



- It started merely as a sepoy mutiny soon engulfed the peasantry & other civilian population over wide areas in northern India.
- The upsurge was so widespread that some of the contemporary observers called it - a - "national revolt".
- The hatred of the people for the britishers was intense and bitter.
- Between May & June 1857 it was only some cities like Agra, Lucknow, Allahabad and Banaras that kept alive evidence of British presence in north India.
- By then the revolt had spread to Awadh (NE Uttar Pradesh), Rohilkhand (NW Uttar Pradesh), Bundelkhand (U.P. & M.P.), Bihar and many parts of central India



CAUSES OF REVOLT

EXPLOITATION OF PEASANTRY

- The main source of income of EIC was land revenue
- After Bengal, it spread its power in India through wars and treaties.
- To extract as much money as possible it devised new systems of land settlements - Permanent, Ryotwari and Mahalwari -each more oppressive than the other.
- The Permanent Settlement in Bengal Presidency & in parts of north India did not recognise the hereditary rights of the peasants on land, which they had earlier enjoyed.
- The loyal zamindars & revenue-collectors were now given the proprietary rights on land.
- The cultivators were reduced to the status of simple tenants.
- But even the newly created landlords were not given absolute rights.
- They had to pay to the Company 10/11th of the entire rent derived from the cultivators and if they failed to do so, their property was sold to others.
- The other land settlements were no better.

- The peasants in any adverse natural shifts like droughts or flood compelled them to go for loans to the money lenders who charged exorbitant interest.
- This made the peasants so heavily indebted that they were ultimately forced to sell their land to these money lenders.
- It is because of this that the money lenders were so hated in rural society.
- The peasantry was also oppressed by petty officials in administration who extracted money on the slightest pretexts.
- If the peasants could not afford to go to the law court to seek redress of their grievances
- When the crop was good the peasants had to pay back their past debts; if it was bad, they were further indebted.
- This nexus between the lower officials, law courts and money lenders created a vicious circle which made the peasantry desperate and ready to welcome any opportunity for change of regime.

ANNEXATION OF PRINCELY STATES

- The East India Company did not spare even its former allies.
- The native state of Awadh was annexed by Dalhousie in 1856 on the pretext that Nawab Wajid Ali Shah was mismanaging the state.
- Even before this he had annexed Satara in 1848 and Nagpur and Jhansi in 1854 on the pretext that the rulers of these states had no natural heir to succeed them after their death.
- These annexations embittered the rulers of these states, making Rani of Jhansi & Begums of Awadh staunch enemies of the British.
- Further the British refusal to pay pension to Nana Sahib, the adopted son of Peshwa Baji Rao II worsened the situation.
- The annexation of Awadh was also resented by the sepoys as most of who came from there.
- This action hurt their patriotic loyalty & sense of dignity.
- Moreover, since their relatives had now to pay more taxes on land, it adversely affected the purses of the sepoys themselves.

THE ALIEN RULE

- Another important reason of the unpopularity of the British was the alien nature of their rule.
- They never mixed with the Indian people and treated even the upper class Indians with contempt.
- They had not come to settle in India but only to take money home. So the Indians could never develop any affinity towards them.

IMPACT ON THE SEPOYS

- The revolt of 1857 originated with the mutiny of the Sepoys. These Sepoys were drawn mainly from the peasant population of North and North-West India
- The rapacious policies followed by the East India Company were impoverishing and ruining the peasantry. This must have affected the Sepoys also.
- Infact, most of them had joined the military service in order to supplement their fast declining agricultural income.
- They were paid a monthly salary of 7 to 9 Rupees out of which they had to pay for their food, uniform and transport of their private baggage.
- The cost of maintaining an Indian Sepoy was only one-third of his British counterpart in India.
- Moreover, the Indian Sepoy was treated roughly by the British officers. They were frequently abused and humiliated.
- The Indian Sepoy, despite his valour and great fighting capacity could never rise above the rank of a Subedar while a fresh recruit from England was often appointed his superior overnight.

