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The Revolt of 1856

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ABSTRACT

The Revolt, Indian Mutiny, or First War of Independence was a major uprising against British authority in 1857. Despite its failure, the 1857 rebellion was widely supported. The British East India Company acted as an independent government in India for the British throne. The Revolt of 1857 was a stepping stone towards the initial explosion of anger and rage stemming from the widespread resentment against the British. The Revolt of 1857 is a significant historical event and a crucial period of history. The rebellion began on May 10, 1857, when sepoys of the Company's army launched a mutiny at the garrison town of Meerut. Considered to be the first instance of organised opposition to the British East India Company was the Revolt of 1857.

The majority of the Indian public backed the insurrection, despite the fact that it was initially a sepoy rebellion. Peasants, craftsmen, and followers of different cultures and religions all participated in the rebellion. The soldiers of the East India Company dedicated their life for the good of others. Everyone got together in this rebellion and fought as one.

The revolt brought major Changes in the company and over all rule of the Englishmen in the country. The system and administration of the Englishmen was changed. Some also like to say that the revolt marked the end of the British rule over the country. In this paper the author has talked about the background, reasons, results of the revolt and the role it played for the independence of the country. The method of research is doctrinal.

Keywords: *revolt, reasons, peasant uprising, spread of revolt, suppression , administrative changes.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The influence of nawabs and rajas had been declining since the middle of the eighteenth century. They have steadily lost their respectability and reputation. The independence of the rulers had been curtailed, their military forces dissolved, and their revenues and territory gradually diminished. Residents had been stationed in several tribunals.

²Numerous governing families made efforts to bargain with the Company in order to further their interests. For instance, following her husband's passing, Rani Lakshmibai of Jhansi wished for the Company to accept her adopted son as the rightful successor to the throne. The adoptive

¹ Author is a student at IILM University, India.

² Revolt of 1857, Drishtiias, 23/04/2023, <https://www.drishtiias.com/to-the-points/paper1/revolt-of-1857>.

son of Nana Saheb assemble soldiers for the 1857 uprising that took place throughout the plains of north India to not be published again Peshwa Baji Rao II begged to get his father's pension after his passing. However, the Company ignored these requests since it was sure of its strength and military might.

³One of the final territories to be annexed was Awadh. Awadh was forced into a subsidiary alliance in 1801, and it was seized in 1856. Governor-General Dalhousie argued that the region was being mismanaged and that British control was necessary to establish appropriate governance. The Company even started formulating plans for how to destroy the Mughal monarchy. The Company's coins were struck without the Mughal king's name on them. Governor-General Dalhousie stated in 1849 that following Bahadur Shah Zafar's demise, the royal family will be relocated from the Red Fort and given a new residence in Delhi. Bahadur Shah Zafar would be the final Mughal ruler, and after his death, none of his successors would be regarded as kings; instead, they would be referred to as princes, according to Governor-General Canning's decree from 1856.

II. ⁴SPOYS AND FARMERS

Peasants and zamindars in the countryside disliked the high taxes and strict methods of revenue collection. Many people lost the fields they had farmed for generations as a result of failing to repay their moneylender loans. The Company's Indian sepoys had their own causes for unhappiness. They were dissatisfied with their wages, benefits, and working conditions. Additionally, several of the new regulations went against their religious principles and sensibilities. A lot of people in the nation at the time thought that if they travelled over the sea, they would lose their caste and religion.⁵

As a result, in 1824, when ordered to travel to Burma by water in order to fight for the Company, the sepoys declined to do so even if they were willing to travel by land. They received heavy punishment, and because the problem persisted, the Company issued a new regulation in 1856 mandating that everyone joining the Company's army must consent to serving abroad if necessary. Sepoys responded to what was occurring in the land as well. Many of them had family who resided in the countryside and were peasants. So, among the sepoys, the peasants' rage swiftly spread. Sepoys responded to what was occurring in the land as well. Many of them

