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### Lesson at a Glance

- Since the mid-18th century, Nawabs and Rajas had gradually lost their **power** and **authority**. Their freedom reduced, their armed forces disbanded and their revenues and territories taken away.
- Many ruling families such as Rani Lakshmbai of Jhansi tried to negotiate with the company to protect their interest but they did not get success.
- Now the company began to plan to bring an **end to the Mughal dynasty**. To make this plan successful the company took several measures.
- The name of the Mughal king was removed from the coins minted by the Company.
- In 1849, it was announced that after the death of Bahadur Shah Zafar, the family of the king would be shifted out of the Red Fort and given another place in Delhi to reside in.
- In 1856, the Company decided that Bahadur Shah Zafar would be the **last Mughal king**, and after his death his descendants would be called **princes**.
- In the countryside peasants and zamindars resented the high taxes and the rigid methods of **revenue collection**.
- The Indian sepoy were unhappy about their pay, allowances and condition of service. Some of the Company's rule even violated their **religious sentiments**. Thus, everywhere there spread **discontentment**.
- The responses to the reforms brought in the Indian society by the British were also not positive, although some reforms were essential.
- The Company passed laws to stop the **practice of sati**.
- English-language education was promoted.
- In 1850, a new law was passed to make **conversion to Christianity** easier.
- Some Indians thought that the British were destroying their religion and their social customs while some wanted to change existing social practices.

- By and by people began to view the British as their common enemy and therefore they rose up against this enemy at the same time.
- In May, 1857 a massive rebellion started that threatened the company's very presence in India.
- Sepoy mutinied in several places beginning from Meerut and a large number of people from different sections of society rose up in rebellion.
- On 29 March 1857, **Mangal Pandey**, a young soldier, was hanged to death for attacking his officers in Barrackpore. This was too much for the sepoys. They refused to do the army drill using the new cartridges, which were suspected of being coated with the fat of cows and pigs. Thus, tension grew between the Company and sepoys.
- The sepoys were determined to bring an end to the Company's rule. From Meerut they rushed to Delhi.
- As the news of their arrival spread, the regiments stationed in Delhi also rose up in rebellion. They killed several British officers, seized arms and ammunitions, set buildings on fire.
- They met the Mughal emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar and proclaimed him as their leader.
- The Mughal emperor got support from the rulers and chiefs of the country and together they rose against the British power.
- After the British were routed from Delhi, there was no uprising for a few days. Then, a spurt of **mutiny** began.
- Regiment after regiment mutinied and took off to join other troops at nodal points like Delhi, Kanpur and Lucknow. After them, the people of the towns and villages also rose up in rebellion and rallied around local leaders, zamindars and chiefs who were prepared to fight the British. Thus, a widespread revolt shook the British confidence over ruling India.
- The Company had no way out except suppressing the revolt with all its might. It brought reinforcements from England, passed new laws so that the rebels could be convicted with ease, and then moved into the storm centres of the revolt.
- The Company recaptured Delhi from the rebel forces in September 1857. Bahadur Shah Zafar was tried in court and sentenced to life imprisonment. He along with his wife were sent to prison in Rangoon.
- But people in other areas still continued to resist and battle the British. The British had to fight for two years to suppress the massive forces of popular rebellion.

- The British had regained control of the country by the end of 1859 but they could not carry on ruling the land with the same policies any more.
- The British Parliament passed a new Act in 1858 and **transferred the powers** of the East India Company to the British Crown in order to ensure a more responsible management of Indian affairs.
- The **Governor-General** of India was given the title of **Viceroy**, that is, a personal representative of the Crown. In this way the British government took direct responsibility for ruling India.
- All ruling chiefs of the country were allowed to pass on their kingdoms to their heirs, including adopted sons. However, they were made to acknowledge the **British Queen as their Sovereign Paramount**.