THREAT TO RELIGION

- An impression was created among the Sepoys & civilians that their religion was being attacked by the British.
- The influence of the missionaries & some of the British officials instilled fear in the minds of the people that their religion was in danger.
- The Govt maintained the chaplains at its own cost and in some cases also provided police protection to the missionaries.
- Even the army maintained chaplains at state cost and Christian propaganda was carried among the sepoy.
- The sepoy were forbidden to wear their caste marks,
- In 1856 an Act was passed under which every new recruit had to give an undertaking to serve overseas, if required.
- The conservative beliefs of the sepoy were thus shaken and they sometimes reacted strongly.
- For example in 1824, the 47th Regiment of sepoy at Barrackpore refused to go to Burma by sea-route because their religion forbade them to cross "black water".
- The British reacted ruthlessly, disbanded the Regiment, and put some of its leaders to death.
- In 1844, seven battalions revolted on the question of salaries and batta (allowance). Even during the Afghan War from 1839 to 1842 the soldiers were almost on the verge of revolt
- Like sepoy, the people of India had also risen in revolt against the oppressive British rule.
- The most important of these uprisings were the Kutcha rebellion (1816-32), the Kol uprising in 1831 and the Santhal uprising in 1855-56.

- The main point with regard to the 1857 challenge, however, was that both the military and civilian revolts merged and this made it really formidable.

THE IMMEDIATE CAUSE

- The atmosphere was so surcharged that even a small issue could lead to revolt.
- The episode of greased cartridges, however, was a big enough issue to start the rebellion on its own.
- Cartridges of the new Enfield rifle which had recently been introduced in the army had a greased paper cover whose end had to be bitten off-before the cartridge was loaded into rifle.
- The grease was in some instances made of beef and pig fat. This completely enraged the Hindu and Muslim sepoy and made them believe that the govt was deliberately trying to destroy their religion.

RISE OF A REVOLT

- On 29th March, 1857, a young soldier, Mangal Pandey, stationed at Barrackpore, revolted single-handedly attacking his British officers.
- He was hanged, and not much notice was taken of this event. But it showed the resentment and anger aroused among the sepoy.
- Less than a month later, on 24th April, ninety men of the Third Native Cavalry, stationed at Meerut, refused to use the greased cartridges.
- Eighty-five of them were dismissed and sentenced to ten years imprisonment on 9th May.
- The rest of the Indian sepoy reacted strongly to this, and the next day, on 10th May, the entire Indian garrison revolted.
- After freeing their comrades and killing the British officers, they decided to march on to Delhi.
- This shows that they did have in mind some sort of alternative to the British.
- It was not merely army mutiny was that the people from surrounding areas began to loot the military bazaars and attacked and burnt the bungalows of the British as soon as they heard the shots fired by the sepoy on their officers.
- The Gujjars from the surrounding villages poured into the city & joined the revolt.
- Telegraph wires were cut and horsemen with warning messages to Delhi were intercepted.
- As soon as the sepoy from Meerut reached Delhi, the Indian garrison also revolted & joined the rebels.
- They now proclaimed the old Bahadur Shah, as the Emperor of India
- Thus in twenty-four hours. What began as a simple mutiny had swelled into full-scale political rebellion.
- In the next one month the entire Bengal Army rose in revolt. Whole of North and North West India was up in arms against the British.
- In Aligarh, Mainpuri, Bulandshahr, Etawah, Mathura, Agra. Lucknow, Allahabad, Banaras, Shahabad, Danapur and East Punjab, wherever there were Indian troops, they revolted.

