rebellion against the foreign rule.

### **4. What were the measures taken to ensure unity among the rebels?**

**Ans:** The following measures were taken to ensure unity among the rebels:

1. The rebel proclamations in 1857 repeatedly appealed to all sections of the population, irrespective of their caste and creed. For example, the Azamgarh Proclamation of 25 August 1857 appealed to all “Hindoos and Mohammedans” to stake their lives and property for the well-being of the public and take their share in the holy war against the British.

2. Proclamations made by the Muslim princes or in their names took care to address the sentiments of Hindus.
3. The rebellion was seen as a war in which both Hindus and Muslims had equally to lose or gain.
4. The ishtahars harked back to the pre-British Hindu-Muslim past and glorified the coexistence of different communities under the Mughal Empire.
5. The proclamation that was issued under the name of Bahadur Shah appealed to the people to join the fight under the standards of both Muhammad and Mahavir.
6. British made attempts to create divisions between Hindus and Muslims. For example, in Bareilly in western Uttar Pradesh, in December 1857, the British spent 50,000 to incite Hindu population against the Muslims but they failed.

### **5. What steps did the British take to quell the uprising ?**

**Ans:** In 1857 a sepoy mutiny broke out in East India that became a mass uprising in many parts of the country. The Company had faced rebellions in the past too, but not of this magnitude and extent. The British rulers realised that unless the rebellions is suppressed, their empire was destined to fizzle out.

They took swift measures to put down the flame of the rebellion, some were of military nature while others were of political nature.

The important measures taken by the British to suppress the rebellion are as follows:

1. Imposition of Marshal Law and large scale of execution: In north India where rebels were holding ground, Marshal Law was imposed. Apart from enforcing law, military officers also had the power to dispense justice and pronounce conviction and punishment. Thus, for all practical purposes, rebels and their sympathizers could be declared guilty without fair trial. The punishment was not just swift, cruel and partisan but in most cases execution. The execution was carried out in a manner that fear grips the masses. The people were blown up by canons, still others were hanged by trees. The objective was to terrorize the people and make them subservient to the might of the British empire.

2. Diplomacy: The British masters used diplomacy as tool to weaken and destroy the rebellions. They tried to win the support of native kingdoms who were not on the side of rebels, by promising them rewards and securing their kingdoms. The communities who were not involved in the mutiny, viz. Sikhs were recruited and sent to fight the rebels.

3. Use of technology: The British used technology to get an upper hand in the battle fields. Apart from having superior weapons, it was the superior communication system that routed the rebels. The company used telegram to instantly communicate with others, the rebels were totally clueless about such things.

To conclude the British strategy and technique to defeat the rebels was multipronged and superior to those employed by the rebels. It was natural that the rebels crumbled in course of time.

### **6. Why was the revolt particularly widespread in Awadh? What prompted the! peasants, taluqdaars and zamindars to join the revolt?**

**Ans:** (a) The revolt was widespread in Awadh due to the following reasons:

1. Awadh was annexed by the British on the plea that the region was being misgoverned. The British thought that the Nawab was not popular but on the contrary he was very popular. People considered it as “the life has gone out of the body”. The removal led to an emotional upheaval among the people of Awadh.
2. The annexation of Awadh led to unemployment among the musicians, dancers, poets, artisans, cooks, retainers, administrative officials and soon those who were attached with the Nawab and his household.
3. It also led to loss of court culture.

(b) The peasants, taluqdars and zamindars joined the revolt due to the following grievances:

1. Before the annexation, the taluqdars were very powerful but immediately after the annexation, they were disarmed and their forts destroyed. Not only under the first British revenue settlement, known

as the Summary Settlement of 1856, it was assumed that they had no permanent stakes in land. Wherever possible they were removed. This led to discontentment among the taluqdars.

2. The British had hoped that by removing the taluqdars, the condition of the peasants would improve but this did not happen. Revenue flows for the state increased but the burden of demand on the peasants did not decline. So, the peasants were too not happy with the new situation.

