

7. The Revolt of 1857

The cumulative effect of British expansionist policies, economic exploitation and administrative innovations over years resulted to simmering discontent among all sections which burst in the form of 1857 revolt.

■ Various Causes of Revolt:

Economic causes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Economic policies of the British destroyed the traditional economy of the country-Peasant suffered due to heavy taxation under new revenue settlement system. Annexation of Indian states by British led to loss of patronage of many artisans. Destruction of traditional industry. Zamindars often saw their land rights forfeited Summary evictions Discriminatory tariff policy against Indian products.
Political causes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interference in socio religious affair of Indian public. Policies such as Doctrine of Lapse, Subsidiary alliance further complicated the matter. Absentee sovereignty character of British. Denial of certain rights to Mughal rulers
Administrative causes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Widespread corruption in company's administration.
Socio-religious causes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Racial arrogance of British Activities of Christian missionaries Abolition of Sati, support to widow remarriage, women education The Religious Disabilities Act, 1856, which modified Hindu customs.
Immediate causes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The rumour about the mixing of bone dust in atta (flour) and the introduction of the Enfield rifle.
Influence of Outside Events.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> British suffered serious losses—the First Afghan War(1838-42), Punjab Wars(1845-49), Crimean Wars(1854-56), Santhal rebellion(1855-57).

■ The Beginning of the Mutiny:

The rebellion began on 10 May 1857 in the form of a mutiny of sepoys of the Company's army in the garrison town of Meerut, 40 miles northeast of Delhi. It then erupted into other mutinies and civilian rebellions chiefly in the upper Gangetic plain and central India

■ Timeline of the Events During the Revolt:

February 26, 1857: The 19th BNI at Benhampton refuses to use the new rifle cartridge. The commander withdraws the cartridges.	March 29, 1857: Mangal Pandey attempts to incite his fellow soldiers to refuse the cartridges. He fails and is captured.	April 9, 1857: Pandey is executed.	May 9, 1857: 85 sepoys from the 3rd Bengal Light Cavalry refused the cartridges.
May 30, 1857: The 11th and 20th BNI turn on their officers, breaking into open revolt.	May 11, 1857: Sepoys capture Delhi and proclaim Bahadur Shah Emperor.	May and June 1857: Revolt breaks out throughout Bengal.	June 6, 1857: Nana Sahib joins the rebellion as the rebel siege on Kanpur begins.
June 8, 1857: The British siege of the rebels in Delhi begins.	June 27, 1857: The massacre of Kanpur. European refugees at Satichaura Ghat occur.	June 30, 1857: Rebels begin their siege of Lucknow.	July 6, 1857: Nana Sahib releases a proclamation calling for all Indians to join in the rebellion.
July 31, 1857: Most of Bengal participates in the revolt.	September 14, 1857: The British capture Delhi. The rebels begin to lose ground.	November 17, 1857: Sir Colin Campbell relieves the siege of Lucknow.	January 14, 1858: Rani of Jhansi issued the "Victory of Religion" proclamation against the British.
March 23-April 5, 1858: British forces lay siege to and capture Jhansi.	June 1, 1858: Rani of Jhansi and Tanja Tope capture Gwalior.	June 17, 1858: Rani of Jhansi is killed at the battle of Kotah-Ki-Serai.	June 20, 1858: British forces captured Gwalior.
	November 1, 1858: Queen Victoria abolished the rule of the East India Company and placed India under direct British government rule.	November 1, 1858: The military aspects of the Indian rebellion essentially come to a close.	

■ Storm centres and their leaders:

Place	Leaders
Delhi	General BhaktKhan
Lucknow	Begum HazratMahal
Kanpur	Nana sahib
Jhansi	Rani Lakshmibai
Bareilly	Khan Bahadur
Arrah, Bihar	Kunwar Singh
Faizabad	MaulviAhmadullah
Baghpat, UP	Shah Mahal

▪ **Causes for Failure of the Revolt:**

• **Limited territorial and social base:**

All-India participation was absent, revolt was more or less concentrated only to North India.

- **All classes did not join:** Big Zamindars, Taluqdars, Merchants and Money lenders preferred British rule. Educated Indians looked down upon this revolt as backward going. Many Kings and prince didn't support revolt
- **Poor Arms and Equipment:** European Soldiers were equipped with latest weaponry unlike Indians
- **Uncoordinated and Poorly Organized, lack of central leadership:** No unified and able leadership on Indian side.
- **No Unified Ideology:** Rebels represented diverse elements with differing grievances and concepts of current politics.
- **The revolt has a centripetal tendency around the Mughal. So once Delhi was captured the main force was gone.**

Note: There was widespread unity between Hindus and Muslims at all levels during this revolt

▪ **Consequences of the Revolt:**

- Company rule was abolished. Crown took over the administration.
- Expansion and annexation were ended by British.
- Army was thoroughly re-organized & British military policy "division and counterpoise".
- Racial hatred between the ruled and ruling class increased.
- **White mutiny:** resentment among company forces to transfer their allegiance to British Army. It was because of cancellation of Bhatta that they used to receive earlier.
- Act of 1858
- All native ruling chief were assured that there territory would never be annexed in future.(Allahabad proclamation)
- Policies were made to protect landlords and zamindars and give them security of rights over their land
- Concept of martial race in the army

▪ **Significance of the Revolt:**

1. It showed up the glaring shortcomings in the Company's administration and its army, which they rectified promptly.
2. The senseless atrocities committed by both sides shocked the Indian intellectuals who were increasingly convinced that violence was to be eschewed in any struggle for freedom.
3. It had a major influence on the course of the struggle for freedom.

▪ **Views on Revolt:**

- **V.D. Savarkar** argues that it was the first war of Indian independence
 - Tara Chand described it as "War of Nation's Independence"
 - **R.C. Majumdar** concludes that 1857 war of independence of 1857 is neither the first, nor national, nor a war of independence
 - **SurenderNathSen** is of the view that what began as a fight for religion ended as a war of independence.
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