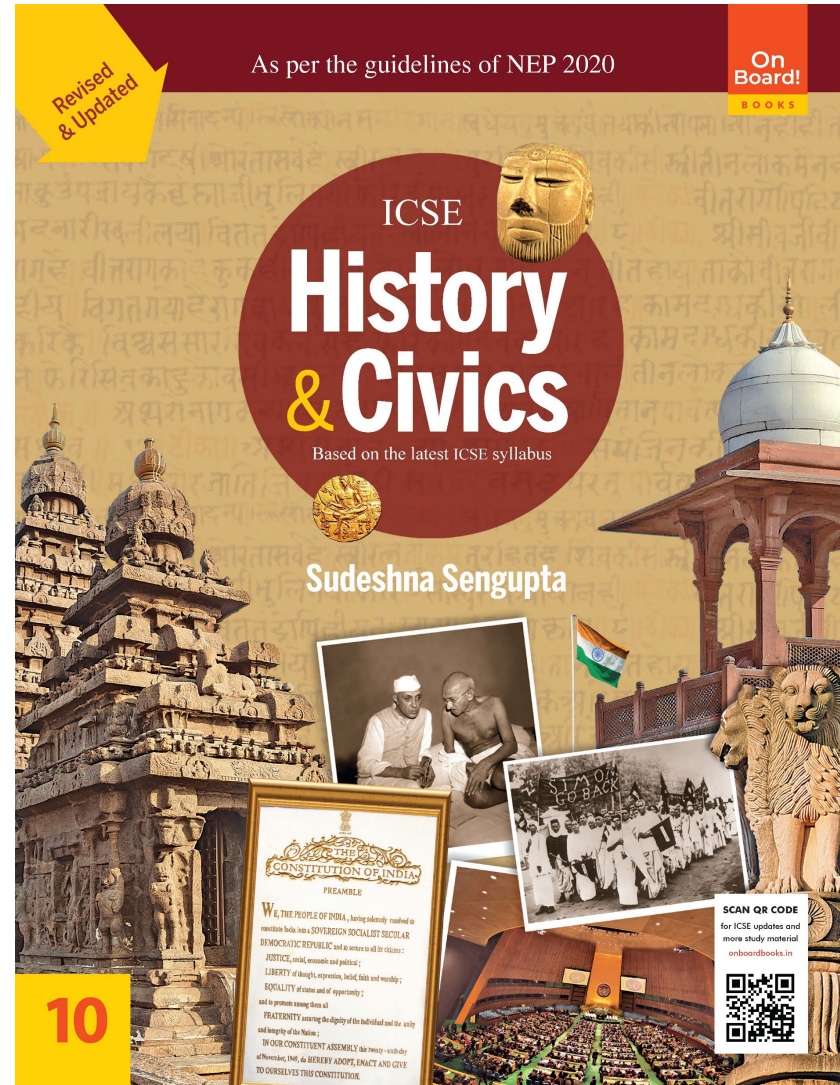


On Board!

B O O K S

ICSE History and Civics 10



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Chapter 1 The First War of Independence

By the middle of the nineteenth century, the East India Company had established direct control over a very large part of India. The British rule had alienated all sections of the Indian society.

- The rulers were enraged by the annexation of their territories.
 - The landlord aristocrats resented the loss of their zamindaris.
 - The peasants hated the exploitative system of land revenue collection.
 - The craftsmen were against the new trade policies which exposed them to unfair competition with goods from England.
 - The sepoys were angry as they were treated in an unfair manner by their British superiors.
- The different sections of society thus expressed their anger and hatred for the British rule through protests and revolts, which culminated in the great uprising of 1857

POLITICAL CAUSES

The growing discontent in the country was due to the expansion of the British dominions at an alarming pace.

Doctrine of Lapse

A number of kingdoms and minor states were annexed under the pretext that the kings did not have male heirs. An heir adopted without the consent of the East India Company could only inherit the private property of the king, and not his political territory. This kingdom would then be taken over by the Company.