³ KENNETH PLETCHER, INDIAN MUTINY, BIOGRAPHIES APR 26, 2023, [HTTPS://WWW.BRITANNICA.COM/EVENT/INDIAN-MUTINY](https://www.britannica.com/event/Indian-Mutiny)

⁴ Indian mutiny: Remembering farmers who fought British rule, BCC, 12 July 2017, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-40528129>

⁵ Sabyasachi Dasgupta, THE AGRARIAN QUESTION: REVISITING THE SEPOY PEASANT NEXUS IN 1857, Vol. 70 (2009-2010), pp. 421-426 (6 pages)

had family who resided in the countryside and were peasants. So, among the sepoys, the peasants' rage swiftly spread.

III. 'THE MUTINY BECOMES A POPULAR REBELLION

Even though conflicts between the ruling and the ruled are common, on occasion these conflicts spread widely as a form of populist opposition, weakening the authority of the state. A extremely big number of individuals start to think they share an enemy and band together to fight that adversary at the same time. People must coordinate, communicate, take the initiative, and act with confidence to change the situation if they don't.

In 1857, a similar circumstance emerged in the northern regions of India. The English East India Company faced a significant uprising that began in May 1857 and endangered the Company's very existence in India after a century of conquest and rule. Many Sepoys rebelled in various locations, starting in Meerut, and many members of other societal groups joined them. Some consider it to have been the largest armed uprising against colonialism in the whole nineteenth century. A teenage soldier named Mangal Pandey was executed by hanging on March 29, 1857, for assaulting his superiors in Barrackpore.

A few days later, several sepoys of the regiment at Meerut objected to performing the army practise with the new cartridges, which were thought to be covered with pig and cow fat. For refusing to follow orders, 85 sepoys were discharged from the army and given ten-year prison terms. This occurred on May 9, 1857. The other Indian soldiers at Meerut responded in a most unusual way. The army marched to the Meerut jail on May 10 and freed the sepoys who were being held there. They killed British officers after attacking them.⁷

They took British weapons and ammunition, destroyed British structures and property, and declared war on the Firangis. The troops were devoted to ending their control over the nation. The soldiers knew the response. The Mughal ruler Bahadur Shah Zafar is the answer to this question. The Meerut sepoys galloped all night on May 10 to get there. Early the following morning, Delhi. The troops stationed in Delhi also revolted as word of their arrival spread. Once more, buildings were set on fire, weapons and ammunition were taken, and British officers were slain. Soldiers who had just won battle came around the Red Fort's walls, where the Badshah resided, and demanded to speak with him.

⁶ Mahesh Shant, The Revolt of 1857 in India: Causes, Spread and Other Details, <https://www.historydiscussion.net/history-of-india/revolt-of-1857/the-revolt-of-1857-in-india-causes-spread-and-other-details/5949>

⁷ Nidhi Goyal, Beginning And Spread Of The Revolt Of 1857, KNOWLEDGE CAPSULES UPSC IAS, February 19, 2020, <https://knowledgekart.in/blog/beginning-and-spread-of-the-revolt-of-1857-upsc-ias/>

They broke down the palace doors and named Bahadur Shah Zafar their leader. Foreigners, or Firangis The phrase conveys a disdainful mindset.

horse lines Over 3,000 rebels arrived from Bareilly that nightfall, crossed the Jamuna, invaded Delhi, and attacked the British cavalry troops. Through the entire night, the conflict persisted. to not be published again 57 The old emperor was forced to comply with this request. He sent letters to all of the chiefs and leaders in the nation urging them to establish an alliance of Indian nations to resist the British. Bahadur Shah's one action had far-reaching effects.