### ■ TEXTBOOK QUESTIONS SOLVED ■

#### Let's Recall

1. *What was the demand of Rani Lakshmibai of Jhansi that was refused by the British?*

**Ans.** 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 British refused her plea.

2. *What did the British do to protect the interests of those who converted to Christianity?*

**Ans.** Those who converted to Christianity would inherit the property of his ancestors.

3. *What objections did the sepoys have to the new cartridges that they were asked to use?*

**Ans.** The sepoys objected that the new cartridges that they were asked to use were coated with the fat of cows and pigs.

4. *How did the last Mughal emperor live the last years of his life?*

**Ans.** The last Mughal emperor lived a very pathetic life during the last years of his life. He was tried in court and sentenced to life imprisonment. He and his wife were sent to prison in Rangoon. He died there after four years.

## Let's Discuss

**Q. 5.** What could be the reasons for the confidence of the British rulers about their position in India before May 1857?

**Ans.** The reasons are given below:

(i) Since the mid-18th century Nawabs and Rajas had gradually lost their authority and honour. Residents had been stationed in many courts, the freedom of the rulers reduced, their armed forces disbanded and their revenues and territories taken away by stages.

(ii) The Company decided to end the Mughal dynasty. In 1849, Governor-General Dalhousie announced that after the death of Bahadur Shah Zafar the family of the king would be shifted out of the Red Fort. In 1856, Governor-General Canning decided that Bahadur Shah Zafar would be the last Mughal emperor and after his death his descendants would be recognised as princes.

**Q. 6.** What impact did Bahadur Shah Zafar's support to the rebellion have on the people and the ruling families?

**Ans.** Bahadur Shah Zafar's support to the rebellion boosted the morale of the people and the ruling families. They became united to fight the British authority with double spirit.

People of the towns and villages rose up in rebellion and rallied around local leaders, *zamindars* and chiefs. Nana Saheb, the adopted son of the late Peshwa Baji Rao, who lived near Kanpur, gathered armed forces and expelled the British garrison from the city. He proclaimed himself Peshwa. He declared that he was a Governor under emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar.

In Lucknow, Birjis Qadr, the son of the deposed Nawab Wajid Ali-Shah, was proclaimed the new Nawab. He too acknowledged the suzerainty of Bahadur Shah Zafar.

In Jhansi, Rani Lakshmbai joined the rebel sepoys and fought the British alongwith Tantia Tope, the general of Nana Saheb.

**Q. 7.** How did the British succeed in securing the submission of the rebel landowners of Awadh?

**Ans.** The British succeeded in securing the submission of the rebel landowners of Awadh by providing them inheritance rights, i.e. they would enjoy the traditional rights over their land. The British also exempted them from taxes.

**Q. 8.** In what ways did the British change their policies as a result of the rebellion of 1857?

**Ans.** As a result of the rebellion of 1857, the British changed their policies. Following are the important changes that the British made:

(i) The powers of the East India Company was transferred to the British Crown in order to ensure a more responsible management of Indian affairs.

(ii) The Governor-General of India was given the title of Viceroy, that is, a personal representative of the Crown.

(iii) All ruling chiefs of the country were assured that their territory would never be annexed in future. They were allowed to pass on their kingdoms to their heirs, including adopted son. But they had to acknowledge the British queen as their Sovereign Paramount.

(iv) It was decided that the proportion of Indian soldiers in the army would be reduced and the number of European soldiers would be increased. It was also decided that instead of recruiting soldiers from Awadh, Bihar, Central India and South India more soldiers would be recruited from among the Gorkhas, Sikhs and Pathans.

(v) The British decided to respect the customary religions and social practices of the people in India.

## Let's Do

**Q. 9.** Find out stories and songs remembered by people in your area or your family about San Satavan Ki Ladaai. What memories do people cherish about the great uprising?

**Ans.** Students are suggested to visit the library of their school and collect songs and stories related to the revolt of 1857.

**9. 10.** Find out more about Rani Lakshmibai of Jhansi. In what ways would she have been an unusual woman for her times?

**Ans.** Rani Lakshmibai of Jhansi played a vital role in the revolt of 1857. She fought bravely with the British force. She challenged the British law which had debarred her adopted son from being the ruler. She was one of the great forces behind the revolt against the British. The matchless courage that she showed is rare.