Appointment of judges

Satara The kingdom of Satara was the first to be annexed following this doctrine.

Jhansi Jhansi was annexed next.

Nagpur Nagpur was annexed and its treasures were auctioned away.

Sambalpur When Narayan Singh, the ruler of Sambalpur died without a male heir, Lord Dalhousie annexed Sambalpur in 1849.

Discourtesy and ill-treatment

In 1849 Lord Dalhousie announced that Bahadur Shah Zafar would no longer be allowed to stay in the Red Fort. He and his wife Zeenat Mahal were compelled to move to a place near Qutb Minar. Further, Lord Canning announced that after Bahadur Shah Zafar, his successors

would not be allowed to use the title 'king'. The proposal of taking away the title from the Mughal Emperor shocked the Muslims.

Independence and impartiality of the High Courts

Discourtesy was also extended to the Peshwa when Lord Dalhousie rejected the claim of Nana Saheb—the adopted son of Peshwa Baji Rao II—to the annual pension of 8 lakhs.

According to Dalhousie, the pension granted was personal and not hereditary.

Annexation of Awadh

Lord Dalhousie's excuse for annexing Awadh was poor administration and misrule. In early February 1856, Nawab Wajid Ali Shah was deposed and the Court of Directors ordered the annexation of the entire province. Further, the soldiers of the British Indian Army were also enraged.

Other factors

- The British declined to honour the pledges and treaties made with the native princes.
- Indians were treated with contempt and the British officials excluded them from every sphere of administration.
- With the defeat of the British Army in the First Afghan War, the myth of British invincibility was shattered.
- The bravery of the Santhals of Bengal and Bihar, and their courage to rebel against the might of the English was an eye-opener for the Indians.
- A rumour spread that the rulers of India changed every hundred years. A hundred years had passed since the Battle of Plassey in 1757, when British rule in India had begun. So people believed that the time had come for the British rule to end.

ECONOMIC CAUSES

The British rule in India was marked by the economic exploitation of the country, which was another major cause of the struggle to gain freedom.

Trade and handicrafts

East India Company confined its activities to trade and commerce. The Company purchased textiles, indigo, saltpetre, spices and foodgrains from Indian markets in exchange for gold and other precious metals.

- The eighteenth century marked a change in the pattern of trade. With the advent of the Industrial Revolution, England developed its own textile industry and did not have to depend on Indian textiles. From this time, instead of buying finished textile goods from India, the East India Company started to purchase raw cotton and exported it to England.

- India gradually became a raw material producing country, supplying cotton and jute to the factories in Britain. This cotton was processed into finished cloth and sent back to India, making her the market as well. This two-way trade benefited the British traders who reaped enormous profit.
- Many weavers, merchants and craftsmen lost their livelihood when trade and commerce came to be monopolized by the Company. This resulted in resentment against the British rule. Whatever little patronage that the artisans received from the native princes was also gone because of the annexation of those states.

Impoverishment of Indian artisans

Demand for Indian textiles was reduced due to the cheap goods flooding Indian markets from the factories of Manchester and Liverpool. The local handloom industry, as a result, incurred heavy losses. The poor Indian weavers could not compete with the machine-made goods imported from England. Moreover, the Company bought the best quality cotton from the Indian markets, leaving no scope for the Indian weavers to compete. Gradually, the Indian handicraft and cottage industries declined.

Other factors

- Numerous experiments in the land revenue settlement made the condition of the farmers miserable. In Bengal and Bihar, the peasants were forced to grow indigo and opium instead of food crops. Famines became common, with little relief from the government.
- The British confiscated the lands and properties of many landlords and talukdars.
- Indians who held civil and judicial posts in the states lost their jobs that were taken over by the British.
- Thousands of soldiers who were employed in the army of the native states were rendered jobless, when the states were annexed by the Company

SOCIAL AND RELIGIOUS CAUSES

Western education and fear of mass conversion

By the Charter Act of 1813, Christian missionaries were allowed to preach in India. This caused fear and alarm because:

- Christian missionaries set up a number of schools where Christian doctrines were taught.
- The Bible was introduced in government schools and colleges as well as in public prisons and jails.
- The teaching of English was introduced in schools.

