

# The indian rebellion of 1857 history essay



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The Indian Rebellion of 1857 is also known as India's First War of Independence, the Great Rebellion, the Indian Mutiny, the Revolt of 1857, the Uprising of 1857, the Sepoy Rebellion and the Sepoy Mutiny. The many names are the result of the conflict's continuing importance to India's national sense of identity. It began as a mutiny of native soldiers (sepoys) employed by the British East India Company's army, against perceived race based injustices and inequities, on 10 May 1857, in the town of Meerut, and soon erupted into other mutinies and civilian rebellions which were mainly centered on north central India along the several major river valleys draining the south face of the Himalayas [See red annotated locations on Map at right] but with local episodes extending both northwest to Peshawar on the north-west frontier with Afghanistan and southeast beyond Delhi.

The main conflict occurred largely in the upper Gangetic plain and central India, with the major hostilities confined to present-day Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, northern Madhya Pradesh, and the Delhi region. The rebellion posed a considerable threat to British East Indian Company power in that region, and it was contained only with the fall of Gwalior on 20 June 1858. Some regard the rebellion as the first of several movements over ninety years to achieve independence, which was finally achieved in 1947.

Other regions of Company-controlled India-Bengal province, the Bombay Presidency, and the Madras Presidency-remained largely calm. In Punjab, the Sikh princes backed the Company by providing both soldiers and support. The large princely states, Hyderabad, Mysore, Travancore, and Kashmir, as well as the states of Rajputana did not join the rebellion. In some regions, such as Oudh, the rebellion took on the attributes of a patriotic revolt against

European presence. Rebel leaders, such as the Rani of Jhansi, and Rani of Tulsipur of Tulsipur-State, became folk heroes in the nationalist movement in India half a century later, however, they themselves “ generated no coherent ideology” for a new order. The rebellion led to the dissolution of the East India Company in 1858, and forced the British to reorganize the army, the financial system, and the administration in India. India was thereafter directly governed by the Crown in the new British Raj.

War of independence is described as an uprising that was ignited by Indian troops in the town of Meerut near Delhi in 1857. In addition to economic exploitation, political, and military causes, the British failed to observe several cultural factors in their rule. One of these factors being that India was a cast-based society. But most important, was the religious conflict regarding the famous British cartridges that used pig and cow fat. India had a long history of recurring revolts during British occupation. Although some of these uprisings were more effective than others, nonetheless they were indicative of a widespread discontent with British rule. Revolts were a yearly occurrence but were always cruelly put down by the British forces. The Indians were never a match for the British, and without an efficient way to communicate with others these revolts were unable to spread to other areas of the country. The Rebellion of 1857 was different because it was the larger and more widespread armed challenge to British rule. It began as a revolt of Indian Sepoys, but, “ The revolt then spread rapidly to other garrisons and soon turned from a limited military mutiny into a widespread civil rebellion that involved peasants, artisans, day laborers, and religious leaders” (Tignor, 712). Besides attacking government buildings including prisons, treasuries,

barracks and courthouses, Sepoys and peasants killed all Europeans and Christians they could find. As a result it has been described by many as a nationalist revolt, or India's first war of national independence.

Following can be stated as possible and logical reasons or causes of war of independence 1857:

Controversies and disputes

Unease among masses due to social reforms introduced by the company

Economical exploitation by the British

Unrest among the Sepoys

The Enfield controversy

Superstitious public and rumors

### **Controversies and disputes:**

Many locals believed that British wanted to force them to change their religion and convert to Christianity. The British creed of the time was Evangelism, and many East India Company officers tried themselves to convert their Sepoys. This was strongly discouraged by the Company officials.

The doctrine of lapse was also a major reason for this tragedy [1]. According to this doctrine the company could annex any heirless princely state if the ruler didn't have any natural heir to the throne. In eight years, Lord Dalhousie, the then Governor-General of India, annexed many kingdoms including

Jhansi, Oudh, Satara, Nagpur and Sambalpur. Nobility, feudal leaders, and royal forces were unemployed. Even the treasure of the royal family of Nagpur was publicly sold in Calcutta. It was seen as a sign of abject disrespect by the Indian aristocracy.