- With the revolt in army, the police and local administration also collapsed.
- These revolts were also immediately followed by a rebellion in the city and countryside.
- But in several places the people rose in revolt even before the sepoy. Wherever revolt broke out, the govt treasury was plundered, the magazine sacked, barracks & court houses were burnt and prison gates flung open.
- In the countryside, the peasants and dispossessed zamindars attacked the money lenders & new zamindars that had displaced them from the land.
- They destroyed the government records and money lenders' account books.
- They attacked the British established law courts, revenue offices, revenue records and thanas (police stations). Thus the rebels tried to destroy all the symbols of colonial power.
- Even when the people of particular areas did not rise in revolt, they offered their help and sympathies to the rebels.
- It was said that the rebellious sepoy did not have to carry food with them as they were fed by the villagers.
- On the other hand, their hostility to the British forces was pronounced.
- They refused to give them any help or information and on many occasions they misled the British troops by giving wrong information.
- In central India also, where the rulers remained loyal to the British, the army revolted and joined the rebels.
- Thousands of Indore's troops joined in Indore the rebellious sepoy.
- Similarly, over 20,000 of Gwalior's troops went over to Tatya Tope & Rani of Jhansi.
- In the whole of north & central India the British power was limited only to the towns of Agra, and Lucknow.
- Hindus & Muslims fought together and died together.
- Wherever the sepoy reached, cow-slaughter was banned as a mark of respect to the sentiments of the Hindus.

COURSE OF REVOLT

- In 1857 there were some 45,000 European & some 232,000 regular troops in India.
- The bulk of European units were concentrated in the recently conquered Punjab.
- Thus between Calcutta and Delhi there were only 5 European regiments.
- On May 11 the Meerut Mutineers crossed over to Delhi and appealed to Bahadur Shah II, the pensioner Mughal emperor to lead them and proclaimed him Shahenshah-Hindustan.
- By the first week of June mutinies had broken out in Aligarh, Mainpuri, Bulandshahr, Etawah, Mathura, Lucknow, Bareilly, Kanpur, Jhansi, Nimach, Moradabad, Saharanpur etc.

- By mid-June and September 1857 there had been mutinies in Gwalior, Mhow and Sialkot and in Bihar, in Danapur, Hazaribagh, Ranchi and Bhagalpur, and Nagode and Jabalpur in central India.
- By September-October it was clear that the revolt would not spill across the Narmada.
- North of the Narmada the main axis of the revolt was represented by the river Ganga and the Grand Trunk Road between Delhi and Patna.

REVOLT OF THE ARMY

- A mere chronology of the mutinies conceals their pattern of diffusion.
- The mutinies travelled down the Ganga from Meerut and Delhi with a time gap between the various stations required for news to travel from one place to another.
- There were rumours that 30th May 1857 was the day fixed for a total destruction of white men all over north India.
- Just as news of the fall of Delhi had precipitated the revolt of the army and civil population, the fall of Lucknow in end of May set off uprisings in the district stations of 'Awadh'.
- There is evidence of a certain element of coordination and communication
- The transmission of rumours and panic about religion, which acted as springboards of action because many soldiers were recruited from the same region Awadh. (Regional Discontentment)
- The pattern of mutinies was the destruction of houses used or lived in by the British and the government treasures and jails.
- In Awadh the sepoy claimed that Telinga Raj (sepoy Raj) had arrived.

PEOPLE'S REVOLT

- Food (Chapatis) was passed from village to village during the winter of 1856-7; it had different meanings for different people.
- Though by no means a cause of the disturbance, it was perceived as a message of an imminent holocaust.
- Rumours of greased cartridges, flour polluted with bone, and forcible conversion to Christianity transformed popular grievances against the British into a revolt.
- In several places people collected, conferred and planned their attack on government and bahia property.
- People in rural areas, after connected by kinship and caste ties, got together to make such attacks.
- Sadar stations were often attacked by people from anything between 30 to 60 villages.
- The pattern of attack was the same everywhere. Scores were settled with tax collectors, court officials, policemen & banias(money lenders)
- Treasuries were looted, prisoners set free and bungalows set on fire.

