

CBSE Class 8 Social Science History Notes

Chapter 5 - When People Rebel

Students of CBSE Class 8 can learn about policies and the people, peasants and the sepoys, fight between the Company and nawabs and rajas, etc. from Chapter 5 - When People Rebel. Students can master the concepts of the Chapter by going through CBSE Class 8 Social Science History notes of Chapter 5. These notes are beneficial for students to revise the entire Chapter quickly just before the exam. It saves the valuable time of the students and also makes them confident to write the exams well.

Policies and the People

Nawabs lose their power

Nawabs and rajas lost their authority and power since the mid-eighteenth century. In order to protect their interests, many ruling families tried to negotiate with the Company. Rani Lakshmibai of Jhansi wanted the Company to recognise her adopted son as the heir to the kingdom after the death of her husband. But, the Company turned down these pleas.

Awadh was one of the last territories to be annexed. In 1801, a subsidiary alliance was imposed on Awadh, and in 1856 it was taken over. The Company planned to bring down the Mughal dynasty to an end. In 1849, Governor-General Dalhousie announced that after the death of Bahadur Shah Zafar, his family would be shifted out of the Red Fort and given another place in Delhi to reside in. After Bahadur Shah Zafar, the last Mughal King, none of his descendants would be recognised as kings – they would just be called princes.

The peasants and the sepoys

Peasants and zamindars from the countryside resented the high taxes and the rigid methods of revenue collection. Many lost their lands as they failed to pay back their loans to the moneylenders.

The Indian sepoys who were employees of the Company were unhappy about their pay, allowances and conditions of service. When sepoys were told to go to Burma to fight for the Company via sea route, they refused to go but agreed to go via land route. The Company passed a law in 1856, which stated that every new person who took up employment in the Company's army had to agree to serve overseas, if required.

Responses to reforms

The British reformed Indian society by passing laws to stop the practice of Sati and to encourage the remarriage of widows. English education was widely promoted. After 1830, Christian missionaries were allowed to function freely in its domain and own land and property. A new law was passed in 1850, to convert into Christianity easier. The law allowed Indian Christians to inherit the property of their ancestors.

A Mutiny Becomes a Popular Rebellion

A large number of people believed that they have a common enemy and rose up against the enemy at the same time. For such a situation to develop people have to organise, communicate, take initiative and display the confidence to turn the situation around.

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In May 1857, English East India Company faced a massive rebellion. In several places, sepoys mutinied beginning from Meerut and a large number of people from different sections of society rose up in rebellion. It is considered as the biggest armed resistance to colonialism in the nineteenth century.

From Meerut to Delhi

On 29 March 1857, Mangal Pandey, was hanged to death for attacking officers in Barrackpore. Some sepoys of the regiment Meerut refused to do army drill using the new cartridges, suspected of being coated with the fat of cows and pigs. On 9th May 1857, eighty-five sepoys were dismissed from service and sentenced to ten years in jail for disobeying their officers.

The soldiers released the imprisoned sepoys from the Meerut jail on 10 May. The soldiers were determined to bring an end to their rule in the country. The sepoys rode all night of 10 May and reached Delhi in the early hours next morning. Triumphant soldiers gathered in the Red Fort demanding to meet Badshah.

Bahadur Shah Zafar accepted the demand and wrote letters to all the chiefs and rulers of the country to come forward and organise a confederacy of Indian states to fight the British. The Mughal dynasty had ruled over a very large part of the country. Small rulers and chieftains controlled different territories were threatened by the expansion of British rule.

The British thought that the disturbance caused by the issue of the cartridges would die down. But the entire situation changed dramatically by the decision of Bahadur Shah Zafar.

The rebellion spreads

The British were routed from Delhi, and for almost a week there was no uprising. Regiments mutinied and troops joined nodal points like Delhi, Kanpur and Lucknow. Nana Saheb, the adopted son of the late Peshwa Baji Rao proclaimed himself Peshwa, gathered armed forces and expelled the British garrison from the city. In Lucknow, Birjis Qadr proclaimed the new Nawab. In Jhansi, Rani Lakshmibai joined the rebel sepoys and fought the British along with Tantia Tope, the general of Nana Saheb. In the Mandla region of Madhya Pradesh, Rani Avantibai Lodhi of Ramgarh raised and led an army against the British who had taken over the administration of her state.

The British were defeated in a number of battles. A situation of widespread popular rebellion developed in the region of Awadh in particular. Emergence of many new leaders. For example, Ahmadullah Shah, from Faizabad, Bakht Khan in Delhi, Kunwar Singh in Bihar.

The Company Fights Back

The Company brought reinforcements from England, passed new laws to easily convict the rebels. In September 1857, Delhi was recaptured and the last Mughal emperor, Bahadur Shah Zafar was sentenced to life imprisonment.

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In March 1858, Lucknow was taken and Rani Lakshmbai was defeated and killed in June 1858. Rani Avantibai chose to embrace death when surrounded by the British on all sides. Tantia Tope was captured, tried and killed in April 1859.

The defeat of rebel forces encouraged desertions. To win people loyalty, the British announced rewards for loyal landholders, who will continue to enjoy traditional rights over their lands. If anyone who rebelled against the British surrendered themselves and if they had not killed any white people, they would remain safe and their rights and claims to land would not be denied.

Aftermath

By the end of 1859, the British had regained control of the country. Some of the important changes that were introduced by the British are mentioned below:

1. In 1858, a new Act was passed and transferred the powers of the East India Company to the British Crown in order to ensure more responsible management of Indian affairs. A member of 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 India Council. The Governor-General of India was given the title of Viceroy. Through these measures, the British government accepted direct responsibility for ruling India.
2. All ruling chiefs were assured that their territory would never be annexed in future. They were allowed to pass on their kingdoms to their heirs, including adopted sons. The Indian rulers were to hold their kingdoms as subordinates of the British Crown.
3. The proportion of Indian soldiers in the army were reduced and the number of European soldiers increased.
4. Muslims land and property were confiscated on a large scale and they were treated with suspicion and hostility.
5. The British decided to respect the customary religious and social practices of the people in India.
6. Policies were made to protect landlords and zamindars and give them security of rights over their lands.