

1. The battle of Plassey marked the beginning of political supremacy of the English East India Company in India. Elucidate.

Introduction

The Battle of Plassey was a decisive victory of the British East India company over the Nawab of Bengal and his French allies. The battle consolidated the company's rule in Bengal by defeating one of the strongest dynasties of the time. It was the first major event of East India company meddling into Indian politics and establish political supremacy over Indian provinces.

Body

It was the beginning of the political supremacy of the British as

- Sovereignty of British over Calcutta was recognized and established. The free trade and revenue from Bengal provided the company resources to expand their rule.
- British were able to install a puppet nawab 'Mir Jafar' who gave them
 - A large sum of money as war compensation which was used by the British in their future conquests.
 - Zamindari rights of Bengal paraganas which upheld the taxing rights of British.
 - Allowed the British to maintain their army at the expense of Bengal (which later developed into subsidiary alliance by Wellesley).
 - Robert Clive controlled the political affairs of the Bengal who appointed a resident to assist (aka control) Mir Jafar in administration.
- It resulted in the ousting of the French from Bengal and left British without any rivals in economic exploitation of Bengal.
- It displayed the military supremacy of the British which helped in subsequent diplomatic efforts in expansion of British empire.
- Further, it is on the success of Battle of Plassey, British built upon their military power and allies which helped to defeat rivals in subsequent wars like Battle of Buxar etc.,
- It was after the Battle of Plassey (and later Battle of Buxar) Robert Clive started to introduce the political administration of British in India. This later evolved into regulating act of 1773 and so on.

Thus, the British started to control the politics of Bengal and began to rule.

Conclusion

Battle of Plassey was of immense historical importance. It paved the way for the British mastery of Bengal and eventually whole of India. As Historian Edward Thompson noted, it boosted British prestige and the rich revenues of Bengal enabled them to organize a strong army. It also played a decisive role in Anglo-French rivalry and made the British the only contender of the Indian empire.

2. The rebellion of 1857 was something more than a sepoy mutiny, but something less than a national revolt. Do you agree? Substantiate your views.

Introduction

The 1857 revolt was much more than a mere product of sepoy discontent. It was the end result of accumulated grievances of the people, rulers, zamindars etc., over the company's administration especially the economic exploitation built over the time. Yet, the spread and extent of revolt shows that it was less than a national revolt with an idea of 'India'.

Body

Background:

There are multiple views about the nature of 1857 revolt which are listed below

- Sepoy mutiny: as some British historians like John Seeley observed – “it was a wholly unpatriotic and selfish sepoy mutiny with no central leadership”.
- Military outbreak as some of the historians like K. Datta observed which was taken advantage by certain sections of discontented landlords and princes. Though this may be true up to an extent, the nature of revolt had a nationalist feeling over the time.
- Planned war of national independence: as nationalists like V D Savarkar interpreted, the revolt was inspired by the intent of self-rule by the Indians.

More than sepoy mutiny:

- It involved many sections of the civilian population (artisans, peasants etc.) and not just the sepoys. As per an estimate, more than half of the people dead are civilians.
- The revolt as said by Nehru was also an uprising against the feudal class. The instances where villagers attacked and burnt moneylender books shows the revolutionary character of the revolt.
- The revolt spread all over north India which involved various princes, local chieftains and not just led by sepoys and military commanders.
- The mutineers looked up to the Mughal King to lead them with the intent of self-rule. This shows that it was an intent for freedom from British rule and not just discontent among sepoys.
- The sepoys who revolted for the reason of Pig-Cow greased cartridges later used the same cartridges to fight the British. This shows, the revolt was against the British rule and policies per-se than just about sepoys' discontent.

Less than a national revolt:

- All-India participation was absent which would have made it national revolt. The eastern, southern and western parts of India remained more or less unaffected.
- The revolt was not organized by any institution or a group with a proper structure with a defined goal like the Indian national congress.
- All classes did not join.
 - Big zamindars, Taluqdars, Money-lenders and merchants helped the British.
 - Educated Indians trusted British as way of modernization and did not support the mutineers.
 - Most Indian rulers refused to join, and many rulers like Holkar, Sindhia etc., gave active help to the British.
- No Unified Ideology: There was no idea of an Indian nation and the mutineers had no concrete plan to overthrow British.
- As R C Majumdar considers it was neither the first, nor national nor a war of independence as major parts of the country is not affected.

