



Political Science

Paper: Colonialism in India

**Lesson: The 1857 Revolt-Nature, Causes and
Consequences.**

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Contents

- Introduction
- Economic Reasons
- Political Reasons
- Social Causes
- The Sepoys and the British
- The story in brief
- Causes responsible for the failure
- The Impact of Rebellion
- The Queen's Proclamation
- Administrative changes and reforms
- Policy of Social Antagonism
- The nature of the Rebellion
- Exercises
- References
- Web Links



Introduction:

Sir Valentine Chirol in his book "India old and new" records the words of Lord Canning, before he left England for India. "I wish for a peaceful term of office. But I cannot forget that in the sky of India, serene as it is, a small cloud may arise, no larger than a man's hand, but which, growing larger and larger, may at last threaten to burst and overwhelm us with ruin." [Chirol Valentine , Macmillan and Company , London 1921. Pg 50] Within a year the cloud arose and burst, and the last Governor General of the East India Company had to face the outbreak of the Mutiny, which shook the company rule.

The revolt which took place in 1857 not only covered a large territory, but it also involved a large part of Indian population, in central-north and central-east regions of British India. Though it began as a sepoy Mutiny, but it had its kernels in the history, majorly from 1757 to 1857 viz a viz colonial policies on Indian issues, which adversely affected Indian society on political, economic and social grounds. British historians consider this rebellion nothing more than a violent expression of the armed sepoys against colonial policies. But nationalist school disapproves this whole idea of colonial historians. In fact, according to them, colonial policy of political domination, economic exploitation, policy of divide and rule and discriminatory attitude towards Indian population forced the people of India to revolt. Judith brown in her book "Modern India" notes, "Early Marxist analysis also confirmed the understanding of 1857 as a national war of liberation. Extreme nationalist V D Savarkar described this rebellion as "India's First War of Independence" [published in 1909] [raj to Swaraj, p39] this uprising though could not achieve the end it may have intended but British parliament decided to end the company rule. And through the queen's proclamation India came under direct control of the empire.

For the convenience of the readers the causes of the revolt are discussed below, before we move to examine the nature and the consequences of the rebellion. The causes of the revolt can be examined under three broad heads:-

Social: Religious unrest in both Muslims and Hindus, conversion to Christianity and liberal reforms under company-rule.

Economic reasons: peasants, industries and distruction of Indian economy.

Political causes: subsidiary alliance, doctrine of lapse and other political causes.

Economic reasons—

East India Company came to India for the purpose of trade and commerce. In the year of 1600, the company was granted the Royal Charter to initiate business in India. The company established First English factory at Surat in western India, And they obtain Zamindari (landowning) rights in Kolkata, Sutanuti and Gobindapur in Eastern India. [area around modern Kolkata] .By the middle of the 18th century British company defeated major European rivals who were trying to set up colonial control over India. The battle of Plassey in 1757 and battle of Buxar in 1764 not only established British political supremacy over

Indian territories but also through the treaty of Allahabad, the company obtained the Dewani rights over Bihar, Bengal and Orissa

British economic policies in general proved destructive for the Indian people. The idea of modernization left little space for the non-industrial economy of India. New liberal policy of the industrial world was announcing the end of jajmani-system, and barter-exchange was to be replaced by money-economy. British arrival in India brought ruins to Indian handicrafts, small scale cottage industry could not meet the demands of the market as British goods were cheap and were of good standard. "The Industrial Revolution in England dramatically changed the whole pattern of trade, and the years from 1813 to 1858 saw the classic age of free-trader industrial capitalist exploitation, converting India rapidly into a market for Manchester textiles and a source for raw materials, uprooting her traditional handicrafts—a period when 'the home-land of cotton was inundated with cotton'. From the latter half of the nineteenth century onwards, finance-imperialism began to entrench itself in India through some export of capital and a massive chain of British-controlled banks, export-import firms and managing agency houses." [Sarkar Modern India, p24] Soon the Indian small industries faced the shortage of raw material. Gradually Indian industries saw the end of their growth. Thus the company established monopoly over Indian cotton industry and this control was founded on the ruins of the Indian small scale industries and handicrafts. This set in a feeling of discontent in the minds of the owners and in the labors as well.

However, the major source of the Indian economy was still the agriculture, but here too whatsoever provisions were taken up by the British in the name of the liberalism and rationalization of the taxes, proved discomforting and destructive for the peasants at all levels. Cornwallis reforms and his agrarian policies were first introduced in Bengal as revenue reform measure known as "permanent settlement", fail to provide any relief to the peasants, instead, it worsened the condition further. subsequent reforms of "Ryottwari" and "Mahalwari" in south and west northwest regions all proved beneficial only for the British, as all these measures worked as a revenue generating tool.

Peasants came under heavy burden of taxes which in turn forced the middle and small peasants to surrender their property to the landowners. Moneylenders also benefited from these arrangements as they provided the much needed support to the peasants in times of droughts, famine, floods and epidemic. But poor peasant, who was unaware of the money-lender's web, seldom could payback the debt, thus, the uneducated tillers of the land had to surrender their rights over the land. Decades leading to the rebellion saw many epidemics and famines which further deteriorated the condition of the peasantry, which led them to take part in the revolt. British laws not only hurt small peasantry, but it also affected landowners and talukdars, they were reduced to a position of mere kashtkar, their property rights and big land-holdings were confiscated as they failed to pay a fix amount to the authorities. This, not only dented their political control, but also harmed them emotionally. It prompted talukdars to confront the British, as they received rejection from the authorities and felt isolated from their property

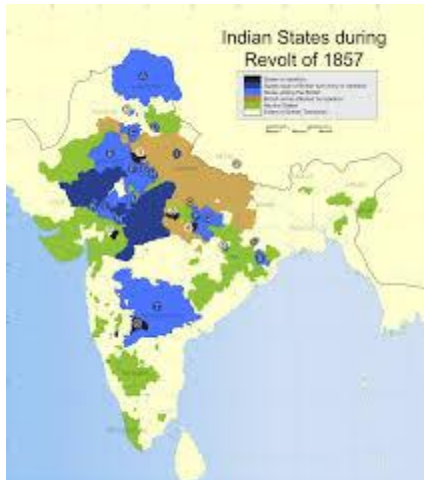
Bandopadhyay reveals that the annexation of Awadh was followed by a summary settlement in 1856, which led to the dispossession of a number of powerful talukdars. The settlement was made with the actual occupiers of the land or village coparcenaries to the disregard of all other proprietary rights, in the same way as it was done a little while ago in the North-Western Provinces. The prime motive was to gain popularity among the agricultural population and get rid of the unwanted middlemen who stood between the peasants and the government. As a result, in Awadh the taluqdars lost about half of their estates; they were disarmed and their forts demolished, resulting in a considerable loss of status and power in local society. In the eyes of law they were now no different from the humblest of their tenants. Awadh, therefore, became the hotbed of discontent of the landed aristocrats and so was the North-Western Provinces, where too many taluqdars had lately been dispossessed. As the revolt started, these talukdars quickly moved into the villages they had recently lost, and significantly, they faced no resistance from their erstwhile tenants. Bound by ties of kinship and feudal loyalty, the villagers were happy to acknowledge the claims of their lords and joined hands against their common enemy, the British. [Bandopadhyay :p173]

