

Part-III: Chapter 2
REBELS AND THE RAJ: The Revolt of 1857 and its Representations
Revision Notes

Key concepts in nutshell

- **Rebels and the Raj - The revolt of 1857 and its representation Pattern of Rebellion**
- People from different walks of life plunged into the revolt - due to their hatred against the oppressive policies of the British
Centres of the Revolt - Lucknow, Kanpur, Bareilly, Meerut, Arrah in Bihar.
- **Leaders** - Rani Lakshmi Bai of Jhansi, Nana Saheb, Kunwar Singh, Bakt Khan, Begum Hazrat Mehal, Tatya Tope.
- **Awadh revolt** - direct annexation policy of Dalhousie - 1856. Hatred provoked - dispossessed taluqdars of Awadh, Injustice done to Nawab Wajid Ali Shah of Awadh embittered the people.
- **Revolt of the sepoys:**
 1. Policy of social superiority of British.
 2. Interference in religious matters - greased cartridges issues.
- **The vision of unity:**
 1. Hindu Muslim unity
 2. Search for alternative powers
 3. Rebels established parallel administration, in Delhi, Lucknow, and Kanpur after capturing centers of British power. Later they failed.
 4. The British policy of repression.
- **Repression - 1857** - North India was brought under a strict law to prolonged attack of British - one from Calcutta to North India, another from Punjab to recover Delhi, 27,000 Muslims hanged.
- **Image of the Revolt** - Pictorial images produced by British and Indians - posters and cartoons.
- **The performance of terror:**
 1. Execution of rebels Nationalist imageries.
 2. Inspiration to nationalists celebration as the first war of Independence - leaders



depicted as heroic figures.

1. PATTERN OF THE REBELLION

How the mutinies began?

- I. The sepoys began their action with a signal, firing of the evening gun or the sounding of the bugle.
- II. They seized the bell of the arms and plundered the treasury.
- III. They attacked the government buildings – the jail, treasury, telephone office, record room, bungalows –burning all records.
- IV. Everything and everybody connected with the white man became a target.
- V. In major towns like Kanpur, Lucknow, and Bareilly, moneylenders and rich became the objects of the rebels.

2. Leaders and followers

- I. To fight the British, leadership and organisation were required, and for this, they turned towards the Mughal ruler Bahadur Shah who agreed to be the nominal leader of the rebellion.
- II. In Kanpur, the sepoys and the people of the town agreed to support Nana Sahib.
- III. In Jhansi, the Rani was forced to assume the leadership of the uprising.
- IV. Kunwar Singh, a local Zamindar in Arrah in Bihar, too took the leadership.
- V. The local leaders emerged, urging peasants, zamindars, and tribals to revolt eg - Shah Mal mobilized the villagers of pargana Barout in Uttar Pradesh; Gonooa, a tribal cultivator of Singhbhum in Chotanagpur, became a rebel leader of the Kol tribals of the region.

3. Rumors and prophecies

- I. There was the rumor that the British government had hatched a gigantic conspiracy to destroy the caste and religion of the Hindus and Muslim.
- II. The rumour said that the British had mixed the bone dust of cows and pigs into the flour that was sold in the market.
- III. The sepoys and the common people refused to touch the atta.
- IV. There was a fear and suspicion that the British wanted to convert Indians to Christianity.
- V. The sepoy had the fear about bullets coated with the fats of cows and pigs, and biting those bullets would corrupt their caste and religion.

4. Why did the people believe in the rumors?



- I. The British adopted policies aimed at reforming Indian society by introducing Western education, Western ideas, and Western institutions.
- II. With the cooperation of sections of Indian society, they set up English medium schools, colleges, and universities which taught Western sciences and the liberal arts.
- III. The British established laws to abolish customs like Sati (1629) and to permit the remarriage of Hindu widows.
- IV. The British introduced their own system of administration, their own laws and their own methods of land settlements and land revenue collection.

