

# THE FIRST WAR OF INDIAN INDEPENDENCE (1857 A.D.)

### ***We learn about the following in this chapter:***

- *Causes for the First War of Independence*
- *Immediate causes for the revolt*
- *Spread of the revolt and its nature*
- *Failure of the revolt and its effects*

With the objective of expanding their rule in India, the British had brought into force the Doctrine of Subsidiary Alliance and Doctrine of Lapse. Many provinces came into the control of the British because of these rules. As a result, Indians were upset. They were dissatisfied with the British administration too. This dissatisfaction surfaced as a major revolt in 1857. While some Indians called this 'The First War of Independence', British historians called it 'The Sepoy Mutiny'.

### **Causes for the First War of Independence:**

**Political causes:** Many kingdoms lost their rights due to the promulgation of Doctrine of Lapse brought about by the British. Satara, Jaipur, Jhansi, Udaipur and other kingdoms came under British control. Dalhousie cancelled the princely titles of the Nawabs of Tanjore and Carnatic kingdoms. The Moghul sultans, the Nawab of Oudh and other kings were stripped of their kingly status. Consequently, thousands of soldiers who were dependent on these kings, became unemployed. This

became a strong cause for the protest of 1857 against the British.

### ***Do you know this:***

***Doctrine of Lapse :***  
*Doctrine of Lapse: This policy was established by Lord Dalhousie during British rule. According to this policy, an Indian king could not transfer his kingdom to his adopted children in the absence of natural heirs. Thus, his kingdom came naturally under British rule.*

**Economic causes:** Due to the industrial revolution in England, Indian handicrafts and cottage industries suffered heavily. England, instead of being a trading country, became a hub of industries. The Indian craftsmen became unemployed. Primarily, the textile and wool industries became sick and people lost their jobs. The cottage industries too suffered a death blow. The British imposed a heavy tax on sale of Indian goods in England. Because of the zamindari system, the landlords, acting as commission agents between the Government and the farmers, exploited the farmers. The right given to the taluks to collect tax was withdrawn. An 'Inam Commission' was appointed and all the gifted lands ('Inam lands') were taken back. Due to this, the farmers felt insulted and experienced many financial problems. This too led to the revolt of farmers against the government.

**Administrative causes:** The British brought into force new civil and criminal laws. These were applicable only to Indians. English became the language of the courts. Most of the time the British judges favoured the British. The new rules were not understood by the common people.

**Military causes:** The condition of the Indian soldiers in the British army was pathetic. The status, salary and opportunities for promotion that British soldiers enjoyed were not given to Indian soldiers. The religious sentiments of the Indian soldiers were disturbed when they were forced to cross the oceans to serve on a foreign land.

### **Eruption of the Revolt:**

Most of the Indian soldiers in the British army believed that if they fought together, they could drive away the British from India. At that time, the soldiers were being given new rifles called 'Royal Enfield'. A rumour spread among the soldiers that the cartridges used in these rifles were greased with the fat of cow and pigs. While cows were sacred to the Hindus, pigs were blasphemous for Muslims. This incident became the immediate cause for the revolt.

The rumour that spread in the army troops at Barackpur led to severe dissatisfaction. When the British officers ordered the Indian soldiers to pull the safety catch with the help of their teeth, the soldiers rejected the command and revolted against their superiors. At this juncture, an Indian soldier named Mangal Pandey killed a British official. Subsequently, he was arrested, tried and hanged.

Meerut was a strong military base of the British. When the British ordered the Indian soldiers to use the greased cartridges, the soldiers refused to carry out the order. The soldiers were imprisoned. As a result, there was a revolt in Meerut. Indian soldiers rushed into the prison and released the soldiers jailed there. This became the spark that led to the fire of the War of Independence. Later, the group of soldiers went to Delhi from Meerut. They laid siege on the Red Fort and declared the Moghul king, Bahadur Shah II Emperor of India. Protesting soldiers from different parts of India reached Delhi. Consequently, the protest became serious. It spread like wild fire to Kanpur and Jhansi.

In Kanpur, Nana Saheb rose in protest. Tatya Tope was his assistant. In Jhansi, a revolt took place under the leadership of Queen Laxmibai. When Kanpur fell into the hands of the British, Tatya Tope came to Jhansi to help the Queen.



**Thathya Topi**

The heat of the revolt was felt in Lucknow too. Ultimately, Lucknow was taken over by the British.

The war spread to the south of river Yamuna. As a result, the soldiers in Jhansi felt encouraged. Jhansi Rani Laxmibai who was enraged by the Doctrine of Lapse, declared war against the British. She tied her adopted son to her back and fought in the war. She took Gwalior under her control. When the battle took place again with the British, the Queen laid down her life. Even today, the queen occupies a pride of place in the history of the independence struggle.



**Jhansi Rani  
Laxmibai**

## **Reasons for failure of the revolt:**

The First War of Independence of 1857 failed due to various reasons. The movement did not spread to the whole country. This struggle was intended to protect the interests of a few rather than getting freedom for the country. Instead of being an organized struggle, it erupted due to certain unexpected reasons. The unity among the British forces and lack of it among the Indian soldiers also led to the failure. There was no proper direction or proper leadership. In addition, there was a lack of strategy, expertise among soldiers, effective leadership, discipline and direction. Many provincial kings, on account of their loyalty to the British, did not support the struggle. The people lost confidence in the soldiers due to their arson and looting.

## **Effects of the revolt:**

The freedom struggle put an end to the administration of the East India Company, and the administration was taken over by the Queen of England. The administrative responsibility was handed over to the Secretary of Indian Affairs in the British Parliament. In 1858, the Queen of England made an announcement. This declaration has been called India's 'Magna Carta'. The following points were included in it:

- The agreements made by the East India Company with the kings were accepted.
- Ambitious expansion plans had to be given up.
- A stable government had to be provided to India
- There would be equality under law.
- The government would exhibit religious tolerance and not interfere in religious matters of the country.

The British realized that peaceful rule was not possible without support, trust and confidence of the Indian people. This gives new route to Indian freedom movement. Indians understood the inevitability of finding alternative routes to obtain freedom from the British.

## EXERCISES

### I Fill in the blanks with suitable words:

1. British historians refer to the 1857 revolt as \_\_\_\_\_.
2. The policy brought into force by Dalhousie was \_\_\_\_\_.
3. \_\_\_\_\_ killed the British Major during the 1857 revolt.
4. Jhansi Rani fought against British and took \_\_\_\_\_ under her control.

### II Discuss the following in groups and answer them:

1. What were the effects of the Doctrine of Lapse? Analyse.
2. The economic changes of the time were responsible for the 1857 revolt. How?
3. What were the factors that disturbed the religious sentiments of the soldiers during the 1857 revolt?
4. What were the immediate causes for the First War of Independence?
5. Make a list of the reasons for the failure of the revolt.
6. What were the features of the declaration of the British Queen in 1858?

### III Activities:

1. On the Indian map, mark the kingdoms which were taken over by the British with the help of the Doctrine of Lapse.
2. Organise a debate on "The 1857 revolt was the First War of Independence".