Conclusion

Thus, the 1857 revolt as British called it was indeed a mutiny of soldiers. However, when it spread among civilians it assumed the civilian character and instilled nationalist feelings. The observation by S N Sen summarizes it "The Mutiny became a Revolt and assumed a political

character when the mutineers of Meerut placed themselves under the king of Delhi. What began as a fight for religion ended as a war of independence. “

3. In the public discourse of early nationalism, religion played an important role. However, a distinction has to be made between the two strands that coexisted during this period- one being a revivalist tendency that invoked the sense of an Indian nation based on Hindu religious symbols and history, and the other- a reformist one that attempted to bring changes in Hindu social organization. Comment.

Introduction

The 19th century was the time of emergence of first stages of Indian nationalism, and beginning of mutual interaction between politics and religion. Unlike the notion of Nationalism as it appeared in Europe as a secular doctrine, Indian religion has had important role in nationalism so that this area evidenced the growth of religious nationalist movements.

Body

Revivalist tendency that invoked the sense of an Indian nation based on Hindu religious symbols and history

- The first stirrings of national awakening in India were visible through the religious reform movements of the 19th century such as the Arya Samaj, the Rama Krishna Mission, the Theosophical Society, and others. These Movements directly and indirectly have had important impact on nationalism movement during 19th and 20th centuries.
- Religious symbolism was frequently and effectively used to mobilize peasants to secure their rights through organized struggle. Swami Sahajanand, one of the successful organizers of peasant movements in the 1930s, was a Hindu religious activist who made extensive use of religious symbolism and traditional ties.
- The whole of the Extremist movement was a call to go back to Indian ancient religious and cultural traditions and following the Hindu scriptures as its religious and philosophical weapons to meet the challenge of an alien civilization.
- Mahatma Gandhi looked to religion as a unifying force and used the revivalist method to awaken the people. His motive in appealing to the religious faith of the people was to use this faith as an instrument to national awakening and to give an ethical and moral basis to the political struggle.

However Despite their religious origin or regional source, the spirit and content of some of these tendencies were designed for wider appeal and transcended regional barriers. The

significant role of a song like 'Bande Mataram' in national mobilization across regions was hard to dispute. The references to historical events or religious symbols in literary works in regional languages often alienated members of particular religious communities. For instance, some historical novels in 19th century Bengal, written by nationally prominent authors of Hindu origin were criticized for their bias against Muslim characters or episodes of history.

Reformist tendencies that attempted to bring changes in Hindu social organization

- **The Brahmo Samaj:** Established in 1828 and Led by Raja Ram Mohan Roy. He tried to interpret the highest elements of Islam, Christianity and modern Rationalism or Humanism and transformed them into a single creed which he discovered in the ancient Upanishadic philosophy of his own community.
- **The Prarthana Samaj:** Established in Bombay by Dr. Atma Ram Pandurang in 1876 with the objective of rational worship and social reform. The two great members of this Samaj were Shri R.C. Bhandarkar and Justice Mahadev Govind Ranade. They devoted themselves to the work of social reform such as inter-caste dining, intercaste marriage, widow remarriage and improvement of the lot of women and depressed classes. Prarthana Samaj's central idea was one positive belief in the unity of God.
- Gandhi imparted a powerful symbolism and great depth and diffusion to reform Hindu social organization. He converted large and unresolved issues of Indian society into charismatic symbols. He gave to the vast masses of "untouchables" the name of "Harijans. Besides, Mahatma Gandhi used the concept of 'Rama-raj'. He relates it to a "higher" utopian goal, namely the transformation of society by religious reform.

Conclusion

Indian nationalist leaders used religion to mobilize the mass against British Empire for gaining independence. Almost all trends used the religion in the line of their goals. It was shown how these leaders used the religious symbols, the religion's power of solidarity to integration of Hindu mass and consequently achieved coordination and unity against the same enemy.

4. Examine the factors that led to the rise of an extremist trend within the Congress circles? What were the most characteristic attributes of this trend? Analyse.