Legislations against religious customs

When the British passed laws against inhuman social practices and customs, the Hindus especially disliked the interference in their religion. They feared that the entire country would be converted to Christianity.

- The 1829 Act abolishing sati was regarded as an undue interference in the religion of the Indians.
- The two laws of 1832 and 1850, which permitted the Christian converts to inherit property, became very unpopular.
- The Widow Remarriage Act of 1856 affected only a handful of widows, nonetheless it was regarded as an infringement upon the religious sentiments of the people.

Other factors

- The unwritten law was that all Indians, irrespective of their rank, had to bow before any Englishman and silently bear the humiliation.
- The educated Indians were denied promotions and opportunities for appointment to high positions.
- The introduction of railways introduced caste distinction.
- The religious sentiments of the people were further hurt when a tax was imposed on property held by temples and mosques.

MILITARY CAUSES

The commissioned officers were all British but the soldiers or sepoys were Indians. The discontent and anger against the English was deep-seated among the sepoys for many reasons.

Discriminatory treatment

The Indian soldiers were efficient, the British officials paid them poorly. All the higher ranks were reserved for the white men, irrespective of their capacity.

General Service Enlistment Act

- The General Service Enlistment Act of 1856 provided that all recruits to the Bengal Army should be ready to serve anywhere, both within and outside the country.
- A large number of troops from the annexed Indian states were unemployed.
- The English troops at that point of time were involved in wars in Persia and China.
- The sepoys also realized that the promise of a special bhatta (allowance) on crossing the Indus during the Afghan War was a false one.

IMMEDIATE CAUSE

The introduction of the Enfield Rifles in place of the old-fashioned musket is considered as the immediate cause of the war. It was rumoured that its cartridges were greased with lard made from the fat either of the hog or the ox. The end of the cartridges had to be bitten off with the teeth and then loaded, which would mean getting some of the grease in the mouth. This violated the religious sentiments of the Hindus.

THE OUTBREAK

The first soldier to protest against the greased was Mangal Pandey. Mangal Pandey rebelled by refusing to use the cartridge. He attacked his superior British officer but was overpowered and hanged. Thereafter, the whole regiment was disbanded. Sepoys in other regiments resented this act of the Company. According to some historians, the show of disgrace while disbanding the regiment contributed to fanning the anti-British sentiment.

Initial stages

Troopers of the Third Cavalry refused to touch the cartridges on the parade ground. They were court martialled and sentenced to ten years' rigorous imprisonment. The way this sentence was executed caused considerable public outrage. The 82-year-old Bahadur Shah was proclaimed leader of the revolt. Most contemporary historians however suggest that he was forced by the sepoys and his courtiers to sign the proclamation. The civilians, nobility and other officers took the oath of allegiance to the Emperor. The British realized the importance of Delhi and regarded its recapture as their most important goal. Bahadur Shah was forced to surrender. He was taken prisoner and exiled to Rangoon.

The events at Kanpur were directed by Dhondu Pant, also known as Nana Saheb. Initially, both the infantry and the cavalry remained loyal to their masters and resisted the sepoys from Meerut. This betrayal on Nana's part enraged the British. General Havelock routed Nana's army but the latter fled with his family. After Nana Saheb fled Kanpur, the real authority passed into the hands of his Commander-in-Chief Tantia Tope. Sir Colin Campbell defeated him on 6 December and the revolt in Kanpur came to an end.