- The rebels gave priority to political considerations and did not hesitate to destroy economic resources.
- For example, the coal mines in Kotah were damaged, canal Pock were destroyed to prevent a British battalion reaching Bulandshahr by boat.
- Similarly numerous attacks were also made on railways and factories by the United Provinces' rural poor who were dependent on them for their livelihood.
- In the course of the suppression of the revolt what struck the British was the remarkable solidarity among rebels.
- Most often pecuniary rewards could not induce betrayal, nor could they play off Hindu against Muslims.

REBEL INSTITUTIONS

- The revolt of 1857 went beyond overthrowing the British, is borne out by the Organizational effects of the rebels
1. Immediately after the capture of Delhi, a letter was sent to rulers of all the neighbouring states of present day Rajasthan soliciting their support.
 2. In Delhi, a court of administrators was set up. Of the 10 members 6 were from the army and four from other departments. Decisions were taken by majority vote.
 3. Such attempts at organization were made at other centres too – Awadh where Birjis Qadr, a minor, was crowned prince by consensus, immediately after the British defeat at the battle of Chinhat on 30th June 1857.
- The rebels laid down conditions such as:
 1. Orders from Delhi were to be obeyed
 2. The wazir would be selected by the army and
 3. Officers of the army would be appointed after the consent of the army.
 - The Awadh rebel executive structure comprised two separate decision-making bodies:
 1. One consisting of bureaucrats & court officials to see to organization and payments,
 2. The 'military cell' composed of sepoy or rebel soldiers and a few court officials.
 - At this early stage of the revolt, around July 7, 1857, there was no talukdar in any important decision-making body.
 - In fact orders-were issued to talukdars and zamindars, with promises of land or revenue, asking them to join the revolt to end British rule.
 - Notwithstanding occasional divisions in the rebel ranks, as for example between the followers of Birjis Qadr & Maulvi Ahmadullah in Awadh, it is the efforts to maintain a semblance of organisation that is remarkable
 - Guidelines were laid down for sepoy and commanders for their operations.
 - Efforts were made for the regular payment of rebel troops either by the conversion of ornaments into

coins or granting remission of revenue to talukdars for them to pay the troops.

SUPPRESSION

- Isolated outbreaks that had occurred in as distant places as Peshawar, Singapore, Kolhapur, Chittagong and Madras were put down with ease.
- By early July with the core area of the revolt emerging clearly, the British moved into mop it up.
- About 39,000 troops were shipped, on request from London to the suppression operation. By the end of November – 37 troopships crammed the Hughli.
- By mid-August the mutineers were driven out of Arrah, Gaya, and Hazaribagh in Bihar.
- Delhi fell on 21st September after an attack with heavy casualties. Thereafter many rebels shifted to Lucknow.
- Rebels were supplied with ammunition from the districts and a workshop was set up in Faizabad to repair heavy guns.
- Many talukdars fought personally.
- According to one estimate 100,000 of the 150,000 who died in Awadh were civilians.
- After the fall of Lucknow in March 1858, the rebels dispersed into the countryside & enclaves of resistance emerged to the south and south-east and the west and north-west of Lucknow.
- Till September-October 1858 the rebels believed that one combined, well planned attack could still dislodge the British from Awadh and tried to coordinate campaigns in this direction.
- Prominent among the leaders of the revolt were the Rani of Jhansi who died fighting in June 1858, Nana Saheb, the adopted son of the last Peshwa, Baji Rao II, who led the mutiny at Kanpur and escaped to Nepal in the beginning of 1859
- Kunwar Singh of Arrah who had carved a base of himself in Azamgarh and Ghazipur and died fighting in May 1858
- Begum Hazrat Mahal who escaped to Nepal
- Maulvi Ahmadullah who carried on the revolt around the borders of Awadh and Rohilkhand till his death in June 1858
- Tantia Tope, uprooted from his base on the Jumna at Kalpi, reached Gwalior in June 1858, crossed the Narmada in October and was captured and put to death in 1859.
- For more than a year the rebels had struggled with limited supply of arms and ammunitions and a poor system of communication.
- Many sepoy were amazed at the resources of the British and had expected that the British would need French help to put them down.
- The British surrounded Awadh, tackled Delhi and the Jamuna area, & then concentrated on Awadh.

