

Unit - 7

Anti-Colonial Movements and the Birth of Nationalism



Learning Objectives

To acquaint ourselves with

- The nature of tribal and peasant revolts against the British
- Contributory factors for the outbreak of the Great Rebellion of 1857 and the subsequent changes in the British approach to governing India
- Factors leading to the formation of the Indian National Congress and the perspectives of the early nationalists
- Divide and rule policy of the British behind the Partition of Bengal (1905) and the launch of Swadeshi movement in Bengal
- Background for the launch of Home Rule Movement



Introduction

On 23 June 1757 the Nawab of Bengal Siraj-ud-daulah was defeated by the East India Company at the Battle of Plassey. The battle was orchestrated by Robert Clive, commander-in-chief of the East India Company, who managed to get the clandestine support from Mir Jafar, the uncle of Siraj-ud-daulah and the chief of the Nawab's army. Clive was helped by the Jagat Seths (moneylenders from Bengal) who were aggrieved by Siraj-ud-daulah's policy. Between 1757 and 1760, the company received ₹ 22.5 million from Mir Jafar, who became the new *Nawab* of Bengal. The same money was later invested to propel the industrial revolution in Britain, which rapidly mechanised the British textile industry. On the other hand, India was led to the path of de-industrialisation and forced to create a market for the products manufactured in Britain. The plunder of India by the East India Company continued for another 190 years.

In this lesson the story of resistance and a varied range of response against the British rule in the Indian subcontinent from the early and mid-nineteenth century to the early twentieth century are outlined.

7.1 Peasant and Tribal Resistance

While the urban elite of India was busy responding to the western ideas and rationality by engaging in various socio-religious reform movements, a far more aggressive response to the British rule emerged in rural India. The traditional elite and peasantry along with the tribals revolted. They were not necessarily seeking the removal of British but rather the restoration of the pre-colonial order.

There were nearly a hundred peasant uprisings during British rule. They can be classified into the following categories: