



**Unit – XI:**  
**Revolt of 1857 and its representations.**

⇒ The British rule had brought political, economic and social degeneration in India. British policy compelled Indians to rise in revolt. There were a series of revolts but they were mostly local and easily suppressed. The Revolt of May 1857, although it finally failed first sowed the seed of freedom struggle and so it is regarded as the First War Of Indian Independence.

⇒ The events of the Mutiny are recorded and narrated in both published and unpublished official records. Some are narrated as below

⇒ Account given by the contemporary writers, military officers and by many scholars in the post mutiny period.

⇒ Persian and Urdu papers recovered from the palace after the fall of Delhi are useful for the study.

⇒ The west Bengal Record Office has many papers relating to Mutiny in Bihar.

⇒ Collections of officials narratives of Mutiny furnished by the magistrates of various localities; 1858

⇒ Report on the engineering operations during the defence of Lucknow in 1857 being extracts from the report of Major General, Sir John Ingles.

⇒ The North West Provinces of India during the Mutiny of 1857 written by Sir William Muir.

⇒ A short and a useful compilation from the Calcutta Government Gazette at the Fall of Delhi by A.A.Savastra

⇒ The stories of the uprising were published in British Newspaper and Magazines which narrate in detail the violence of the Mutineer.

⇒ Some general works are also sources of the study. Such as The campaign in India (1857-58) by Captain G.F. Atkinson, The India Rebellion, Its Causes and Results, in a series of letters by A. Duff and many others.

⇒ The British painters also painted the events of the days of mutiny. Joseph Noel Paton two years after the mutiny painted “In Memorium” that shows English women and children huddled in a circle seemingly waiting for the inevitable, dishonor death and violence.



### **THE EVENTS OF 1857-58 (THE BEGINNING OF THE UPRISING):**

⇒ The uprising of 1857 began at Barrackpur in Bengal when Mangal Pandey, a sepoy was captured and hanged to death for refusing to use greased cartridges and also for murdering two British officers on 28<sup>th</sup> March 1857. Thereafter, the revolt spread far and wide.

⇒ There was a general uprising among the Indian soldiers stationed at Meerut as eighty five (85) soldiers were imprisoned for refusing to use Grease Cartridges. The sepoy killed British officers and freed their fellow soldiers.

⇒ The sepoy reached Delhi and gathered at the Red Fort and was meeting the last Mughal Emperor, Bahadur Shah. They narrated the incident at Meerut to the Mughal Emperor. Many other groups from different places also arrived at the Red Fort and joined the Mutiny. They proclaimed Bahadur Shah as the Emperor of India.

⇒ After receiving the news, Lord Canning, the Governor General, sent a large troop under the command of Henry Bernard Wilson and occupied Delhi on 11<sup>th</sup> September 1857 after fighting for three months. Bahadur Shah was exiled to Bengal where he died in 1862 thereby marked the end of the great Mughal rule in India.

⇒ In Kanpur the leader of the Revolt was Nana Sahib, the adopted son of Peshwa Baji Rao II, the last Maratha Peshwa. He had occupied Kanpur and declared himself as the Peshwa when the British commander, Mr. Wheeler surrendered.

⇒ Dr. Ishwari Prasad observes that probably nowhere the revolt was as well organized as in Awadh. On the night of 30<sup>th</sup> May 1857, a canon boomed in the Cantonment (a military camp) at Lucknow (the pre arranged signal of Revolt). Immediately massacre of Englishmen and burning of their houses. The revolt was led by the Begum of Awadh, Harzat Mahal.

⇒ Henry Lawrence, the commander of the British army was killed by the rebels. In June 1857, General Neil and Havlok proceeded onwards Lucknow after capturing Allahabad and they also captured Kanpur and marched towards Lucknow but Neil was killed by the rebels.

⇒ After hearing the news of Neil, Campbell, the newly appointed commander in chief started marching towards Lucknow to help Havlok. But Havlok was also killed on 24<sup>th</sup> September 1857.

⇒ Campbell received reinforcement and in February 1858 with the help of Outram (British commander) completely routed the rebels and Lucknow was reoccupied. The loss of Lucknow broke the backbone of the rebels.