Rebellion erupted in Awadh (also known as Oudh, in modern-day Uttar Pradesh) soon after the events in Meerut. Though the Nawab was taken prisoner in Calcutta, his wife Hazrat Mahal encouraged the troops to rebel in Awadh. A relief force under the command of Sir Henry Havelock arrived in Lucknow. The numerically small column defeated the sepoys in a series of battles. In October, another larger army under the new Commander-in-Chief, Sir Colin Campbell was finally able to relieve the garrison and on 18 November, they took over the city.

The Rani of Jhansi began to recruit troops and asked Tantia Tope for help. The troops under the inspiring guidance of Rani Laxmibai offered stiff resistance. But Sir Hugh Rose captured Jhansi. The Rani went to Kalpi and joined Tantia Tope. Here they were again defeated by Rose. So they marched to Gwalior. Dressed in a man's attire and riding a horse, she fought the British forces only to die a soldier's death. Tantia Tope was captured and hanged.

An 80-year-old Rajput landowner Kunwar Singh, played a leading role in the struggle in Bihar. He is believed to have organized the sepoys in Patna, Danapur and Arrah. There were similar incidents in Shahabad, in the Gaya district and the Chotanagpur belt.

One has to remember that the common people like peasants, artisans, craftsmen, religious preachers, etc. joined the revolt. They destroyed government buildings and courts and provided the rebels with food and shelter.

NATURE OF THE REVOLT

Historians remain divided on what this momentous event in our history be referred to. In order to downplay its importance, the British historians call it a mere Sepoy Mutiny. They held that the revolt was confined to the Bengal army and the north and central India.

It is popular as the Revolt of 1857 as many believed that for the first time, the power of the British was challenged and the anger of the masses was expressed openly and effectively. Nationalist Indians like Veer Savarkar and Subhas Chandra Bose called it the First War of Indian Independence as it was an organized effort against the foreign rule.

Considering the fact that it spread over a vast area and involved even the civilians, Indian historians have rightly termed it as the First War of Independence. The War of 1857, undoubtedly an epoch-making event in India's struggle for freedom, was India's First War of Independence in a very true sense, as people from all walks of life, irrespective of their caste, creed, religion and language, rose against the British rule. Even in its failure, it served to inspire the nationalist leaders for centuries to come.

CAUSES OF THE FAILURE

Lack of a plan and organization

The First War of Independence was marked by a series of sporadic incidents. It lacked coordination. The rebels had no common goal or plan of action. None of them knew what to do after a region was captured. Hence, they were unable to consolidate their early military successes.

Inferior leadership and military skill

The skill, prowess and able leadership of Havelock, Campbell, Nicholson, Rose and Lawrence can be contrasted to the great leadership but lack of incisive decisions on the part of Nana Saheb, great courage but inferiority in warfare of Tantia Tope, and daring valour yet lack of tactical strategy of Rani Laxmibai.

Absence of a great leader

The Indians lacked an iconic leader who could fuse the disparate and scattered rebels into a consolidated unit. There was no leader to strategize a definite policy and plan an action with positive results.

British diplomacy

A notable reason for the failure was the resourcefulness of the British to gather around their banner the support of the Sikhs on one side, the Gurkhas on the other and the Pathans of the north-west frontier as the third force. Credit should also be given to the British for enlisting the support of Scindia, Bhonsle and the Nizam. Had they joined the War, the fate of the British in India would have been endangered in 1857 itself.

No high ideal

The principal motives that sustained the movement were hatred and dissatisfaction towards the British and the hope of material gains in driving them out. The spirit of nationalism and a religious inspiration as the guiding force were visibly lacking. It contrasted with the patriotism of the British in retaining an Empire and defending their territories. The leaders had no vision of setting up a national state and they could not inspire the same spirit in their own, many of whom helped the British during this struggle for freedom.

EFFECT AND CONSEQUENCES

The First War of Independence in 1857 brought about fundamental changes in the character of Indian administration and the future development of the country. The attitude of the British leaders towards the Indian people and states changed, and its consequences were far reaching.