5. AWADH IN REVOLT

"A cherry that will drop into our mouth one day"

- I. In 1851, Governor General Lord Dalhousie described the kingdom of Awadh as "a cherry that will drop into our mouth one day" and five years later it was annexed to the British Empire.
- II. The Subsidiary Alliance had been imposed on Awadh.
- III. The terms of this alliance the nawab had to disband his military force of the British to position their troops within the kingdom and act in accordance with the advice of the British.
- IV. Deprived of his armed forces the nawab became increasingly dependent on the British to maintain law and order within the kingdom.
- V. He could no longer assert control over the rebellious chief and taluqdars.

6. WHAT THE REBELS WANTED

The vision of unity

- I. The rebellion was seen as a war in which both Hindus and Muslims had equally to lose or gain.
- II. The ishtahars (notifications) harked back to the pre-British Hindu-Muslim past and glorified the coexistence of different communities under Mughal Empire.
- III. In 1857, the British spent Rs. 50,000 to incite the Hindu population against the Muslims but the attempt failed.

7. Against the symbols of oppression

- I. The land revenue settlements had dispossessed the landholders, both big and small and foreign commerce had driven artisans and weavers to ruin.
- II. Every aspect of the British rule was attacked and the firangi accused of destroying a way of life that was familiar and cherished.



- III. The proclamations expressed the widespread fear that the British were bent on destroying the caste and religions of Hindus and Muslims and converting them to Christianity.
- IV. People were urged to come together and fight to save their livelihood, their faith, their honor, their identity.

8. IMAGES OF THE REVOLT

- I. Official accounts of colonial administration and military men left their versions in letters and diaries, autobiography and official histories.
- II. The changing British attitudes were evident through the innumerable memos and notes, assessments of situations.
- III. The stories of the revolt that were published in British newspapers and magazines narrated the in gory detail the violence of the mutineers.
- IV. The pictorial images were produced by the British and Indians - paintings, pencil drawings, cartoons, bazaar prints.

9. Celebrating the saviors

- I. British pictures offer a variety of images that were meant to provoke a range of different emotions and reactions.
- II. Some of them commemorate the British heroes who saved the English and repressed the rebels.
- III. “Relief of Lucknow “, was painted by Thomas Jones Barker In 1859.

10. English women and the honour of Britain

- I. The British government was asked to protect the honor of innocent women and ensure the safety of helpless children.
- II. Artists expressed as well as shaped these sentiments through their visual representations of trauma and suffering.

11. The performances of terror

- I. The urge for vengeance and retribution was expressed in the brutal way in which the rebels were executed.
- II. They were blown from guns or hung from the gallows.
- III. Images of these executions were widely circulated through popular journals.
- IV. When Governor General Canning declared that a gesture of leniency and a show of mercy would help in winning back the loyalty of the sepoys, he was mocked in the British press.



12. Nationalist imageries

- I. The nationalist movement drew its inspiration from the events of 1857.
- II. A whole world of nationalist imagination was woven around the revolt.
- III. It was celebrated as the first war of independence in which all sections of the people of India came together to fight against imperial rule.
- IV. Art and literature had helped in keeping alive the memories 1857.

Timeline

Time Line	
1801	Subsidiary Alliance introduced by Wellesley in Awadh
1856	Nawab Wajid Ali Shah deposed; Awadh annexed
1856-57	Summary revenue settlements introduced in Awadh by the British
1857, 10 May	Mutiny starts in Meerut
11-12 May	Delhi garrisons revolts; Bahadur shah accepts nominal leadership
20-27 May	Sepoys mutiny in Aligarh, Etawah, Mainpuri, Etah
30 May	Rising in Lucknow
May-June	Mutiny turns into a general revolts of the people
30 June	British suffer defeat in the battle of Chinhat
25 sept	British forces under Havelock and Outram entre the Residency in Lucknow
July	Shah mal Killed in battle
1858 June	Rani Jhani killed in battle