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- ⇒ General Neil occupied Benaras with the help of Sikh and Madras regiment. He massacred thousands of rebels, women and children and then marched towards Allahabad and occupied it in 18<sup>th</sup> June, 1857.
- ⇒ Jhansi and Gwalior were the main centres of revolt in Central India. Rani Lakshmi Bai was the leader of the revolt in Jhansi. She was joined by Tantia Tope. They both fought a fierce battle and drove away the British.
- ⇒ In April 1858, Rani and Tantia Tope were defeated by Sir Hugh Rose as they were not supported by the Scindhiya, ruler of Gwalior. But Scindhiya was preparing to fight against Rani and Tantia Tope.
- ⇒ On June 11, 1858 there was a fierce battle. Rani died fighting on June 17 and on June 20 Tantia Tope left Gwalior and escaped to the South but he was captured by the British and hanged to death on 18<sup>th</sup> April, 1859.
- ⇒ At Bareilly, the revolt was led by Khan Bahadur Khan. In May 1858, the British commander, Campbell crushed the rebellion and occupied Bareilly. Maulvi Ahmed Ullah Shah partner of Khan Bahadur ran away to Shahjahanpur where he was defeated by Campbell.
- ⇒ In Bihar the revolt was led by Kunwar Singh (a zamindar). He joined hands with Nana Sahib's forces. He defeated the British forces at Arrah but he died in April 1858 after sustaining a fatal injury.
- ⇒ South India also did not remain unaffected by the uprising. There were rising of the people and soldiers at about twenty (20) places in Maharashtra. Rang Bapuji Gupte was the leader of the rebel in this region.
- ⇒ In Andhra, the major centres of revolt were the coastal areas from Vishakapatnam to Nellore. In Tamil Nadu the major centres were Chengelpet, Salem, Madurai, Coimbatore and few others.
- ⇒ In June 1857, the First Infantry Battalion refused to move from Madras (Chennai). Some European employees were also murdered at Salem (Tamil Nadu).
- ⇒ In Kerala, the rebels with local people forced open the grain shops. Many soldiers were arrested and the revolt continued till 1857.



### **RUMOURS AND PROPHECIES (PREDICTION) in bringing about the revolt of 1857:**

- ⇒ Rumours and prophecies played an important role for the outbreak of the revolt of 1857.
- ⇒ Rumour about the cartridge of Enfield Rifle coated with fat of cows and pigs.
- ⇒ Rumour of mixing of bone dust of cow and pig with atta.
- ⇒ Rumour of conversion of Indians into Christianity.
- ⇒ Prediction (Prophecy of the end of British rule on the centenary of the Battle of Plassey on 23 June, 1857
- ⇒ These rumours and prophecies were the major factors for the outbreak of the revolution of 1857.

### **REVOLT IN AWADH:**

- ⇒ The kingdom of Awadh was situated in the territory between Sarju, a tributary of the Ganges to the North West of Allahabad. Some of the factors responsible for the outbreak of the revolt in Awadh.
- ⇒ Introduction of Subsidiary Alliance in 1801 that made Nawab gradually became dependent on the British to maintain law and order within his kingdom.
- ⇒ The region was good for producing Indigo and cotton.
- ⇒ The region was ideally located for the development of a principal market of upper India.
- ⇒ The annexation of Awadh would complete the territorial expansion that started a century earlier with the annexation of Bengal.
- ⇒ Deposed of Nawab Wazid Ali Shah on the ground of misgovernment and exiled him to Calcutta in 1856.
- ⇒ The annexation of Awadh displaced the Taluqdars of the region. Taluqdars enjoyed certain degree of autonomy before the annexation.
- ⇒ Company directly settled revenue with peasants after removing Taluqdars. This dispossession of Taluqdars meant the complete breakdown of social order.



- ⇒ During hardship or failure of crops, there was no guarantee that the company would reduce the revenue to be paid by the peasants. But Taluqdars used to reduce payment of revenue during such hardship or failure of crops.
- ⇒ Indian sepoys were racially abused, paid low salary, differences in treatment by the British officials.
- ⇒ Physical violence started. English officers develop a sense of superiority.
- ⇒ Peasants of Awadh were already suffered because of the high revenue and on the other hand Taluqdars also looking out for revenge to get back their authority.
- ⇒ All these were the reasons for the discontentment of the people of Awadh and thus compelled them to take part in the revolt of 1857 actively.

### **GRIEVANCES OF THE REBELS AND WHAT THEY WANTED:**

- ⇒ A few proclamations (Notifications) were issued by the rebel leader to propagate their ideas to the people to join the revolt. The proclamation indicated a vision of unity as they appeal to all sections of Indian society.
- ⇒ Azamgarh proclamation was issued on 25<sup>th</sup> August 1857 that contained five notifications.
- ⇒ The proclamations rejected all things associated with the British rule and condemned all the annexation of territories of the native rulers.
- ⇒ People were enraged when they remembered the land revenue settlement and how this dispossessed landlords.
- ⇒ The proclamations expressed widespread fear of Indians as the British might destroyed the caste and religions. Fear of converting into Christianity.
- ⇒ The attempt shows that the rebel leaders wanted to restore the Pre-British world of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

### **INTERPRETATION OF THE REVOLT OF 1857:**

- ⇒ Some believed that it was a Sepoy Mutiny as there were many military causes of the revolt.
- ⇒ Some believed that it was an organized Hindu-Muslim uprising and therefore named the revolution as the 1<sup>st</sup> War of Indian Independence.



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⇒ Some believed that it was a Muslim organized revolt but the view does not hold much ground as other communities also took part actively.

⇒ Modern historians observe that the revolt was started by the Sepoys but some disgruntled elements joined them.

⇒ So, we may conclude that the revolt began as a Sepoy Mutiny but it soon took the form of a national revolt. It must be admitted that the rising inspired national feelings among the people. It had encouraged the nations to liberate their motherland. Most of the national leaders agree that it was the First War of Indian Independence.