But as Judith Brown explains, that the talukdars were not hit that badly. "In fact under the British settlement of Oudh in 1856 the talukdars who lost land were generously compensated; and much land remained under their control—62 per cent of the area settled at the time. In 1857-8 not all those who lost land rebelled." [Brown :p107] a talukdar, Raja Harwant Singh lost 200 of his 322 villages in 1856-7, yet gave refuge to British officers during disturbances. [Brown p107]. Raja Man Singh, for example, hesitated until August 1857 before "rebell[ing]" to safeguard his future when it seemed that British power had been irreparably demolished. He had lost all but six of his villages: but rebellion for him was a political calculation rather than an automatic response to dispossession. [Brown p107] there were also talukdars who not only maintained peace in their territory but at the same time extended support to the British in Agra, specially the talukdars of Mathura and Aligarh. [Brown p108]

One must note that whosoever, wheresoever's and against whomsoever the people may have fought, the industrialists, talukdars and British were less likely to lose, but it was the small peasants and workers who were at the receiving end, The largest part of the population of India were to face the hardships. It was the sweat of the laborers and the peasants which was responsible for the growth of Indian economy, but it was ruined, which led to a mass unrest.

Political reasons:

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Just on the threshold of the 19th century, Mysore was taken over by the Company and was brought under "Subsidiary alliance". In 1802 Peshwa Baji Rao II sought British protection and accepted the Subsidiary alliance. [Under Subsidiary alliance, British Company was to extend military support to the state; in turn the state would pay for a British army and consult a British Resident stationed in ruler's court]. Lord Auckland installed an indirect rule in North-west by restoring a deposed king on the Afghan throne; and Lord Ellenborough took over Sind in 1843. [bandopadhyay110]

Following decades saw the annexation of Awadh by Lord Dalhousie on grounds of misgovernment. It was only a logical culmination of a long-drawn out process, which began in 1801, when Lord Wellesley established control over half of Awadh. The arrival of Lord Dalhousie in India in the year 1849 also saw the annexation of the territory of Punjab, as Maharaja Dalip Singh signed the treaty on 29 March 1849. Thus making it a province under company rule in India. [Bandopadhyay :108]

Further on, the second half of the 19th century saw more Indian territories coming under the company control. As the company found it necessary that the security of the company is of utmost importance and is under threat, which was a fair justification for the imperial expansion. It was during the time of Lord Dalhousie that expansionist tendencies manifested the most during Company's regime. And he protected the company interests in most efficient manner. By using his "Doctrine of Lapse", [the policy of annexing the territories of Indian rulers who died without a male heir], by 1856 he had taken over Satara, Sambalpur, Baghat, Udaipur, Nagpur and Jhansi. [Bandopadhyay]

Thus one finds that the company authorities used all kinds of legal and illegal methods to protect their commercial interests. Indian rulers willingly or unwillingly surrendered their freedom to the colonial might; they became mere puppet in the hands of the resident. The resident gradually from a position of mere political adviser became a political dictator, who in fact worked as a company's political representative in the princely states, implementing the policies of the company. In doing this, company authorities adopted the vigorous display of the power of the sword, and by 1857 the Company had annexed about 63 per cent of the territories of the Indian subcontinent and had subordinated over 78 per cent of its population. [Bandopadhyay]

Soon the idea of annexation created a fear in the minds of those states also where Dalhousie had not yet turned too. This impending threat, despair, anxiety and an unfaithful behavior of the British demoralized the Indian rulers. The doctrine of lapse, subsidiary alliance and many other anti-India policies: end of pension, position, honor and status forced the states to prepare for a stand off. As it happened in the case of Karnataka and Tanjore, the positions of Nawab and King were withdrawn. Not only this, the pension of Nana sahib was also stopped and he was subjected to leave his native, and live in Kanpur. Lakshmi Bai the queen of Jhansi found herself in similar political helplessness. Last Mughal Bahadur shah met with the same fate, Dalhousie decided that the successors of the Mughal Emperor will have to leave the Red fort and would stay in Qutub minar. Lord Canning further announced that the position of Badshah will no longer be recognized after the death of Bahadur shah. This agitated the minds of both Muslims and Hindus equally. The people of India saw it as a conspiracy to overthrow the mughal-rule, which was still honored by the people of India.

For the British, Hindu Muslim relations always remain a mystery. Politically, the union of two great religions was always a threat to the Company rule. However, the future steps to create a divide between these two religions were clearly represented in early 20th century. [Formation of Muslim league] and [Morley Minto reforms [separate electorate for Muslims]]. Although, there was little reason to believe that there was any threat for any religion, yet, reforms, education and new ideas were not welcomed by the orthodoxy. And this particular construct was exploited by the leadership for parochial interests.

"Leaders such as the Mughal Emperor or Khan Bahadur Khan of Bareilly made political appeals where they stressed the danger to religion. But the force of such appeals was muted by the leaders' awareness that they must try to unite Hindus and Muslims against the British." [Brown 105] a Muslim conspiracy to restore the Mughal Empire was also spreading fast. But as Judith brown finds, "there is no proof of such a conspiracy." [Brown 106] The rebels were notoriously divided in loyalty and intention, and the elderly Mogul was completely surprised by his sudden elevation by Hindu sepoys. When a Hindu leader of revolt, the Nana Saheb, attempted to persuade Rohilkhand hindus to join the rebel Muslims in opposition to the British he had little success. Many Rohillas for their part found his arrival offensive. Judith brown further finds, "In other areas Hindus and Muslims could be found both in the rebel camp and among British supporters." [Brown 106]

Contemporary Historian William Dalrymple reveals that "the rebels were motivated primarily by resistance to the move of the East India Company, which was perceived as an attempt to impose Christianity and Christian laws in India."

For instance, when the last Mughal, Bahadur Shah Zafar met the sepoys on 11 May 1857, he was told: "We have joined hands to protect our religion and our faith." later in Chandni C howk, He asked the people gathered there, "Brothers are you with those of the faith?"

Those British men and women who had previously converted to Islam such as the defectors, Sergeant-Major Gordon, and Abdullah Beg, a former Company soldier, were spared. In contrast, foreign Christians such as Red Midgeley, John Jennings, and Indian converts to Christianity such as one of Zafar's personal physicians, Dr. Chaman Lal, were killed outright.