A sizable portion of the nation had been under the control of the Mughal Empire. The majority of minor kings and chieftains ruled over various lands on behalf of the Mughal emperor. Many of them believed that if the Mughal emperor could govern again, they too would be able to control their own areas once more, under Mughal authority. They felt threatened by the rise of British dominance. This was not what the British had anticipated. They anticipated that the commotion brought on by the cartridge issue would subside. However, Bahadur Shah Zafar's choice to support the uprising drastically altered the situation. People frequently feel motivated and inspired when they notice an alternate prospect. It inspires people to take action and offers them hope and bravery.⁸

IV. ⁹THE REVOLT GAINED POPULARITY

For over a week after the British were driven out of Delhi, there was no revolt. That long passed before news could spread. A wave of mutinies then started.

Following mutinies, several regiments dispersed to join other forces in strategic locations like Delhi, Kanpur, and Lucknow. Following them, the villagers and townspeople also staged uprisings, uniting behind zamindars and chiefs who were eager to assert their power and oppose the British. The late Peshwa Baji Rao's adoptive son, Nana Saheb, who resided close to Kanpur, collected an army and drove out the British troops from the city. He referred to himself as Peshwa. He claimed to be the administrator of the Empire of Bahadur Shah Zafar. The son of ousted Nawab Wajid Ali Shah, Birjis Qadr, was named the next Nawab in Lucknow.

He too recognised Bahadur Shah Zafar's suzerainty. His mother, Begum Hazrat Mahal, actively participated in planning the revolt against the British. Rani Lakshmibai, a rebel sepoy in Jhansi, fought with Tantia Tope, Nana Saheb's general, in opposition to the British. The rebel soldiers vastly outnumbered the British. They were vanquished in several conflicts. This provided the

⁸ Michael Edwardes, *The Indian Mutiny 1857-1858, THE british Empire*, <https://www.britishempire.co.uk/forces/armycampaigns/indiancampaigns/mutiny/mutiny.htm>

⁹ Revolt of 1857, Wings, Apr 5, 2023, <https://leveragededu.com/blog/revolt-of-1857/>

populace the assurance they needed to take the risk and join the revolt by convincing them that British control had ended permanently. Particularly in the province of Awadh, a scenario of widespread public uprising arose. We found a telegraph from Lieutenant Colonel Tytler to his Commander-in-Chief on August 6, 1857, describing the anxiety the British felt: *"Our men are cowed by the numbers opposed to them and the endless fighting. Every village is held against us, the zamindars have risen to oppose us."*¹⁰

Numerous new leaders emerged. For instance, a maulvi from Faizabad named Ahmadullah Shah predicted that the British Empire would soon come to an end. He captured the public's attention and amassed a sizable army of fans. To oppose the British, he travelled to Lucknow. Ghazis, or holy warriors, gathered in great numbers in Delhi with the goal of exterminating the white population. Bakht Khan, a Bareilly-born soldier, was put in control of a sizable fighting force that arrived in Delhi. He rose to prominence among the rebellion's military leaders. An elderly zamindar in Bihar named Kunwar Singh joined the sepoy rebels and fought the British for several months. Leaders and combatants from all throughout the country joined the battle.

V. ¹¹COMPANY'S REPRESSION

The size of the upheaval alarmed the Company, which made the decision to crush the rebellion with all its power. It pushed into the epicentres of the rebellion after bringing in reinforcements from England and passing new legislation that made it simple to punish the rebels. In September 1857, the insurgent troops were driven from Delhi.

Bahadur Shah Zafar, the final Mughal emperor, was tried in court and given a life sentence. Before his eyes, his boys were shot and killed. at October 1858, he and his wife Begum Zinat Mahal were imprisoned at Rangoon. In November 1862, Bahadur Shah Zafar passed away in the Rangoon prison. However, this did not imply that the uprising ended when Delhi was taken back. People persisted in fighting back against the British. The tremendous forces of popular insurrection required two years of battle on the part of the British.

