

Revolt of 1857

The simmering discontent among the different classes burst in the form of a violent storm in 1857 which shook the British Empire in India to its very foundations. It was the first expression of organised resistance against the British East India Company.

It began as a revolt of the sepoys of the British East India Company's army but eventually turned into a popular revolt.

The Indian revolt of 1857 is known by several names: the Sepoy Mutiny (by the British Historians), the Indian Mutiny, the Great Rebellion (by the Indian Historians), the Revolt of 1857, the Indian Insurrection, and the First War of Independence (by Vinayak Damodar Savarkar).

Causes of Revolt of 1857

Economic Cause

Peasants and zamindars were angered by the heavy taxes on land and the unpopular revenue settlement followed by the Company.

Many among these groups were unable to meet the heavy revenue demands and repay their loans to money lenders, eventually losing the lands that they had held for generations. This result into rural indebtedness.

Large numbers of sepoys belonged to the peasantry class and had family ties in villages, so the grievances of the peasants also affected them.

After the Industrial Revolution in England, there was an influx of British manufactured goods into India, which ruined industries, particularly the textile industry of India and thus resulting into mass unemployment. British rule brought misery to the artisans and handicrafts people.

Political Cause

British expansion through the Doctrine of Lapse and direct annexation caused resentment among large number of Indian rulers and chiefs.

Rani Lakshmi Bai's adopted son was not permitted to sit on the throne of Jhansi.

The annexation of **Awadh by Lord Dalhousie on the pretext of maladministration** left thousands of nobles, officials, retainers and soldiers jobless. This measure converted Awadh, a loyal state, into a hotbed of discontent and intrigue.

Military Causes

Indian sepoy were considered inferior to British soldiers. They were paid less than a European sepoy of the same rank.

They were required to serve in areas far away from their homes.

In 1856 Lord Canning issued the **General Services Enlistment Act** which required that the sepoy must be ready to serve even in British land across the sea.

Social and Religious Cause

The rapidly spreading Western Civilisation in India was alarming concerns all over the country.

An act in 1850 allowed a Hindu who had converted into Christianity to inherit his ancestral properties.

The people were convinced that the Government was planning to convert Indians to Christianity.

The abolition of practices like sati and female infanticide, and the legislation legalizing widow remarriage, were believed as threats to the established social structure.

Immediate Cause

The Revolt of 1857 in India eventually broke out over the incident of greased cartridges.

A rumour spread that the cartridges of the new enfield rifles were greased with the fat of cows and pigs.

Before loading these rifles the sepoy had to bite off the paper on the cartridges.

Both Hindu and Muslim sepoy refused to use them.

Revolt of 1857 leaders

Different leaders led the revolt locally. Major amongst them included:

Lucknow	Begum Hazrat Mahal
Kanpur	Nana Saheb
Delhi	Bahadur Shah II
Jhansi	Lakshmi Bai
Bihar	Kunwar Singh

Revolt of 1857 Effects

It resulted into direct rule of the British Crown. This was announced by Lord Canning at a Durbar in Allahabad in a proclamation issued on 1 November 1858 in the name of the Queen.

The Indian administration was taken over by Queen Victoria, which, in effect, meant the British Parliament.

Administrative changes were introduced : the Governor General's office was replaced by that of the Viceroy. The rights of Indian rulers were recognised.

The Doctrine of Lapse was abolished. The right to adopt sons as legal heirs was accepted.

Military reorganisation: the ratio of British officers to Indian soldiers increased but the armoury remained in the hands of the English. It was arranged to end the dominance of the Bengal army.

Religious tolerance: it was promised and due attention was paid to the customs and traditions of India.

Though the revolt failed to achieve the desired goal, it sowed the seeds of Indian nationalism.

Revolt of 1857 - FAQs

Q. Who led the revolt of 1857 from Lucknow?

Ans. Begum Hazrat Mahal led the revolt from Lucknow.

Q. Did the revolt of 1857 spread throughout the country?

Ans. No, the the revolt was limited in the Northern India in parts of UP, Bihar, Bengal and Delhi.

Q. Who was Governor general during the revolt of 1857?

Ans. Lord Canning was the governor general during the revolt of 1857.

Q. On what ground Awadh was taken over by the Britishers?

Ans. On ground of maladministration.