Dalrymple further points out that as late as 6 September, when calling the inhabitants of Delhi to rally against the upcoming British assault, Zafar issued a proclamation stating that "this was a religious war being prosecuted on behalf of 'the faith', and that all Muslim and Hindu residents of the imperial city, or of the countryside were encouraged to stay true to their faith and creeds." As further evidence, he observes that "the Urdu sources 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)."

(http://www.google.co.in/?gfe_rd=cr&ei=xQsVMWHNeXA8ged4oDYBg)



http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/f/f2/Bahadur_Shah_Zafar.jpg

In his book "India under British rule" James Talboys Wheeler sums up the events as "Rebellion was preached by Mohammedan fanatics yearning for the restoration of Islam as the dominant religion. Dispossessed talukdars, who thought themselves, rightly or wrongly to have been unjustly dealt with in the settlement of the land revenue, took a part in the disturbances. In a word all the turbulent and ill-conditioned elements of the population in the north-west,—all "who were discontented or in debt,"—readily joined in the insurrection; possibly to revenge some fancied injury, but mostly from that love of riot and plunder which had been universal in Hindustan under Mahratta supremacy." [Wheeler J.T. "India under British rule" London MACMILLAN AND CO. 1886 p.14]1

Social causes:-

Many social reasons could be cited for the revolt of 1857, as the company rule belonged to a different race; they were obsessed with the idea of being a superior race and have a responsibility to civilize the inferior race. However, the dichotomy of "superior and inferior" led the British to follow the policy of "discrimination." The British looked down upon the Indians as inferior race and discriminated with them racially at every step. They were not allowed at many places such as railway, parks and hotels as these were reserved for the English. This racial arrogance of the English harmed the Indian masses, and they began to regard the Englishmen as their foe. Thus a hostile attitude crept in the minds of the people.

Influenced by the "white men's burden", they the British, at least in the first half of the 19th century introduced many liberal reforms. These reforms would not have become a reality without the help of "first liberal" Raja Rammohan Roy. "When the practice of sati was legally abolished in 1829, the credit for its abolition was given to the Governor General, William Bentinck. However, as a contemporary English observer—herself a woman—pointed out, the legislation could not have been brought about 'but for the powerful though unacknowledged aid of the great Hindu philosopher Rammohan Roy'." [Guha R.C. penguin Delhi 2010 p39] Rammohan Roy advocated that Sati was not a religious duty sanctioned or upheld by Hindu scriptural traditions. [Guha p39] not only British liberals, but Rammohan himself was abused, and his ideas were considered as an obstruction to the Hindu conservative customs.

In the response of the efforts of Pt. Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar this act came in to being, which not only questioned the issue of widow remarriage, but also touched upon the issues of child-marriage, early widowhood, right to inheritance and polygamy. However, the same was not practiced by the low caste Hindus.

The efforts of Macaulay minutes and the woods dispatch introduced English education in India, which stirred the modernizing liberals, and they began to resist the social evils prevalent in the Indian society. The propagation of the work of the Christian missionaries and the changing of the Hindu law of property with a view to facilitate the conversion of Hindus to Christianity alarmed many orthodox Indians. They feared that these practices would upset the social and religious order of the traditional Indian society.

Whatsoever steps were taken up by the British, with the help of liberal Indians, were not accepted by the Hindu orthodoxy, especially by the Brahmins and the upper caste Hindus. As it was considered as interference in Hindu social affairs, and a threat to Hindu religion.

The Sepoys and the British:-

During the late eighteenth century and the first half of the nineteenth century, the armies of the Company, specifically those of the eastern Presidency, were victorious in many wars, and the British had an unbroken series of triumphs in India, against the Marathas, Mysore, north Indian states, the Gurkhas, the Sikhs and abroad in Egypt, China, Burma and elsewhere. Here in the participation of the Indian sepoys was significant. They not only fought gallantly, they also brought honors for the company. It should however ever be remembered, as Bandhopadhyay notes that maximum number of Indian sepoys were in the Bengal regiment, and if we look at total numbers, almost half of the Indian sepoys of the East India Company had rebelled. [Bandhopadhyay p187] further, Judith brown writes, "Only 23,000 out of the army's 50,000 men were British, partly because European troops had been withdrawn to serve in the Crimean and Persian Wars. Europeans were concentrated in Bengal and Punjab, and this meant that the Gangatic plain, including its key towns, was virtually denuded of British troops. In the opinion of one contemporary this 'was the one, great, capital error.'" [Brown Judith m. 104] However, the sepoys of Indian origin in the British army were unhappy for long and for more than one reason. Racial discrimination was visible all over. The Indian soldiers were considered inferior and were ill-treated by English officers. The higher ranks in the army were reserved for the British. And the Indian army men were deliberately given lower ranks and supposed to do works generally disliked by the British. The Indians were also excluded from responsible positions. As the colonial rulers did not find them worthy for these tasks.

This discriminatory policy by the company rule provoked the sepoys who rebelled in the first half of the 19th century. The Madras army had mutinied in Vellore in 1806 and the Bengal army in Java in 1815, Gwalior in 1834, Afghanistan during 1839 to 1842, and Burma in 1824 and 1852. [JALAL A.SUGATHA BOSE, modern south Asia History, Culture, Political Economy, oxford university press Delhi, 1998, p90] in the 1850s the British carelessly added a number of new provisions leading to The refusal of units to fight in Burma. It further led to the passage of the "general service enlistment act of 1856" which required recruits to undertake to serve abroad or, as the soldiers saw it, across the Kala Pani. [JALAL and BOSE] The Afghan debacle had also led the British to widen the circle of caste and regional groups from which they recruited the Bengal army. "The Rajputs and Bhumihaar Brahmins of Banaras and Awadh who had so far formed the backbone of the Bengal army thoroughly disliked the new recruitment policy. After the conquest of Punjab and Sind these soldiers lost their bhatta (pay bonuses) for service abroad, and with the annexation of

Awadh in 1856 they lost prestige.”[JALAL and BOSE] At the same time their families were being subjected to a high land-revenue demand.

As the Sepoys of Indian origin in the company's army were already suffering from a deep sense of social, psychological and economic unease, the most unexpected happened. “Certain greased cartridges for the new Lee Enfield rifle supplied the immediate fuel to spark off revolt. These cartridges were rumored to have been smeared with cow and pig fat, repugnant to Hindus and Muslims alike, and were widely seen as an insidious plot by the infidels to pollute Indians before forcing their conversion to Christianity.” [JALAL and BOSE] not only this, there were instances as Judith m. Brown records; “some evangelical army officers such as Colonel Wheeler in Barrack pore openly preached the Christian gospel.” [Brown Judith M/. 104]

Wheeler T.J. in his book “India under British rule” gives an account of Cartridge controversy, “In those days , soldiers had been accustomed for generations to bite off the end of his paper cartridge before loading his musket. Accordingly a supply of cartridges for the new rifle was received from England, and forwarded to each of the three schools, and further supplies of the same pattern were manufactured in the arsenal at Dumdum by low-caste workmen known as Lascars. Suddenly it leaked out that the new cartridges were greased with the fat of cows, or with the fat of pigs. Thus every Hindu sepoy who bit the cartridge would lose his caste and religion as if he had eaten beef; whilst every Mohammedan sepoy would be polluted by contact with pork, and not only lose his religion, but be barred out for ever from the heaven of celestial houris.” [Wheeler T.J. p124-5]

He further notes, “A Lascar employed in Dumdum arsenal met a Brahman sepoy going to Barrackpore, and asked him for a drink of water out of his brass lotah. This was an unusual request, intended to vex and annoy the Brahman. A thirsty low-caste Hindu might ask a high-caste man to pour water into his mouth, but would not offend the Brahman by the bare suggestion of drinking out of his lotah. The Brahman turned away in disgust at the idea of low-caste lips polluting his drinking-cup. The Lascar retorted that the Brahman would soon be as impure as himself, for he would bite the new cartridges which had been smeared with the fat of cows and pigs.” [Wheeler T.J. p125]

The story may or may not have been true, but the rumor filled the air, and the anger and anxiety were reflected vehemently in the minds of the caste Hindus and Muslims as well. “Suet and lard are such familiar ingredients in European cookery, that no one in the British Isles could have been surprised at their being used for greasing Enfield cartridges. But to Europeans that have lived in India, the bare fact that cartridges should have been greased with suet or lard, to be bitten by Hindu or Mohammedan sepoys, seems a mad freak of fortune which is altogether incomprehensible. In the fierce antagonism between the two religions, Hindus have thrown dead pigs into Mohammedan mosques, and Mohammedans have thrown slaughtered cows into Hindu temples; but the British government stood on neutral ground. It had always professed to hold an even balance between the two religionists, and any attempt to destroy the caste of Hindus, or the religion of

Mohammedans, was altogether foreign to the ideas of Asiatics or Europeans". [Wheeler]. T. p125]

In the spring of 1857 a Brahmin sepoy named Mangal Pandey attacked Lieutenant Baugh and killed him. This episode in Indian history could be marked as a starting point for the rebellion. For some weeks the 34th Native Infantry was not disbanded. Mangal Pandey and the Jemadar [who refused to arrest Mangal Pandey] were tried, convicted, and hanged, but the plague of mutiny was not stayed. As soldiers refused to load the new rifle in the early summer of 1857, they were sentenced to imprisonment and sent off to jail in fetters. It was the sight of their compatriots humiliated in this fashion that in fact forced the XI Native Cavalry, in Meerut, to mutiny on the night of 10–11 May. The mutineers then marched to Delhi where the reluctant and ageing Mughal emperor, Bahadur Shah Zafar, was installed as the symbolic head of the revolt. Although it was a symbolic act, yet it in a way was recognition to the fact that the mutineers were united and were determined to overthrow the company rule.

The story in brief:-

After having discussed the causes of the revolt one finds it absolutely essential to read a brief account of the events without which the reading remains incomplete. And also, to establish a logical conclusion and historical connect of the events one should go through the chronology of the revolt.

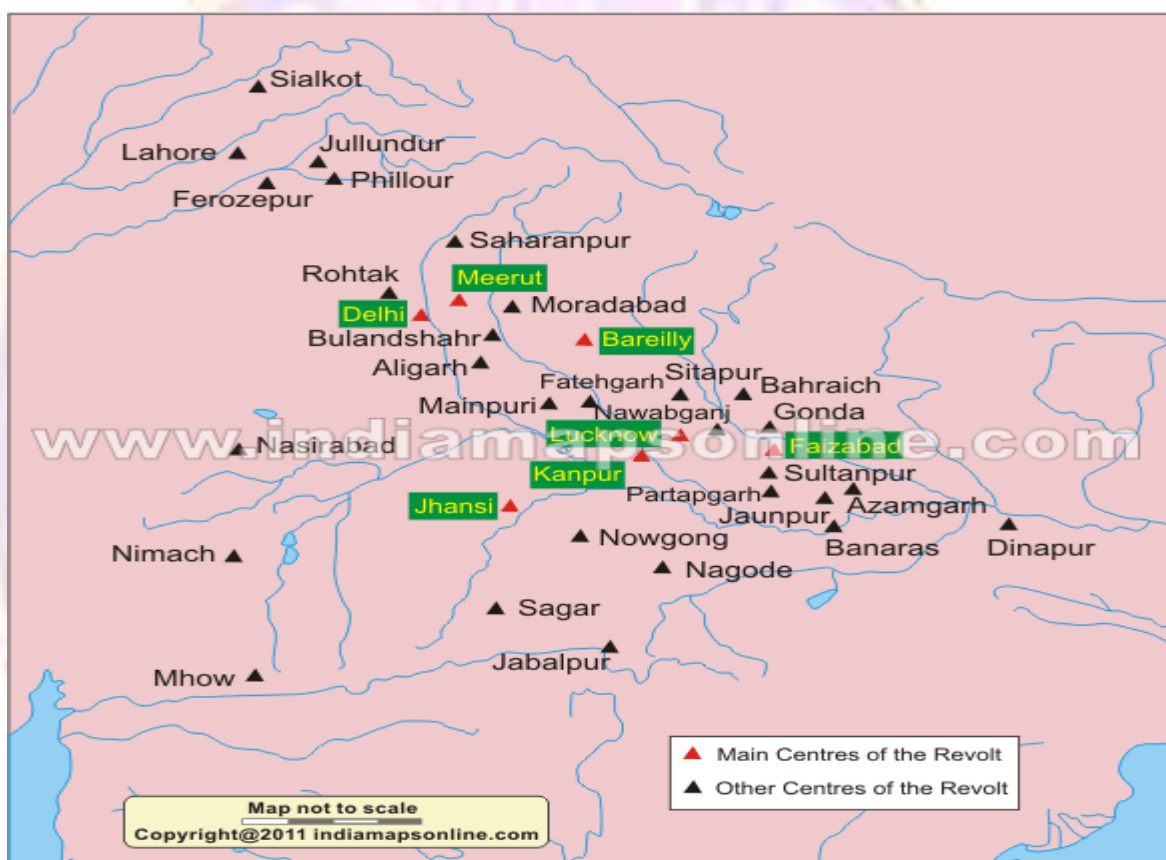
The rebellion broke out on March 29th 1857 at Barrackpore. Where a sepoy Mangal Pandey attacked Lieutenant Baugh and killed him. When British officer called for help the sepoys sympathized with Mangal Pandey, and the Jemadar forbade them to stir. The primary cause for this disobedience was cartridge question and a suspicion of despoiling of their religion. [Read "the sepoys and the british"] the story had travelled too quickly, and soon the large number of armymen especially the Indian soldiers were aware of the story, at least in the Bengal presidency. On May 3rd, at luck now, the sepoys mutinied, which was telegraphed to the then governor general canning, who decided to disband the regiment. Sir Henry Lawrence ordered the same, and thus The 34th Native Infantry was disbanded as the 19th had been five weeks before, but, unlike the sepoys of the 19th, they showed no signs of contrition. [Wheeler J.T. 131] Still, it was hoped that the disbandment of the 34th would put an end to the mutiny.

On 10 May 1857, the soldiers rebelled in Meerut. They attacked the British officers and freed their fellow soldiers, who had been imprisoned as they refused to use the new cartridges. On 11 May 1857, they proceeded to Delhi, under the command of Bakht Khan, and persuaded Bahadur Shah Zafar, the last Mughal Emperor, to accept the leadership of the rebellion, which was gaining momentum in central and north India.

Soon the disaffected mutiny covered a large area and the mutineers also began to amass support of the people. One should also remember that the two other presidencies saw no such disturbance. [Bombay and madras] A large number of sepoys stationed at Banaras, Allahabad, Bareilly, Jhansi, Danapur and Jagdishpur soon joined the rebellion. At certain

places, particularly in the Awadh area, local chieftains and land magnates, persuaded by the sepoys assumed the leadership as they had their own grudges against the Company rule. Begum Hazrat Mahal of Lucknow, Nana Saheb of Bithoor, Khan Bahadur of Bareilly, Kunwar Singh of Jagdishpur, and Rani Lakshmi Bai of Jhansi soon started leading the rebellion from the front. They had joined the rebellion partly out of their own resentment against the Company Raj and partly under the pressure and persuasion of the sepoys. [pradhan40]

<http://www.indiamapsonline.com/history-of-india-map/images/Important%20centres%20of%201857%20revolt%20in%20north%20india.gif>



The queen of the princely state of Jhansi, Lakshmi Bai though was reluctant initially, took command and led the forces. Her troops were defeated in Jhansi but she captured Gwalior with the help of faithful Tantya Tope and some afghan soldiers. In Kanpur the revolt was led by Nana Saheb who declared himself the Peshwa and governor of Bahadur Shah. Tantya Tope took command of the rebel forces and defeated General Windham outside Kanpur. General Havelock although faced a stiff resistance by The rebels, but he succeeded in suppressing the Peshwa forces. And in lucknow Begam HazratMahal [the widow of Nawab Wazid Ali Shah] commanded the rebellion. She declared her son Brijis Kadiras as the Nawab

of avadh against the firm will of the company rule. The British resident sir Henry Lawrence was killed by the mutineers here in Lucknow on July 4 1857.

It seems pertinent to give an account of the happenings in the northeast region at the time of the revolt and its impact in that particular region. Maniram Barua, popularly known as Maniram Dewan, an Assamese nobleman planned to stage a revolt simultaneously with that of the Revolt of 1857.

He started organizing protests against the British. He advocated the restoration of monarchy in Assam and tried to persuade the British through prayer and petitions. For this, he submitted two memorandums to John Moffat Mills, in his memorandum he pleaded for the restoration of monarchy in Assam and also pointed out the harsh administrative decisions that hampered the aristocracy and ruined the condition of the common people. However his petitions were rejected by the British Government.

When Maniram was at Kolkata the sepoy mutiny broke out in north India. He made up his mind to take full advantage of the situation and planned to drive out the British from Assam. Being encouraged by the success of the sepoys at Meerut, Delhi and Lucknow, he also decided to unite the sepoys stationed in Assam and raise the banner of rebellion. Since the sepoys stationed at Dibrugarh mostly hailed from Bihar where Kunwar Singh led the revolt against the British. These sepoys, according to Maniram would surely join the revolt in Assam. Secondly, the Assamese sepoys owing allegiance to the Ahom king were also sure to join the rebellion. Thirdly, owing to the difficulties in communication it would be impossible for the British to dispatch a British army immediately after the outbreak of rebellion in Assam. Finally, the Khassies, Nagas, Singphos and other hill tribes who had already rebelled, he believed, would extend their support to the cause.

Maniram also negotiated with Kandarpeswar Singha, the grandson of the deposed Raja Purandar Singha. Who was assisted by Piali Barua and some other noblemen viz., Madhu Mallick, Mayaram Barua, Kamala Charingia Barua, Mahidhar Sharma Muktiar, Dutiram Barua, Bahadur Gaonburha etc? Maniram also published pamphlets in which he vividly described the events of the Revolt of 1857.

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Maniram and his followers hatched a plot to start rebellion in Assam. During the time of Durga Puja in October, 1857 Maniram was expected to reach Assam with arms and ammunition. The sepoys stationed at various places like, Guwahati, Sadiya, Golaghat, Jorhat, etc, also gave assurance to join them. However, the British had come to know about the conspiracy of the sepoys in Assam and became alert. It was during this time that some of the letters sent by Maniram to Kandarpeswar was captured by the police under Haranath Barua 'Daroga' of Sibsagar. The British were clever enough to follow this clue. Charles Holryod, who was the Principal Assistant of Sibsagar immediately, took to action with the army to arrest the rebels. Kandarpeswar Singha was arrested from his palace on 7 September 1857. Maniram was arrested in Calcutta itself. Later, he was brought for trial in

Assam where he was hanged with Piali Barua. Thus the attempt of the Revolt of 1857 by Maniram in Assam ended in a pathetic failure.

The summer of 1857 saw many places in Bengal presidency, where mutineers were fighting, and were determined to dislodge the colonial rule. Soon the civilian population also joined the rebellion. Both the sides not only lost soldiers but also lost men, women and children. For a while it seemed that the days of the Company Raj were numbered. But there was swift and strong mobilization by the British which began to quell the revolt. By the end of September the British forces supported by Gorkhas and Sikhs succeeded in capturing Delhi. One would keep in mind that the Sikhs had no sympathy for the Mohammedans, nor for the king of Delhi. On the contrary, they remembered the murder of their Gurus and saints by Aurangzeb and his successors, and were burning to be revenged on Delhi and the Mogul. During the reign of Runjeet Singh they had outraged the Mohammedans of the Punjab by polluting their mosques.[wheeler J.T. 142] However, The successors of the last mughal were captured and killed. John Nicholson established control over Delhi. And Bahadur Shah Zafar was deported to Burma, where in Rangoon, he died after few years in 1862.

Despite of all this, it did not mark the end of the rebellion, it continued in other centers like Kanpur, Banaras, Allahabad etc. In all these places, it had assumed a form of civil rebellion in which people belonging to all sections of the society participated. By the middle of the following year rebellion virtually collapsed. Kunwar Singh died in May 1858, the Rani of Jhansi Lakshmi Bai died in the battle field in June 1858, where Hugh Rose suppressed the rebellion. Nana Saheb fled to Nepal, and Tantia Tope was captured and executed in April 1859 after being betrayed by a local zamindar. Thus by the beginning of 1859 the rebellion was crushed by the British.