In March 1858, Lucknow was captured. In June 1858, Rani Lakshmibai was defeated and slain. Tantia Tope managed to flee to the forests of central India, where she carried on a guerilla campaign with the aid of several tribal and peasant leaders. In April 1859, he was apprehended, tried, and murdered. The loss of rebel forces encouraged desertions, much as prior wins against the British had done. The British made every effort to regain the trust of the populace. They

¹⁰ 1857: The geographical spread, Indus, 30/04/2023, http://indpaedia.com/ind/index.php/1857:_The_geographical_spread

¹¹ How did the Company suppress the revolt?, flashededucation, Jun 9, 2021, <https://flashededucation.co.in/question-answer/how-did-company-suppress-revolt>

declared that faithful landowners will get benefits in the form of continued enjoyment of their historic rights to their properties.¹²

People who had revolted were assured that their rights and claims to land would not be rejected provided they submitted to the British and had not killed any white people. However, a large number of sepoys, rebels, nawabs, and rajas were tried and executed by hanging.

VI. ¹³AFTERMATH

By the end of 1859, the British had retaken power, but they were no longer able to rule the nation using the same methods. The major alterations made by the British are listed here.

1. To assure better administration of Indian affairs, the British Parliament approved a new Act in 1858 that transferred the East India Company's authority to the British Crown. As Secretary of State for India, a member of the British Cabinet is in charge of all affairs pertaining to India's government. The India Council, a council appointed to advise him, was granted to him. The Viceroy title, which designates a personal representative of the Crown, was granted to the Governor-General of India. By taking these actions, the British government directly assumed responsibility for ruling India.
2. It was promised to the nation's governing chiefs that their territories would never again be annexed. They were permitted to leave their kingdoms to their descendants, which included their adopted sons. They were forced to recognise the British Queen as their Sovereign Paramount, nonetheless. As a result, the British Crown was to keep the Indian kings' kingdoms in subordination.
3. It was determined to enhance the amount of European soldiers and decrease the proportion of Indian soldiers in the army. Additionally, it was determined that more soldiers would be recruited from among the Gurkhas, Sikhs, and Pathans rather than from Awadh, Bihar, central India, or south India.
4. Muslims were subjected to widespread land and property confiscation as well as mistrust and animosity. The British felt strongly that they were largely to blame for the insurrection.
5. The British opted to respect the people of India's traditional religious and social practises.

¹² THE REVOLT OF 1857, 27/04/2023, [https://archive.mu.ac.in/myweb_test/TYBA%20study%20material/T.Y.B.A.%20History%20Paper%20-%20V%20-%20Modern%20India%20\(1857%20-%201984\)%20Eng.pdf](https://archive.mu.ac.in/myweb_test/TYBA%20study%20material/T.Y.B.A.%20History%20Paper%20-%20V%20-%20Modern%20India%20(1857%20-%201984)%20Eng.pdf)

¹³ Thomas R. Metcalf, *Aftermath of Revolt: India 1857-1970*, Published: Apr 19, 2016

6. Landlords and zamindars were given security of rights over their properties through the creation of policies.

Thus, after 1857, a new period of history started.

VII. CONCLUSION

The 1857 Revolt did not succeed. It did, however, significantly contribute to achieving independence some 90 years later. People think that this uprising, which is sometimes referred to as the first independence war, is what forced India to learn how to fight. Before this uprising in 1857, the Hindu-Muslim fellowship had not been observed, and it was a welcome sight for many Indians as well. As a result, this subject represents a key moment in Indian history. Indian sepoys, who were part of the British East India Company's army, started the uprising at first, but it swiftly spread to citizens and became into a sizable uprising.

Although the roots of the uprising were numerous and complicated, frustration with British policies, economic complaints, and religious tensions were some of the main contributing factors. Major breakouts of the uprising occurred in Delhi, Lucknow, Kanpur, and Jhansi, which helped it fast expand throughout northern and central India. The size and severity of the insurrection originally caught the British off guard, and they battled to recover control of the nation. Both the British and the insurgents committed crimes throughout the conflict, which was characterised by horrific bloodshed on both sides. By 1858, the British had retaken control of India, but not before the uprising had claimed the lives of hundreds of thousands of people and severely damaged British colonial administration there.