End of Company's rule and administrative changes

- India would be governed directly by and in the name of Her Majesty.
- There would be a Secretary of State in whom all the powers formerly exercised by the Court of Directors or the Board of Control would be vested.
- The Secretary of State would perform all his duties with the aid of the India Council.
- This Council would comprise fifteen members, of which eight would be appointed by the Crown and the rest by the Court of Directors from among themselves.
- The appointments to the Civil Service were to be made through open competition as per the rules laid down by the Secretary of State.
- The Governor General received the additional title of the Viceroy. Lord Canning was appointed as the first Viceroy of India under the Crown.

Indian states under the British Crown

- The Crown had taken over their treaties and those stood to be honoured.
- Their autonomy over the territories would be protected and their privileges would be maintained.
- The right of adoption was granted on condition of loyalty.
- The main centres of India were connected by railways, and the Imperial Telegraph system functioned in nearly every state.

Reorganization of the army

- A Royal Indian Army was created by merging the existing armies under a Commander-in-Chief.
- The proportion of the British to the Indian soldiers was substantially increased.
- The British would control all strategic places and posts.
- No Indian would be given a position in the artillery units.
- The regiments would not follow any religious or caste norms, i.e. soldiers belonging to different religions, castes and regions were put together to form a regiment.
- Regiments that had remained loyal to the British like the Gurkha regiment were not only retained but expanded as well.

Pledge to the people

The declaration of the Queen that raised the hopes of the Indians contained certain positive assurances.

- The first was her promise of equal treatment to all her subjects, Indian and European.
- The clause of the Charter Act of 1833 was repeated when it was declared that all Indians would be freely and impartially admitted to all offices.
- Except for those found guilty of murder, all other offences were pardoned by the Crown.
- The primary concern of the government would be the moral and material advancement of the people of this country.
- The government would not interfere in the social and religious beliefs and customs of the people.

Policy of Divide and Rule

This period marked the beginning of a new policy. A thin wedge was drawn between the vested interests of the ruling aristocracy and the welfare of the common people. This sought to gain the loyalty of the Indian rulers, while pitting them against their own subjects. Another aspect of this policy was the deliberate encouragement of the split between the Hindus and the Muslims. In the initial years after the War, which had shown the two communities striving together against their masters, the British hated the Muslims as they believed that the latter were instrumental in organising the rebellion of 1857. But the growing nationalism of the Hindus alienated the British who then took the Muslims into confidence. The ploy was to use one community against the other and not allow them to cement any ties.

The era of nationalism

The birth of nationalism was the chief glory of India during the period after the war. The spirit of defiance and courage remarkably displayed by Rani Laxmibai of Jhansi, Nana Saheb and others was remembered and venerated. These leaders became national heroes and champions of national freedom. Popular songs kept their memory alive. Stories about their heroic struggle inspired our freedom fighters even a century later.

The year 2007 marked the 150th anniversary of this momentous event of our struggle for independence.

To Remember

Causes – Political causes: Doctrine of Lapse, discourtesy and ill-treatment, annexation of Awadh, other factors. Economic causes: Trade and handicrafts, impoverishment of Indian artisans, other factors. Social and Religious causes: Western education and fear of mass conversion, legislations against religious customs, other factors. Military causes: Discriminatory treatment, General Service Enlistment Act, other factors. Immediate Cause – Introduction of the Enfield Rifles with greased cartridges.

Outbreak – Events: Mangal Pandey, Initial stages: Action at Meerut, Delhi, Kanpur, Lucknow/Awadh, Jhansi and others.

Nature – Opinions differ, however, it can be called the First War of Independence.

Causes of failure – Lack of organization, lack of coordination and military skill, absence of a great leader, British diplomacy, no high ideal.

Effect and consequences of the War – End of Company's rule and administrative changes, the Indian states under the British Crown, reorganization of the army, pledge to the people, policy of divide and rule, the emergence of nationalism.

Thank You