

History of the revolt of 1857 history essay



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Took place in Meerut, was one of the most important events that occurred in the historical background of South Asia. It was commonly known as the Sepoy Rebellion. It was mainly important due to the fact that it was a very first attempt to gaining independence of India by all means of going against the British rule directed by the British East India Company. There are several different factors that led to the convergence of this revolt which include: Dalhousie's annexation of Awadh in 1856, role of the greased cartridges of rifles, the siege of Kanpur, the dissatisfaction of Indian civilians towards the British economic and social policies over many decades, and the aftermath of the revolutionary uprising.

Before the revolt had even begun, there was a wide selection criteria of recruitment of sepoys based on caste and experience. In 1772, Warren Hastings was appointed the first Governor-General of the East India Company's Indian territories, with a task of setting up ordered system of government in British India. One of his first undertakings was expansion of company's army base. This move was taken to support establishment of strong and permanent civil administrative functioning throughout Indian subcontinent (Metcalf & M, 56). The Company heavily recruited Indian soldiers in the army. The recruited Indian army man " sepoy" was a mix of men from Hindu and Muslim societies. Hastings insisted on recruiting soldiers from higher Hindu castes, like Rajputs and Brahmins, and rejected those who had served Nawab as unreliable. The Company also adopted military practices to accommodate cast and religious customs of Indian soldiers to avoid any social grievance amongst them. This high cast ritual status left government vulnerable to protests, whenever sepoys detected the

infringement of their rights and social and religious customs (Metcalf & M, 61). The sepoys showed signs of dissatisfaction throughout the first half of nineteenth century over British Company carelessly adding new provocations, such as the passage of General Services Enlistment Act of 1856, which required soldiers to undertake to serve abroad after the refusal of units to fight Burma. The afghan debacle of 1842 had also led the company to widen the circle of caste and regional groups from which they recruited in to the Bengal army. This new recruitment policy was disliked by the Rajputs and Brahmans who were the only people initially recruited in Bengal army (Bose & Jalal, 70-71)

The next focus of the revolt was Dalhousie's annexation of Awadh in 1856. This important event caused a political and economic conflicts and lead directly to the mutiny and rebellion the very next year in 1857. The reason for this is because no questions were asked about the lack of heirs since the nawab ruler was simply accused of misgovernment and the state was finally annexed against his will. The transfer of power over the nawab's protests offended the Muslim reputation. Tax collectors who were called " taluqdars", peasants, and artisans also participated in the revolt in order to collapse the newly installed British administration in the residency of Lucknow which was the same place where the downfall of nawab was planned (Bose&Jalal, 72). The British camps panicked as they found out that there could be a possible end to their rule on the hundredth anniversary of Plassey (Bose&Jalal, 72). In addition, this event had an effect on the British army's role of religion because faith could not divide the Indian army rebellions. Their common cause was the anti-colonial, patriotic, and Mughal ruler as proclaimed their

true sovereign of the heterogeneously constituted group. Muslims and Hindus mutually participated in the revolt and both used religious rhetoric towards wider mobilization, yet religious identities were part of multiple identities which separated caste, jati, language, and tribal class. Awadh's annexation resulted in loss of honor and prestige for regional superior groups especially upper caste sepoys.

On the 10 May 1857, sepoys of Meerut heavily protested British officers for introducing new Enfield rifles. These rifles were introduced because it was more accurate and effective than the old rifles being used. The rumor spread among the soldiers that cartridge made for this new rifles were packed in mixture of beef and pork fat, and cover of those cartridge had to be bitten off prior to loading (Schmidt, 72). Such mixture of fat was offensive to both Hindus and Muslims. Eighty-five of the Indian soldiers were brutally punished for refusing the use of these new cartridges. After this even Indian soldiers were getting confident with their belief that British company is trying to destroy their religion and society before forcing their conversion to Christianity. On a night after eighty-five of the sepoys sentenced to imprisonment, the sepoy cantonment based in Meerut massacred the English residents of town and marched towards Delhi to start war against British under the leadership of Mughal emperor, Bahadur Shah (Metcalf & M, 101).

