

Write in Brief

1. Write a note on:

(a) What was meant by the 'civilising mission' of the colonisers: The European countries acquired colonies in the East Asian countries to exploit their natural resources. Like other European countries the French also propagated that it was their mission to bring the benefits of civilization to backward people. They posed that they were driven by the idea of the civilizing mission. Like the British in India, the French claimed they were bringing modern civilization to Vietnam. They considered that it was their duty to bring modern ideas into their colonies even at the cost of destroying the local culture, beliefs, etc.

(b) Huynh Phu So: Huynh Phu So was the founder of a nationalist movement called Hoa Hao. He performed miracles and helped the poor. His criticism against useless expenditure had a wide appeal. He also opposed the sale of child brides, gambling and the use of alcohol and opium. The French tried to suppress the movement inspired by Huynh Phu So. They declared him mad, called him the Mad Bonze, and put him in a mental asylum. But the doctor, who had to prove him mad, became his follower. Finally, he was exiled to Laos and many of his followers were sent to concentration camps.

2. Explain the following:

(a) Only one-third of the students in Vietnam would pass the school-leaving examinations.

(b) The French began building canals and draining lands in the Mekong delta.

(c) The government made the Saigon Native Girls School take back the students it had expelled.

(d) Rats were most common in the modern, newly built areas of Hanoi.

Answer

(a) Only one-third of the students in Vietnam would pass the school-leaving examinations because the French colonial administration followed a deliberate policy of failing students in their final year examinations so that they could not qualify for better-paid jobs. Only the wealthy Vietnamese could afford enrolment in these expensive schools, and to add to that, very few would pass the school-leaving examinations.

(b) The French began building canals and draining lands in the Mekong delta for increased cultivation. This was done under a garb to "civilise" Vietnam on a European model, but it was actually an economic idea meant to increase rice production and subsequent export of rice to the international market.

(c) When the French principal of the Saigon Native Girls School expelled the students protesting another student's expulsion, there was widespread remonstrance. Considering the gravity of the situation, the government decided to control the intensity of the protests by providing an outlet-making the school take back the students.

(d) Rats were most common in the modern, newly built areas of Hanoi because the modern and apparently hygienic sewage system provided ideal breeding grounds for rodents apart from being a good transport system as well, for the rats. Sewage from the old city was

drained out into the river or overflowed in the streets during heavy rains. The large sewers now became a protected breeding and living space for rats. Hanoi, despite its “modernity”, became the chief cause of the plague in 1903.

3. Describe the ideas behind the Tonkin Free School. To what extent is it a typical example of colonial ideas in Vietnam?

Answer

Like other colonisers, the French also thought that they were on a civilising mission. Thus the Tonkin Free School was opened to give Western education. The school taught science, hygiene and French, other than the common subjects. For these three subjects the students had to attend evening classes and also pay separately. The students were not only made to attend these classes but they were asked to sport modern looks too. A typical example of this was that Vietnamese were asked to cut off their long hair and adopt a short hair cut which was absolutely against their culture.

4. What was Phan Chu Trinh’s objective for Vietnam? How were his ideas different from those of Phan Boi Chau?

Answer

Phan Chu Trinh’s objective for Vietnam was to make it a democratic republic, along the western ideals of liberty. He accused the French of not following their own national ideals, and demanded for the setting up of legal and educational institutions alongside the development of agriculture and industries.

Unlike Phan Boi Chau, Phan Chu Trinh was extremely opposed to the monarchy. Hence, their ideas had at their roots this fundamental difference.

Discuss

1. With reference to what you have read in this chapter, discuss the influence of China on Vietnam’s culture and life.

Answer

The influence of China on Vietnam’s culture and life was multifarious before the French colonised Vietnam. Even when the latter gained independence in 1945, the rulers maintained the use of Chinese governance systems and culture. The elites were vastly influenced by Chinese culture and life, as has been elucidated in Phan Boi Chau’s book “The History of the Loss of Vietnam”. Chinese language and Confucianism were followed by the upper classes in Vietnam. In 1911, when the Chinese Republic was set up, Vietnamese students followed suit in organising the Association for the Restoration of Vietnam. Vietnamese men also kept their hair long – a Chinese tradition.

2. What was the role of religious groups in the development of anti-colonial feelings in Vietnam?

Answer

Religion had always played a pivotal role in the lives of people in Vietnam. Vietnam's religious beliefs were a mix of Buddhism, Confucianism and local customs. Christianity looked down upon their reverence for the supernatural. In 1868, the Scholars' Revolt protested against the tyrannical spread of Christianity, and though the movement was defeated, it inspired others to follow suit. The Hoa Hoa movement in 1939 drew upon popular religious ideas of the nineteenth century, and its leader Huynh Phu So was a famous entity. These groups were not in tandem with political parties which tended to look down upon their activities with discomfort. Nevertheless, religious movements were successful in arousing anti-imperialist tendencies in the Vietnamese people.

3. Explain the causes of the US involvement in the war in Vietnam. What effect did this involvement have on life within the US itself?

Answer

The US got involved in the war in Vietnam because it feared that a communist government would come to power in Vietnam after the National Liberation Front formed a coalition with the Ho Chi Minh government in the north, against Ngo Dinh Diem's regime. US policy-planners feared a spread of communism to other countries in the area.

This involvement in the Vietnam war affected life within the US itself because of widespread public dissent. Only university graduates were exempt from compulsory service in the army and this caused even more anger amongst the minorities and working-class families.

4. Write an evaluation of the Vietnamese war against the US from the point of
(a) a porter on the Ho Chi Minh trail.
(b) a woman soldier.

Answer

a) From 1965 to 1972, the US-Vietnam War continued and caused losses to both US and Vietnam.

The Vietnamese people suffered human and property losses, yet they never stopped their struggle for freedom. Here it is important to mention the role played by the porters in getting freedom and unity of Vietnam. The porters set out without fear on the Ho Chi Minh Trail which was a great expansive network of roads and footpaths. The heroic porters carried as much as 25 kg to 70 kg of weight on their backs or bicycles. They did not fear that they might fall over in the deep valleys. They bravely walked on the narrow, dangerous roads that marked the treacherous routes. They also did not feel afraid of being shot down by aircraft guns. They put all their fears aside and walked on to maintain the supply line. This fact showed that the porters were heroic and patriotic.

b) The Vietnamese women played an important role in the US-Vietnam War. They were both warriors and workers. As warriors and soldiers, the Vietnamese women constructed six air strips, they neutralised thousands of bombs and went on to shoot down fifteen planes. There were 1.5 million Vietnamese women in the regular army, the militia, the local forces

and professional teams. The women workers were also engaged as porters, nurses and construction workers.

5. What was the role of women in the anti-imperial struggle in Vietnam? Compare this with the role of women in the nationalist struggle in India.

Answer

Women played a crucial role in the anti-imperial struggle in Vietnam. Women who rebelled against social conventions were idealised and rebel women of the past were likewise celebrated. Trieu Au was a popular figure in nationalist tales. In the 1960s, women were represented as brave soldiers and workers. They assisted in nursing wounded soldiers, constructing underground tunnels and fighting the enemy. Interestingly, between 1965 and 1975, 70-80% of the youth working on the Ho Chi Minh trail were women.

Compared to this very direct and active participation of Vietnamese women in the anti-imperial struggle, India women did not play a very dynamic role in the nationalist struggle of India against Great Britain. They followed Gandhian ideals of boycotting foreign goods and picketing liquor shops, but mainstream politics was controlled by men; although women like Sarojini Naidu, Kamla Nehru and Kasturba Gandhi were keenly involved.