Indians were not happy by rule of Europeans who were bent on rather rapid expansion and westernization. They didn't had any regard for historical subtleties in Indian society. Reforms made by British, such as putting curbs on Sati (the self-burning of widows with their husbands) and minor marriage, were accompanied with prohibitions on Indian religious customs, seen as steps towards a change in religion.[2]

Historian William Dalrymple asserts that the rebels were motivated primarily by resistance against a move by the East India Company, which was perceived as an attempt to impose Christianity and Christian laws in India.[3] For example, when Zafar met the sepoys on 11th of May in 1857, he was told: "We have joined hands to protect our religion and our faith." They later stood in Chandni Chowk, the main square, and asked the people gathered there, "Brothers, are you with those of the faith?"[3] Those British men and women who had converted to Islam were spared, while Indian Christians such as one of royal physicians, Dr. Chaman Lal, were killed in cold blood.[3]

Dalrymple also states that as late as 6 September, when calling the inhabitants of Delhi to join hands and put resistance against the eminent British attack, Zafar issued a proclamation stating that this was a religious war being prosecuted on behalf of 'the faith', and that all Muslim and Hindu citizens of the capital city, or of the countryside were encouraged to stay

true to their faith and creeds.[3] As further evidence, he proves that the Urdu manuscripts of the pre and post-rebellion periods usually refer to the British not as *angrez* (the English), *goras* (whites) or *firangis* (foreigners), but as *kafir* (infidels) and *nasrani* (Christians).[3]

The justice system was certainly not just to locals. In 1853, the British Prime Minister Lord Aberdeen opened the Indian Civil Service to locals; however, this was viewed by most of educated India as a non-compensating measure. The official records and war diaries were laid before the House of Commons during the sessions of 1856 and 1857 which revealed that Company officers were allowed an extended series of appeals if convicted or accused of war crimes. The Company also exploited the locals financially. Failure to pay the unjust and heavy taxes always resulted in seizure of property by the government.

British slowed the pace of their programme of reform and also sought to pacify the gentry and princely families, particularly Muslim, who had been major leaders of the 1857 revolt. After 1857, local land lordship became more domineering, the discrimination based on caste became more manifest, and the collective partition between Hindus and Muslims became discernible and visible, which many analysts argue was due to a British approach of "divide and rule".

An additional vital reason for the rebellion was the stance towards the Mughal monarch, Bahadur Shah II. The governor-general of India at the time, had affronted the Emperor by asking him and his family to leave the Red Fort. Later, Lord Canning, the next governor-general of India, announced that

Bahadur Shah's successors would not even be permitted to use the title of the "Shahanshah". Such lamentable events were condemned by public.

### **Unease among masses due to social reforms introduced by company:**

Many locals were angry due to the rule of the British and perceived a project of westernization and slavery to be taking place. The forbidding of Sati (self-immolation by widows along with dead husbands) and minor marriage seemed to be a herald to an nuisance of Christianity. It was also a reason for the tragedy.[2]

### **Economical exploitation by the British:**

The British East India Company was a huge trading firm . The supremacy of the British invasion force took nearly 150 years to emerge. Till 1700's, the yearly expenses in enticement to local rulers and officers reached almost 90, 000 pounds. By bribing the administration, the Company was allowed to function in abroad markets notwithstanding the verity that the cheap imports of South Asia impair conjugal trade. By 1767, the Company was strained into an accord to pay 400, 000 pounds into the state Exchequer per annum.

By mid of 19th century, while, the Company's monetary difficulties had reached a position where mounting taxation requisite escalating British territories in South Asia extraordinarily. The Company began to put curbs adoption rights of indigenous rulers and began the procedure of appropriation of independent Rajas. Karl Marx wrote that "... in 1854 the Raj of Berar, which comprised 80, 000 square miles of land, a population from four to five million, and enormous treasures, was forcibly seized".

By 1857, the very last relics of sovereign Indian states had disappeared and the Company exported untold quantities of gold, jewels, silver, silk, cotton, and a host of other precious materials back to England every year. This very asset funded the industrialized Revolution to great extent.

The agricultural land was restructured under the rather callous feudal system to smooth the progress of the compilation of excise. In some regions farmers were strained to toggle from carry-over farming to commercial crops such as indigo, jute, coffee and tea. This resulted in destitution to the farmers and increases in food prices.

Indigenous commerce, in particular the renowned weavers of Bengal and elsewhere, also suffered under British statute. Import tariffs were maintained low, according to conventional British free-market sentiments, and consequently the Indian open market was snowed under with cheap garments from Britain. Master weavers had their fingers cut off to prevent them from weaving.

The Indians felt that the British were imposing incredibly grave excise on the locals. This incorporated an boost in the levy on land. This appears to have been the most imperative *raison d'être*.

### **Unrest among the sepoys:**

To strengthen power of British crown, the East India Company built a well-trained force of 257, 000 Sepoys (indigenous Indian militia, called Sowars in cavalry units), commanded by British officers. The presidencies of Bombay, Madras and Bengal had their individual army all with individual supreme



commanders. simultaneously, they had more soldiers than the state army of the British realm.