Causes responsible for the failure:-

Company forces defeated the Indian mutineers, though the fighting contingent of the Indian soldiers was very strong and was also aware of the local language, topography, culture and on top of all these, they were amply trained for both infantry and artillery. As one should recall that they had brought honors for the company on many occasions and at many places, yet, they were humbled by the British. Here it seems necessary to examine the causes for this failure.

The mutinous region was largely restricted to a particular location in the central and north India. Specifically in the Doab region, in the North of Narmada river. The south, west, far eastern and far north of India generally remained calm. Thus one finds that the revolt was highly localized and could not stir wrest of India.

The revolt could not gather support of all the sections of Indian society. Although many princely states did take part in the rebellion, but there was a large number of native states who either stayed neutral or even came out to extend assistance to the British forces. Many of the big land magnates declined to join the revolt. In fact, they supported the British to suppress the uprising. The Jaats, Marathas and Sikhs were not supporting the rebellion. [As has been discussed elsewhere that the Sikhs were not happy with the Mughals because of the past history.] In Bengal, as Judith Brown states, "educated Indians at once expressed their loyalty, and their associations presented addresses of support at Government House in Calcutta. Their response was hardly surprising. Such men had material interests in the new order, and often a deep, ideological commitment to new ideas. They would have been uneasy bed-fellows with the rural rebels and disgruntled sepoys who attempted to revive older loyalties." [Brown Judith M. 106] she further finds, "The rebels were notoriously divided in loyalty and intention, and the elderly Mogul was completely surprised by his sudden elevation by Meerut's Hindu sepoys. At a local level all castes and communities were fractured in their response to events—including the Muslims. Only in Rohilkhand were Muslims the prime movers and supporters of wide-spread civil disaffection." [Brown Judith M. 106]

True, that the most educational reforms began in the eastern presidency, and they were the first beneficiaries of the fruits of the developments, so they had little reason to go against the British policies. Modern educated population was also suspicious of the rebels, and they feared the opposition of the rebels in bringing about social reforms.

The revolt was not aptly organized and lacked coordinated planning. Although the last Mughal was crowned as a leader, but it appeared as a temporary arrangement. It was a choice of a small minority of rebels and was a decision taken in haste. In fact, the local leadership was more vocal and active. There was a clear absence of unity, and voices of leadership were coming from all existing classes, the peasants, the zamindars, native princes and talukdars were all confused and clamoring to be the leaders. As zamindars and talukdars were supported and considered as leaders by the Riyaya {the subjects of the riyasat (the Princely State)}. [Peasants living in the estate of the land magnates].

At times, it was also found that the rebels were not even sure of the opposition, they were not only groping in the dark, but also extremely lost in their goals. The rebels stood against the money lenders and local zamindars. One doubts whether the rebels had a common objective and a clear vision of nationalism.

Finally, one should acknowledge the fact that the British were better equipped with new technology and modern warfare methods. They had vast resources at their disposal. Modern armory, enough ammunition, good transport facilities and communication systems were available easily to the British. Whilst on the other hand mutineers were struggling to manage such things. Indian soldiers were also lacking a good commander, whereas the British forces had experienced generals like Havelock, James Outram, Henry and John Lawrence and John Nicholson to depend upon, who crushed the mutiny and won back the lost grounds for the company.

While one discusses the failure of the revolt, it comes so spontaneously to the mind that a collective and nationwide effort and a feeling of nationalism could have yielded different results, as we would see the consequences of the revolt in the following pages.

The Impact of Rebellion:-

The century between the battle of Plassey and the revolt of 1857 saw many changes in the company administration both on the economic and political fronts. Not only this, the two great monarchs of Great Britain queen Elizabeth and Queen Victoria saw the Indian sub-continent being ruled by three different administrative systems within their reigns, the great Mughals, the company rule and the British Raj from year 1600 to 1858. However, the consequences which the people of the sub-continent witnessed after the revolt of 1857 are very significant in the history of pre-Independent India, as one would acknowledge that constitutional development of India began from here on, and the parliamentary democracy in India also initiated after this revolt. The changes, developments and new policy implementations which took place as an aftermath of the uprising will be discussed in the following paragraph.

The queen's proclamation:

Queen Victoria http://s1.hubimg.com/u/768090_f260.jpg

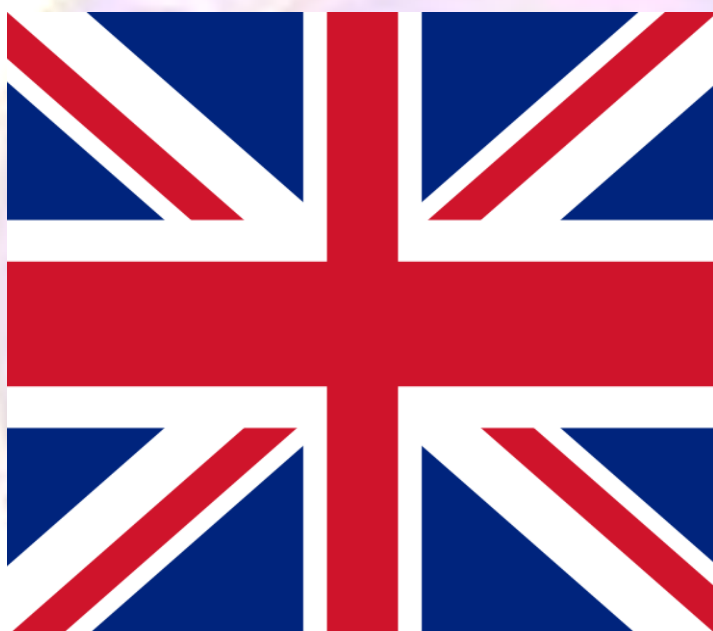


In November 1858 the queen's proclamation was issued, according to which, as earlier, in the days of company, the objective of British policy was to liquidate the native states, the new strategy after the revolt was the abandonment of the policy of annexations and turn the native rulers into allies and loyal supporters of British raj in India. The British

government even undertook to defend them against all attacks from within and without. Their interests and privileges were protected. They were secured in the possession of their land at the cost of peasants and were utilized as counter weights against the nationalist minded intelligentsia.

