

# The Revolt of 1857

## What is Revolt of 1857?

The revolt that was started by the soldiers was later spread across the country. It was V.D. Savarkar called the Revolt of 1857 the First War of Indian Independence. Dr. S.N. Sen describes the revolt as "having begun as a fight for religion but ended as a war of independence."

Dr. R.C. Majumdar, the famous historian considers it as neither the first, nor national, nor a war of independence. The Britishers, consider the 1857 Revolt just a peasant sepyo mutiny.

## Causes of Revolt of 1857

The Revolt of 1857 was pan-Indian, but it was majorly concentrated in parts of Central and North India.

There were instances of continued exploitation of local land and imposition of Britisher's faith on Indians. Many times, it was forceful, which led to resentment. People had severe discontent over this as they felt threatened to lose their faith and religious sentiments. This led to building up a sympathetic chord among the masses and collectively they rose to the common cause against the discontent with British rule.

The administrative innovations, economic exploitations and expansionist policies of the East India Company and Britishers over the years also added fuel to the fire.

## Political Causes of Revolt of 1857

- The main Political Cause of Revolt of 1857 was the British policy of direct annexation and expansion through the Doctrine of Lapse, introduced by Lord Dalhousie. The Governor-General of India was Lord Dalhousie between 1848-1856, and under his supervision the British added numerous territories to the British Empire in India.
- The Doctrine of Lapse enraged the Indian rulers against the British government immensely. The titles and pensions of some of the Indian princes were also confiscated.
- The pension of Nana Sahib was discontinued after the death of Baji Rao II's and Rani of Jhansi was deprived of her right to rule. She was deprived because of the violation of the Hindu law that Britishers had enacted.
- In the span of eight years, The Governor General annexed Satara (1848), Sambhalpur (1850), Jhansi (1853), Nagpur (1853), Jaipur (1849) and Bhagat (1850).
- The Religious Disabilities Act, 1850 enabled a convert from Hinduism to other religions to inherit the property of his ancestors. The Hindu regarded this as an incentive to give up one's religious faith.
- Lord Dalhousie annexed Awadh on the pretext of maladministration, which left thousands of officials, retainers, nobles, and soldiers jobless. This step of Lord Dalhousie converted Awadh into a hotbed of discontent against the British.

- Following the death of Bahadur Shah II, Dalhousie suggested eliminating the title of Mughal emperor.

## Economic Causes of Revolt of 1857

- The British strategy of economically exploiting India was the source of public resentment. Due to heavy tax expectations and a stringent revenue collection program, the masses suffered.
- The British took advantage of India's economic resources, turning it into a colonial economy that served British capitalist interests.
- Following the Industrial Revolution in England, India experienced destitution as indigenous handicrafts and industries were destroyed by the entry of British manufactured products.
- British colonists in India monopolized plantation businesses in indigo, jute, tea, and coffee.
- Under the new Revenue System of the British, the peasants and the British government got into touch with one another. The system removed the middlemen from the scene and as a result, talukdars and zamindars, who used to collect land tax lost both their income and their position.
- Lord Dalhousie in 1852 ordered the Inam Commission to investigate the landlords' title papers. Those who failed to present documentary proof of their property rights were stripped of their rights.

## Socio-Economic Causes of Revolt of 1857

- The Britishers looked down at Indians as inferior and discriminated with them racially at every step. They were not allowed at many places such as parks, hotels, first class railway compartments, as these were specially reserved for the Englishmen.
- Indians were hurt from the racial arrogance they were facing from the Britishers and this led to Indians regarding the Englishmen as their worst enemies.
- The legislation legalizing widow remarriage, abolition of practices like sati and female infanticide, were considered as social threat. This was seen as blow to the social structure Indian were accustomed to.
- The introduction of English education along with the propagation of the Christian missionaries and the changing of the Hindu law of property alarmed the orthodox Indians.

## Military Causes of Revolt of 1857

- There was great inequality in treatment between the Indian and the British troops in terms of salary and other benefits. The Indian soldiers were considered inferior and were illtreated by high officers.
- The high ranks in the army were exclusively reserved for the Englishmen.
- Indian soldiers were prohibited to wear caste and religious marks while serving in the army. It amounted to the Indian troops, interference in their personal and religious affairs by the British.
- The General Services Enlistment Act required sepoy to serve even in British land across the sea. Majority of the Indian soldiers were sent to Crimea, China and Iran to

fight wars of the English. In Indian traditions, crossing the Sea at that time was considered as lost of religion. This piled up anger against the Britishers.

## What was the Immediate Cause of the Revolt Of 1857?

- The Immediate Cause of the Revolt Of 1857 was the introduction of the new Enfield greased cartridge rifle. Before loading the rifle, the sepoy had to bite off its top and then load. It was believed that the grease was made out of the fats of cows and pigs.
- This was objectionable to the Hindus and Muslims alike. For Hindus, cows are sacred and Muslims prohibit eating of pork (pig meat). The rumour of the greased cartridge being made of cow and pig;s flesh and meat sparked off fire of discontent against the British in the form of the revolt.
- The first sign of unrest appeared in 1857 at Barrackpore in Bengal. A sepoy, Mangal Pandey on 29<sup>th</sup> March, 1857, killed senior officers on parade and started the revolt.

## Leaders of the Revolt of 1857

Many leaders from different regions of the country came together against the EIC and the Britishers. The famous leaders and their regions are listed below, in which they led the revolt:

Places of Revolt	Leaders Associated
Delhi	Bahadur Shah II
Lucknow	Begum Hazrat Mahal
Kanpur	Nana Saheb
Jhansi & Gwalior	Lakshmi Bai & Tantia Tope
Bareilly	Khan Bahadur Khan
Allahabad and Banaras	Maulvi Liyakat Ali
Bihar	Kunwar Singh

## Suppression of Revolt of 1857

The Britishers considered this revolt as a serious threat to their regime and considerably changed their policies to overcome this rebellion, and they could succeed also.

Places of Revolt	Leaders Associated	Supressing Officials
Delhi	Bahadur Shah II	John Nicholson

Lucknow	Begum Hazrat Mahal	Henry Lawrence
Kanpur	Nana Saheb	Sir Colin Campbell
Jhansi & Gwalior	Lakshmi Bai & Tantia Tope	General Hugh Rose
Bareilly	Khan Bahadur Khan	Sir Colin Campbell
Allahabad and Banaras	Maulvi Liyakat Ali	Colonel Ocell
Bihar	Kunwar Singh	William Taylor

## Causes of Failure of Revolt of 1857

- Bahadur Shah has gone old and weak, so was unable to lead the revolt. The revolt was poorly organized with no central leadership or coordination.
- There was limited territorial spread of the revolt. Most parts of India remained more or less unaffected. The large princely states, Hyderabad, Mysore, Travancore, and Kashmir, as well as the smaller ones of Rajputana, did not join the rebellion.
- Many zamindars, the rich merchants, traders supported Britishers.
- Modern educated Indians viewed the revolt as backwards-looking.
- The Indian soldiers were poorly equipped materially.
- The revolt lacked a clear understanding of the British rule and was poorly prepared.

## Effects of the Revolt of 1857

- The revolt marked the end of the East India Company's rule in India. India now came under the direct rule of the British Crown.
- The Office of the Governor General was replaced by that of the Viceroy. The rights of Indian rulers were recognised and the Doctrine of Lapse was abolished.
- Restructuring was done in the army but the armoury remained in the hands of the English only.