Introduction

When the failure of moderate politics became quite apparent by the end of the 19th century, reaction set in from within the congress circles and this new trend is referred to as the

'Extremists' trend. This extremism developed in three main regions and under the leadership of three important individuals- Bipin Chandra Pal in Bengal, Bal Gangadhar Tilak in Maharashtra and Lala Lajpat Rai in Punjab.

Body

The factors that led to the rise of and extremist trend within the Congress circles

- Frustration with moderate politics was definitely the major reason behind the rise of extremists' reaction. The congress under moderate leadership was being governed by an undemocratic constitution, although after repeated attempts by Tilak, a new constitution was drafted and rectified in 1899, it was never given a proper trial.
- Moderate politics reached a dead end as most of their demands remained unfulfilled and this was certainly a major reason behind the rise of extremism.
- The failure of the Moderates to win any notable success other than the expansion of the legislative councils by the Indian Councils Act (1892).
- The partition of Bengal in 1905 opened the eyes of the Indians to the true colors of the British rulers.

Characteristic attributes of the extremists trend

- The extremist goal was 'swaraj'. This, at that time either meant complete autonomy and freedom from British control, or a total Indian control over the administration.
- Extremists called for boycotting of foreign goods and the use of swadeshi goods.
- They vehemently opposed the appeasement policy of the moderates. Leaders like Tilak gave the slogan, "Swaraj is my birth right and I shall have it".
- They were strongly against British imperialistic policies in India. They took pride in Indian culture and history. They looked at the ancient scriptures for inspiration and courage.
- They were very vocal in their opposition to the British rule unlike the moderates who had faith in British justice. They did not believe in loyalty to the British Crown.
- They tried to instill self-respect and patriotism in the people by invoking the great heroes of past like Shivaji maharaja, Rani Laxmibai etc.

Conclusion

The extremists drew inspiration from India's past, invoked the great episodes in the history of the Indian people and tried to infuse national pride and self-respect among them. Idealizing western culture gives the Indians an inferiority complex. The rich history of India was revived by them, especially with regard to Hindu history and ideologies.

5. The Swadeshi movement may be described as the best expression of extremist politics. Comment.

Introduction

The swadeshi movement had its genesis in the anti-partition movement which was started to oppose the British decision to divide Bengal. The movement was led majorly by leaders like Tilak, Lala Lajpat rai, Bipin Chandra pal and an element of extremism was incorporated by the overt boycott of British goods.

Body

Extremist politics:

- Methods: The movement was beyond the methods of moderates (petitions, prayers and political protests) as it involved passive resistance in the form of boycott.
- Goal: The end goal of swadeshi movement was 'Swaraj' and not just autonomy and more representation in administration which was the ideology of moderates.
E.g. Indian national congress declared 'Swaraj' as end goal in 1905 congress session.
- Emphasis was given to Atma Shakti (self-reliance) which was extremist ideology while moderates depended on British for any improvement in the administration.
E.g. Establishment of National schools, swadeshi enterprises and so on.
- New forms of extremist struggle: Boycott of foreign goods, public meetings and processions, formations of samitis for mass mobilization.
- Role of masses: every struggle during swadeshi movement involved the masses who played limited role in moderate's style struggle.
 - Students: came out in large numbers to propagate and practice the swadeshi idea.
 - Women took active part in processions.

- Labor class and trade unions participated with leaders like Chidambaram pillai.
- Revolutionaries: on the sidelines, many revolutionaries like Sachin Sanyal, Rashbihari Bose and others who led the movement extended it to include the element of force which was an ideal of extremists.

Not all extremist politics:

- Moderate leaders like Surendranath Bannerjee, Pherozshah Mehta etc., played major role in leading the movement who were against extremist ways of protest.
- The movement was not able to incorporate the ideas of non-cooperation and passive resistance which were the main ideas of extremists.
- Extremists were expelled from the congress for difference of opinion with moderates in 1907 Surat session. This shows that the movement was still an extension of moderate form of struggle rather than led by Extremist ideology.

Conclusion

The 1857 revolt as British called it was indeed a mutiny of soldiers. However, when it spread among civilians it assumed the civilian character and instilled nationalist feelings. The observation by S N Sen summarizes it “The Mutiny became a Revolt and assumed a political character when the mutineers of Meerut placed themselves under the king of Delhi. What began as a fight for religion ended as a war of independence. “