The right of a ruler to adopt a child in the absence of a natural heir was accepted. The Indian subjects of Her Majesty were declared equal to British subjects in other parts of the Empire. The subjects, irrespective of race or creed, would be freely and impartially admitted to offices subject to qualification.

http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/en/thumb/a/ae/Flag_of_the_United_Kingdom.svg/1024px-Flag_of_the_United_Kingdom.svg.png



Administrative changes and reforms:-

The last half of the nineteenth century is sometimes referred to as the 'high noon' of Britain's Indian empire. In those years it seemed at its most secure. Its external appearance was prestigious, sometimes flamboyantly powerful: while its structures solidified into a heavy, bureaucratic machine. Says Judith brown. 1857 was the year when though the revolt was suppressed but it led to drastic changes towards India. Firstly, it led to a number of changes in the Government of India's administrative structure. The Parliamentary Act, 1858 transferred the power to govern India from the East India Company to the British Crown. The power was now to be exercised by a Secretary of State for India aided by a Council. He would be holding a cabinet rank, in the Government of the United Kingdom. But his salary

and that of his establishment were to be paid from the revenues of India. (This payment continued up to 1919). The government was stipulated to be administered by the Viceroy but with the passage of time the Governor-general was reduced to a subordinate status in relation to the British government in matters of policy. The Governor-general became the viceroy and the representative of the Crown in India. Thus the authority over the control and direction of Indian affairs came to reside in London.

The Government of India Act, 1858, transferred to Her Majesty, Queen Victoria of England, "all territories under the possession or under the governments" of the Company and "all rights vested" in the Company in relation to territories. (The Proclamation of Queen Victoria).

Paradoxically, this assurance itself proved to be assigning the Crown the role of the guardian power asserting what came to be known as "paramouncy" over the Indian States. The process culminated in the proclamation of Queen Victoria, during the Delhi Durbar of 1877, as the Empress of India by the Viceroy, Lord Lytton.

The Indian Councils Act 1861 is important in the constitutional history of India for three reasons. First, it enabled the Governor-General or Viceroy to associate the people of the land with the work of legislation. Secondly, by restoring legislative powers of the Governments of Bombay and Madras, and thirdly by making provisions for the institutions of similar legislative councils in other provinces. The Act also laid the foundation of some good principles of Indian administration. Introduction of the portfolio system in which each member of the Viceroy's Executive Council was put in charge of a department was a sign of goodwill to the native people. The Ordinance power and Legislative system with non-officials constituted until now the cardinal features of Indian administration. Although the policy of increasing participation of Indian population in parliamentary affairs continued through the following government of India Acts of 1892, 1909, 1919 and 1935, but the clash of interests between colonial and nationalist forces continued as well.

Policy of social antagonism:

A policy of divide and rule was actively pursued to keep the Hindus and Muslims divided. Communalism was clandestinely spread and tensions between communities were rarely helped to ease. Caste based divisive policies were also adopted by the government. Would be worth mentioning that in the coming 20 years the caste and community based census was taken up in the sub-continent. In the army, public offices and public places the caste discrimination was amply witnessed.

The educated upper caste Hindus, the Muslim aristocracy, the princes and the feudal lords in turn supported the British rule because their position was closely bound up with the maintenance of British colonialism in India. The British policy in India became conservative and a hurdle to the rising progressive forces in India. Communal, caste, tribal and regional

loyalties were encouraged among the soldiers so that the sentiment of nationalism would not creep in the minds.

Though various acts Indian participation was increasing, yet as a policy British rule found Indians as an inferior race and declared them as a race unfit for ruling themselves, thus giving British rule a permanent nature for a longer period. Before 1857 colonial policy was to promote liberal progressive policy towards educational and social reforms. However, post 1857 the policies changed for the worst and became rather reactionary. The new education system which was introduced in the region was not positively encouraged at later stage by the British. As the newly emerging educated class began to analyze and criticize the imperial character of the British colonialism, demand for better representation and participation also increased at this time. The colonial masters not only showed little interest towards education but also dropped progressive liberal policies, and rather supported orthodox opinion.

The re-organization of the army:

The army was re-organized to strengthen British control over the country and avert any further rebellions in future. The number of British soldiers was increased and all the higher posts and key positions were filled up by the British. Would be relevant to say that a policy of racism was implemented in the army. As for example, The Indian Sepoys of the British army were not promoted above the rank of Subedar. The residences of the two races were separately maintained. Superior race was to issue orders and the Indian races were there to obey.

In short, one would find that British policies towards Indian people drastically changed. Civilizing mission regarding the people of India, specifically in the field of education, social reform movement and economic development were considerably slowed down. Thence the objective of being benevolent to the traditional Indian society was quietly discontinued. Conservative policies of the government came in to being, replacing the early liberalism. Company-raj was withdrawn and the sub-continent became a part of the British Empire. The India which was hitherto peaceful, suddenly realized that the two communities of Hindus and Muslims are falling prey to British policy of communalism. Centuries old harmony slowly gave way to animosity, finally culminating in the partition of India. However, after a gap of about 20 years, the new social forces, namely, the intelligentsia and commercial bourgeoisie became the pioneers in spreading national consciousness and leading the first organized nationalist movement. Imbued with Western liberal ideas of freedom, democracy, rights, equality and liberty, this new class was in the forefront of political reform movements, where on they formed social and political associations and societies. They in fact, understood the exploitative character of British colonialism and probed deep into the real nature of imperialism. It also led agitations against the repressive measures of the government and spread national consciousness which culminated in the establishment of

Indian National Congress, finally leading the population of the sub-continent to independence through various phases of freedom struggle.

The nature of the rebellion

Historians have described the nature of the rebellion of 1857 in more than one ways. Was it a revolt based on the idea of "nation?" Or it was just a sepoy mutiny? Some scholars have found it a revolt by the peasants in upper central India, whilst some other leading historians have argued that the revolt was a struggle between the two opposing religions: Christianity and Islam, (as has been discussed earlier in the chapter, the views by William Dalrymple)

The imperial or the colonial stream finds it a "mere mutiny" Wheeler T.J. in his book *India under British rule* spend many pages only to suggest how the British soldiers suppressed the mutinous sepoys. And how brutish were the mutineers. "Before the day was over the clerk at the telegraph office on the Ridge sent his last telegram." "The mutineers from Meerut are masters of Delhi; several Europeans have been murdered; the office must be closed." Shortly afterwards the rebel sepoys swarmed out of the city to complete the work of destruction on the Ridge, and the poor telegraph clerk was cut to pieces and heard of no more." [Wheeler 138]. Most British historians have found the 1857 revolt as a rebellion primarily restricted to Indian army men and did not enjoy the support of the commons. Many English contemporary historians view it as a mutiny of a section of misguided sepoys. Charles Ball, John Kaye or Colonel Malleson has all harped on the familiar theme of mutiny fomented by conspiratorial aristocrats.