Throughout the late eighteenth century and the early part of the nineteenth century, the forces of the East India Company were triumphant and unconquerable .[5] The British had an constant sequence of winnings in India, against the Marathas, Mysore, north Indian states, and the Gurkhas, later against the Sikhs, and abroad in Egypt, China, Burma and elsewhere. The British had just right martial institute.[5]

Contrasting the Bombay and Madras Armies, which were extremely extra assorted, the Bengal Army recruited its regular armed forces approximately entirely amid the landowning Brahmins and Rajputs. Despite the fact that remunerated slightly less than the Bombay and Madras Presidency troops, there was unspoken conviction between the soldiery and the enterprise - the soldiers felt being considered necessary and that the company would care for their benefit. The soldiers performed marvelously on the field of battle in exchange for which they were rewarded with rewards such as skirmish honours in toting up to the superfluous pay or “ batta” (foreign pay) customarily disbursed for operations carried out beyond the conventional boundaries of Company regulation.[5]

There was a sentiment of invincibility, chiefly amid the Indian inhabitants and the sepoys, about the unrelenting excellent fate of the East India Company. for the duration of the mid-eighteenth century, proceedings bothered these ideas of the soldiery, all of which contributed to the appreciation of measures in 1857. The credence of invincibility of the British

was lost in the First Anglo-Afghan War where poor following conclusion and incompetent British management led to the annihilation of Elphinstone's army while withdrawing from Kabul. When the frame of mind of the sepoy crooked not in favor of their masters, they remembered Kabul and that the British were not impregnable.[5]

There were many symptoms that something was wrong within the armies of the East India Company in the form of mutinies by company unit. As early as 1806, threats that the sepoy's caste may be polluted had led to the Vellore Mutiny, which was viciously covered up. In 1824, there was a further mutiny by a brigade posted overseas in the First Anglo-Burmese battle who were refused transport to carry personal cooking vessels and told to share shared pots. Eleven of the sepoy were executed and hundreds more sentenced to hard toil.[7] In 1851-2 sepoy who were vital to dole out in the Second Anglo-Burmese War also refused to budge, but were merely sent to dole out somewhere else.

The soldiers no longer received extra pay (batta or bhatta) for service. Since the batta prepared the distinction between service being magnanimous or callous, troops repeatedly opposed thoughtless one-sided changes in disburse. In the past, the denial to continue on service in anticipation of pay issues was considered a justifiable form of displaying gripe by Indian troops.. The British considered such denial at times as treason of the uppermost array and trodden these refusals viciously.

The anecdotal stances of the British administration, the lessening of allowances and harsh penalties contributed to a sentiment of the troops that

the Company no longer cared for them. Definite actions of the regime, such as augmented staffing of Sikhs and Gurkhas amplified the suspects of the sepoys who contemplated that this was a indication of their services not being needed any longer. [5]

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, British officers were warmly mixed up with the troops, speaking indian languages easily, yet to the degree of having indigenous spouses.[9] Later, the attitudes of British officers distorted with increased bigotry, lack of participation and apathy of the wellbeing of troops becoming obvious more and more.[10]

Understanding rulers, such as Lord William Bentick were replaced by conceited aristocracy such as Lord Dalhousie who loathed the troops and the masses. As time passed, the powers of the commanding officers concentrated and the regime became more unsympathetic or remote from the concerns of the sepoys. [5]

To conclude, officers of an evangelical influence in the Company's Army had taken to preach to their Sepoys in the expectation of converting them to Christianity.[8] The disagreement over the new Enfield Rifle added material to the disturbing rumors circulating regarding their forthcoming enforced adaptation to Christianity.

### **The Enfield controversy:**

The revolt ignited over merely a rifle infact. Soldiers were issued with a new rifle called enfield which was far more powerful than the old smoothbore Brown Bess they had been employing.

To load both the old musket and the new rifle, soldiers had to bite the cartridge open and dispense the gunpowder it enclosed into the rifle's gag, then tuck the cartridge case, which was normally paper encrusted with some kind of fat to make it impermeable, into the musket as padding, prior to loading it with a orb.

It was believed that the cartridges that were regular issue with this rifle were greased with lard which was forbidden for Muslims, or tallow regarded as sacred to Hindus. The sepoys' British officers rejected these claims as rumors, and recommended that the sepoys make a consignment of new cartridges, and grease these with beeswax or mutton fat.

The Commander in Chief in India, General George Anson reacted to this calamity by axiom, " I'll never give in to their beastly prejudices", and in spite of the requests of his junior officers he did not cooperate.

### **Superstitious public and rumors:**

Another rumor that broaden was an old divination that the Company's statute would finish after a hundred years. Their statute in India had begun with the Battle of Plassey in 1757. Chapattis and Lotus Flowers began to mingle around large parts of India, quoting the famous line " Sub Lal hoga hai." (Everything has become Red.), passed around by people from city to city and village to village, as a icon of revolution.

There was also a rumor that the British were contaminating the sepoys flour with ground-up pig and cow bones .

It was a general credence in the decade after the revolt, commented on in the British and regal press, that the Persians, Chinese, Jews or Russians had directly or indirectly inclined the sepoys to insurgency.