The Siege of Kanpur is another key episode in the Indian rebellion of 1857. After the rebellious sepoys left Meerut, where they initially started the mutiny, they marched down to Delhi next in order to convince a weak Mughal emperor, Bahadur Shah II who was ineffective and had no power, in order to assist them against the British (Schmidt 72); However, news of the <https://assignbuster.com/history-of-the-revolt-of-1857-history-essay/>

rebellion spread throughout the central gangetic plains, central and eastern India and similar rebellion outburst amongst the sepoys at Kanpur.

Unfortunately, nothing seemed to work at the end since the group lacked unity and went to different leaders for help. The besieged British in Kanpur were not prepared for an extended siege and surrendered to rebel Indian forces under Nana Sahib in return for a safe passage to Allahabad. The evacuation from Kanpur was quite violent when it turned into a battle. Those captured were executed as an East India Company rescue force. British women and children were killed in Kanpur and below 200 rebels were slaughtered in Lucknow. British forces made violent retaliatory attacks against the rebellions and civilians after the recapture of Kanpur and the sepoys in the Kanpur siege were taken to the Memorial and forced to lick blood stains off its floor and walls.

Overall, the dissatisfaction of Indian civilians over British social and economic policies leads to the revolt due to a response to multiple grievances. One of the important grievances of all was the singling out of religious communities leading to breaks in unity between Hindus and Muslims. The revolt was taken as a holy war even by some sections of Muslims (Bose & Jalal, 74). The revolt was also an infused sense of patriotism for the people of their country, if not nationalism (Bose & Jalal, 73). However, the British were singling out the religious communities and attempting to break the unity. Hindus and Muslims felt the necessity to build and preserve Muslim and Hindu community. Even the Muslim leaders were aware of a possible separation between the Hindus and Muslims by the foreigners. Therefore, Muslim and Hindu leaders held meetings in order to bring back unity for the same goal of

independence. Both communities had realized how colonial rule was identified as the common problem and how the independence was necessary so they had to fight for their rights in order to save their own nation. Other grievances included the severity of revenue assessments in which new revenue systems also lead to the sudden loss of their lands which was forced by landlords into poverty (Schmidt, 72) and the demeaning of princely and landed elites such as the nawab downfall of Awadh. The reason for this revenue issue was because the farmers were not able to meet their debt due to higher taxations imposed on them by the British resulting in the landlord's loss. Lastly, the British social policies angered many Indians. This included the abolition of female infanticide, thuggee, and sati (Schmidt, 72).

The aftermath of the 1857 revolt resulted in a reaction against British racial arrogance which was a key feature of the mid-Victorian era (Bose & Jalal, 76). The British had won in 1858; however it was not without long-term effects because Company rule in India was replaced by Crown rule in which the parliament assumed full control over the British Indian Affairs (Schmidt, 72). The rebellion itself only served to harden the lines of racial hatred.

There was brutality coming from both sides. However, the rebellion faced capital punishment for the killings of British women and children. Although most were hanged, thousands were strapped and blown up in front of cannons. Even after the war had ended, the mental and psychological wounds of it did not. The revolt impacted the governance infrastructures because the taxation system was remade in order to restore the finances of the Indian administration. For example, income tax was imposed on wealthier urban groups for the first time.

Finally, the revolutionary uprising of 1857 was a movement which portrayed India's patriotism and unity. The Sepoy Rebellion changed the shape of the British empire in ways which may have had helped their attitude through the actual Independence of India in 1947. The unique characteristics of this revolt involved resistance, intensity, and the development to a certain degree. The aftermath of the revolt brought beneficial reforms into the country of South Asia. India's first determination in the Revolt of 1857 to fight for their freedom even after India's loss against British rule remains the most memorable movement of South Asian history.