AFTERMATH

- The suppression of the revolt of 1857 was accomplished by a two pronged approach of military strategy & the submission of talukdars.

- The reassertion of British control was thereafter reinforced with princely support based on an assurance of non-interference in adoption question.
- In the North Western Provinces the British made widespread confiscation and redistribution of land.
- Some incomplete figures show that land assessed at Rs. 17 lakhs was confiscated & land assessed at Rs. 9 lakhs was given in reward.
- In making land rewards it was the larger landholders who were preferred.
- After the fall of Lucknow a proclamation was issued confiscating proprietary right in land in the whole of Awadh except six specific estates.
- Some 22,658 out of 23,543 villages were restored to talukdars in return for submission and loyalty in the form of collection and transmission of information.
- Village proprietors in Awadh were to remain under-proprietors or tenants-at-will.
- There was, however, fierce opposition to the talukdari settlement among the villagers in several Awadh districts in 1859-60
- Faced with agrarian strife the government had to limit the rental demand of the talukdars against inferior holders to a fixed amount (1866)

PRINCES

- British policy of annexing states had been one of the many accumulating grievances as is evident both from the leadership provided to the rebels by the Rani of Jhansi, Nana Saheb and Begum Hazrat Mahal, and the proclamations of the rebels.
- At one point during the revolt Canning had observed that had it not been for the 'patches of native government' like Gwalior, Hyderabad, Patiala, Rampur and Rewa serving as 'break-waters to the storm of 1857' the British would have been swept away.
- Therefore, the Queen's proclamation of 1858 declared that the British had no desire to extend their existing territorial possessions.
- To perpetuate dynasties Canning dispensed with the doctrine of lapse and allowed all rulers the right of adoption.
- Territorial and monetary awards were bestowed on loyal princes i.e. those of Gwalior, Rampur, Patiala and Jind.
- In 1861 a special order of knighthood, the star of India, was instituted, of which the recipients were

the rulers of Baroda, Bhopal, Gwalior, Patiala and Rampur.

- However, if the princes were given security from annexation it was made clear that in the event of 'misgovernment' or 'anarchy' the British would step in to take temporary charge of a native state.

ARMY

- A despatch from Charles Wood, Secretary of State for India to Canning in 1861 sums up the thrust of British policy towards the army in the post-mutiny years.
- 'If one regiment mutinies should like to have the next regiment so alien that it would be ready to fire into it.'
- Soldiers from Awadh, Bihar and Central India were declared to be non-marital and their recruitment cut down considerably.
- Sikhs, Gurkhas and Pathans who assisted in the suppression of the revolt were declared to be martial and were recruited in large numbers.
- Briefly, community, caste, tribal & regional loyalties were encouraged so as to obstruct the forging of the solidarity that was evident among the sepoys from Awadh in 1857.

POLICY CHANGE

- In 1858, as a consequence of the revolt of 1857, a Government of India Act abolished the East India Company. India was to be governed directly in the name of the Crown of England.
- The November 1858 royal proclamation gave out:
 1. That those who laid down arms by 2 January 1859 would be pardoned except those directly involved in the murder of British subjects,
 2. That official service would be open to all and
 3. Due regard would be given to ancient usages and customs of India.
- To the British, the appeal to Bahadur Shah II to head the revolt was confirmation of the theory of a Muslim plot to restore the Mughal regime at Delhi.
- This belief in official circles in fact explains the official attitude towards the community in the post-revolt years.
- So marked was the anti-Muslim attitude that Saiyid Ahmad Khan felt the need to -write a pamphlet titled 'who were the Loyal Musalmans?' In that he quoted numerous instances of Muslim collaboration with the British.