These **scholars** perhaps called it a sepoy mutiny as the initial thrust of the revolt in the form of the cartridge controversy was given by the soldiers. But not all the soldiers did supported the same cause, in fact in the upper India the Sikhs and the Jats were with the opposing camp. The sepoys were not only divided on caste and communal grounds but there were large contingent of serving soldiers who were working for the British to do the lower tasks. There are instances quoted by Wheeler when British were given shelter by the villagers in Delhi. [Wheeler 138]

On the other hand Indian nationalists have regarded its nature to be the early footprints of freedom struggle. Leaders like V.D. Savarkar opine that the revolt was the first war of independence. As the Indian aggression was against the colonial rulers and was fought for the idea of "Rashtra", the "Swadharma" and "Swaraj."

The **nationalist** school feels that the revolt sparked off the discontent of the Indians towards the foreign rule and they fought bitterly to drive away the foreigners from their homeland. According to them, the Hindus and Muslims participated equally in the revolt and displayed a new bond of unity against common enemy. The war of the independence was

not only fought against the British exploitation, discrimination and repression, but it was because of the "common suffering", which led the two religions to get united.

In a documentary produced by BBC "the clash of the worlds" it is clearly suggested that the mutiny was an aftermath of the clash between two opposing religions, the Islam and the Christianity. It had its kernel in the "wahabi" movement, (A member of a strictly orthodox Sunni Muslim sect from Saudi Arabia; strives to purify Islamic beliefs and rejects any innovation occurring after the 3rd century of Islam) which was started by Mohd. Ibn abd Al-Wahab in Saudi Arab, which had its branches in India also. In 3rd and 4th decade of 19th century, the movement was led by syed khan initially in patna and latter in north-west frontier region of the British India.

The sub-continent which was housing both Islam and Christianity till early 19th century suddenly found that both religions have created a wide gap between them. The demand of allowing the British missionaries in India and the arrival and the activities of Sir John m. Jennings quickly reversed the harmonious relations in to hatred, disharmony and mistrust. The Islam which still was symbolically ruling in Delhi became "the force of darkness." Hindus and Muslims both religions were considered as barbaric by the newly arriving Christian faith in India, with the idea of converting the uncivilized to civilized culture.

This not only threatened the politically dominant Islam, but Hindus were also worried of the Christian conspiracy. Although the mutiny was led by the Islamic view that Mughal rule should be restored, the Hindus were the army in majority. The threat of religious impurity and conversion brought the Hindus and Muslims together, and British imperialism and Islamic fundamentalism who were fighting to establish the political control in Delhi saw the walled city flooded with blood and grounds covered by dead bodies. Both churches and mosques were polluted to the extreme. William Dalrymple also have discussed in his book "the last mughal": the fall of a dynasty, how the revolt was a mutiny fought on religious grounds. [See the page 6 of the chapter] It was a war of fundamentalism verses modernism, and civilized verses uncivilized. To say in short, it was a struggle between western imperialism and oriental orthodoxy.

Addressing the question of the nature of the revolt, peasants also played an important role in the uprising. Bandopadhyay reveals that those who revolted had two elements among them—the feudal elements and the big landlords on the one end [which have been discussed in the political causes] and the peasantry on the other. Though the middlemen were removed and the cultivators were granted relatively easier situations for cultivation and revenue payments, but whatsoever ease they may have received they in fact were aware of the situation that the British exploitation was continuing, for there always were high revenue demands by the colonizers. The peasants latter decided to take part in the rebellion with the land lords. Where agriculture was insecure, high revenue demands inevitably drove the peasants into debt and eventually, dispossession. One would keep in the mind that before the arrival of company rule there did not exist any army which would have this much Noticeable heterogeneity with precisely controlled organization. In fact before being a sepoy the armyman was a naturally born cultivator.

The **Marxists** scholars view the uprising of 1857 as a struggle of the soldiers and the farmers against feudal bondage. The soldiers were disturbed by the unethical rules and regulations regarding their service conditions and repressive religious conspiracy. Whilst the peasant's agitation was driven by the idea that the British are involved in a mechanism which is based on exploitation, repression and wrongful accumulation of capital. In fact, the Indian soldier was a peasant in uniform and wanted to throw away the feudal domination infused by the British authorities. On the whole one may look at the revolt as a product of the accumulated discontent of the people against the foreign government.

Conclusion:

No single reason can be held responsible for the revolt of 1857. All the aforesaid causes are equally agitated the minds of the people who were heterogeneous in nature. "The Indian Rebellion of 1857 was not one movement, it was many". Says Eric Stokes. [Bandopadhyay 191] In 1965 Thomas Metcalf wrote: "There is a widespread agreement that it was something more than a sepoy mutiny, but something less than a national revolt". [Bandopadhyay 193] C.A. Bayly argued those who rebelled, had various motives, which were not always connected to any specific grievance against the British; often they fought against each other and this "Indian disunity played into British hands." There was no premeditated plan or a conspiracy, as the circulation of chapattis or wheat bread from village to village prior to the revolt conveyed confusing messages.

It was primarily a mutiny of the sepoys, the civilian unrest being a secondary phenomenon, which happened as the unruly elements took advantage of the breakdown of law and order. Some of the later Indian historians too, like S.N. Sen., in his centennial history of the revolt, have echoed the same colonial argument. "The movement began as a military mutiny", Sen. argued; and then "when the administration collapsed the lawless elements ... took the upper hand". [Bandopadhyay 191] R.C. Majumdar's views are identical when he finds that some self-seeking elements took advantage of the situation. S.B. Chaudhuri, who saw in the revolt "the first combined attempt of many classes of people to challenge a foreign power. This is a real, if remote, approach", he thought, "to the freedom movement of India of a later age. [bandopadhyay 191 192] however, this 1857 rebellion not only brought an end to the company-rule but also introduced the control of the British empire over India. In fact the political unity of India was for the first time seen on the political world map. Initial parliamentary process began from there on, and people of India were for the first time found representation of some kind. This revolt was a stepping stone in the political history of India, from where on the idea of Indian freedom struggle and nationalism received the force to move ahead.

But at this juncture the prophetic words of Lord Canning are worthy to recall, "... But I cannot forget that in the sky of India, serene as it is, a small cloud may arise, no larger than a man's hand, but which, growing larger and larger, may at last threaten to burst and overwhelm us with ruin." If the British by themselves were serious of the fact that people of the sub-continent are developing a feeling of distaste for the British? Perhaps true was the man, who was responsible for the ceaseless massacre of 1857. As in not more than 28 years time the demand for sufficient representation for the people began. And Indian National Congress took shape as a political party for the protection of the interests of the people of India. And idea of nationalism emerged which led the nation towards freedom.

Exercises

1. Briefly discuss the causes of 1857 Revolt?
- 2 Explain the constitutional reforms after the 1857 Revolt.
- 3 "1857 revolt was a turning point in Indian Political History" Explain.
- 4 Discuss the Imperial and Nationalist approach towards the understanding of the rebellion of 1857.
- 5 Write short notes on any two of the following:

- A Doctrine of Lapse
- B Subsidiary Alliance
- C Queen's Proclamation
- D Bhadur Shah Zafar

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