### **7. What did the rebels want? To what extent did the vision of different social group differ?**

**Ans:** The rebels wanted to uproot the British rule. It was to be replaced by the rule of Indian, but what would be the nature of that governance is something the rebels were not sure of. They were definitely not fighting to establish a democratic government. The salient points of the vision of the rebels were as follows:

1. Hindu-Muslim Unity: The rebels were not clear about the idea of Hindu-Muslim Unity. But they were definitely cherished the ideals of Hindu-Muslim unity. The religious sentiments of both the parties were respected so much so whenever a new territory fell to rebels, cow slaughter was banned.
2. Preserving Indian Culture: Many believed that the company was pushing European culture and Christianity on the Indians. The rebels wanted to reverse this process. Some of the measures by the company to reform our society were also seen with the same vein.

The vision of the different social groups:

**Zamindars:** Many of them did not like the provision of auction of their estate by the company to recover losses. They considered themselves as rulers who could not be dispossessed of their estate. Hence, many of them wanted to give governance that suited their interest.

**Merchants:** They were a mixed lot. They liked the rule of company as it maintained peace and law across vast areas of India. However, they also looked upon the company rule as partisan that promoted British trade interest at the cost of that of Indian's, for the end of Company rule could translate into a favourable environment.

Artisans: Most artisans were struggling to survive as they suffered due to policies of Company that pumped manufactured goods of England.

### **8. What do visual representations tell us about the revolt of 1857? How do historians analyse these representations?**

**Ans:** (i) Pictorial images were produced by both British and Indians paintings, pencil drawings, posters, etc. They form an important record of the mutiny. British pictures in particular presented a variety of images that have provoked a range of different kinds of emotions and reactions.

(ii) Some of the British pictorial images commemorate the British heroes who served the English. They repressed the rebels hence represented as heroes for example, 'Relief of Lucknow' painted by Thomas Jones Barker, depicts the efforts of James Outram, Henry Havelock and Colin Campbell in rescuing the besieged British garrison in Lucknow. This image was sketched in 1859.

(iii) Newspapers reported incidents of violence against women and children such kinds of news when broke out, they led to demands for revenge and retribution. The British government were asked to protect the women and children. Artists have tried to express these feelings through their visual representations of trauma and suffering.

(iv) Memories "In memoriam" painted by Joseph Noel Paton portrays helpless English women and children huddled in circle awaiting their fate at the hands of the rebels. Through it he tries to represent the rebels as violent.

(v) Portrait of heroes of rebellion the dead and injured portrait in the picture indicate the sufferings which occurred during the siege. While the triumphant figures of heroes in the middle ground emphasised the fact that British rule had been reestablished. The rebellion has been surprised.

(vi) Invincibility of British threatened by the rebellion, the British felt the need to demonstrate their invincibility. They tried to represent it through pictorial images for example, in one such image a female figure of justice with a sword in one hand

a shield in the other is shown. Her posture is aggressive, her facial expression express her anger and a desire for revenge she is presented in a heroic image.

(vii) In certain sketches and paintings women are depicted as heroic. They are represented as defending themselves against the rebels. Women's struggle to save her honour and life is shown to have a deeper religious connotation. It is a battle to save the honour of Christianity and a book lying on the floor is said to symbolize the Bible.

(viii) Source of deals with the report of a British officer from Oudh. The reports of the uprising of the people.

**9. Examine any two sources presented in the chapter, choosing one visual and one text, and discuss how these represent the point of view of the victor and vanquished.**

**Ans:** Ordinary people join the mutiny of 1857. Lucknow was one of the main centres. The sepoys of Awadh were joined by peasants, zamindars, traders and talukdars.



**Source: Sisten and the tahsildar:** In the context of the communication of the

message of revolt and mutiny, the experience of Francois Sisten, a native Christian police inspector in Sitapur, is telling.

He had gone to Saharanpur to pay his respects to the magistrate. Sisten was dressed in Indian clothes and sitting cross-legged. A Muslim tahsildar from Bijnor entered the room; upon learning that Sisten was from Awadh, he enquired, "What news from Awadh? How does the work progress, brother?" Playing safe, Sisten replied, "If we have work in Awadh, your highness will know it." The tahsildar said, "Depend upon it, we will succeed this time. The direction of the business is in able hands." The tahsildar was later identified as the principal rebel leader of Bijnor. This source indicate that the effect of the rebellions had spread even among those officers who had earlier supported the British. The English men worried about their lives, property, owner of women and children. The geographical extent of the revolt was much greater. The magistrate used to get news and daily development day to day through their governmental representatives but they were suspicious as later on magistrate of Sitapur came to know that the Sisten who came to him was a great sympathizer of the rebellions.