



A CRITICISM OF INDIAN HISTORY'S GREAT REVOLT OF 1857

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Abstract

There is no more amazing tale in global history than the establishment of the British Empire in India. It was the end product of a protracted process that began in the British Empire. When the English immigrants arrived in India for trade, they saw that the subcontinent's governmental and administrative structure lacked remarkable coherence and cohesiveness. They trailed behind the Dutch and Portuguese, who were also in decline. The years 1757–1857 were hardly calm and untroubled; instead, they were filled with peasant uprisings, agrarian riots, and civil rebellions. Armed uprisings occurred in several regions of central and northern India in 1857, which almost brought an end to British rule. An important uprising that emerged in 1857 is called the Revolt of 1857.

Keywords: Indian History's, Great Revolt, Empire, Rebellion, Significant

1. Introduction

There is no more amazing tale in global history than the establishment of the British Empire in India. It was the end product of a protracted process that began in the British Empire. When the English immigrants arrived in India for trade, they saw that the subcontinent's governmental and administrative structure lacked remarkable coherence and cohesiveness. They trailed behind the Dutch and Portuguese, who were also in decline.

The years 1757–1857 were hardly calm and untroubled; instead, they were filled with peasant uprisings, agrarian riots, and civil rebellions. After a while, the mutiny that started on May 10, 1857, in Meerut spread to other regions of India and gave rise to several nationalist leaders who opposed British Empire policies. It started in the native infantry lines, quickly moved to the cavalry, and eventually reached the city. With sepoys, everyone joined the mutiny. When the sepoys reached the Red Fort, they assembled under the ancient Mughal emperor Bahadur Shah's palace and declared, "We have come from Meerut after killing all the Englishmen there because they asked us to bite bullets that were coated with the fat of cows and pigs with our teeth." They insisted on receiving the emperor's blessings. The emperor was forced to obey and become one of the rebel leaders. The 19th Native Infantry in Berahampore was dissolved in March 1857 after going on strike in February 1857 over their refusal to use the recently adopted Enfield rifle. The youthful sepoy Mangal Pande fired shots at his unit's senior officer. That marked the start of the revolt, which was later joined by the sepoys from other military battalions.

When ninety men from the 3rd Native Cavalry refused to take the greased cartridges on April 24, the British government fired some of the men and imprisoned many more. Following that, Mangal Pande's activities led to the incident in Meerut on May 10, which marked the start of the uprising. Many Indian groups were deeply dissatisfied with the British during the East India Company's administration (1757–1857) and turned against the British. The Muslims, many of whom had benefited from status and favouritism under the Mughals and other Muslim provincial rulers, suffered a psychological blow with the collapse of Mughal control. The company's commercial strategy destroyed artisans and craftspeople, and its varied land revenue policies—particularly the permanent settlement in the north and the Ryotwari settlement in the south—sent peasants down a path of destitution and suffering. On March 29, 1857, near Barrackpur, a sepoy named Mangal Pandey fired at Lieutenant Baugh when the soldiers of the 34th Native Infantry refused to use the greased cartridges. Mangal Pandey was apprehended and put to death. They were dispersed at Behrampur, which had also defied the authorities. At Meerut, there was the first significant outbreak that ultimately resulted in the Revolt of 1857. On May 10, 1857, the 85 sepoys of the Cavalry Regiment were court martialed for not using greased cartridges.

The sepoys then staged an open rebellion, shot their superiors, freed their fellow sepoys, and marched in the direction of Delhi. After seizing Delhi on May 12 and taking control of the palace, the sepoys crowned Bahadur Shah II as the new Indian ruler. 23 The uprising quickly extended to other locations, including Central India, Bihar, Orissa, Lucknow, Kanpur, Agra, and Jhansi. The Indian kings, however, continued to support the British and played a crucial role in putting an end to the uprising. Early in the uprising, the British were on the defensive. They started by making a concerted effort to retake Delhi from the Sepoys. The British retook Delhi in September of 1857. Following his imprisonment and banishment to Mandalay, Burma, Emperor Bahadur Shah II passed away a few years later.

A grandson and two of his sons were shot and killed. As a result, the Mughal dynasty in Indian history was ended by the British. Revolt was largely confined and not nationwide: Despite being remarkable and extensive, the uprising was largely restricted, disorganised, and localised. It was not a universal Mutiny. It was never an all-Indian nature; rather, it was localised, constrained, and ill-organized, according to Dr. R.C. Mazumdar. The afflicted areas included the western regions of Bengal and Bihar in the northeast, the United Provinces, Oudh, Rohilkhand, and the territory between the Narbada and Chambal rivers. Under Dost Muhammad, Afghanistan was a peaceful country. Rajputana was devoted, Sindh was quiet. Although there were several violent outbursts of emotions at Hyderabad, the Nizam's capital, and native battalions that mutinied at Kolhapur in the Southern Marathan area, India south of the Narbada river made no significant movement. Bengal's central and eastern regions remained unaffected, and Nepal provided the British with invaluable support in quelling the uprising.

2. The Revolt's Centres And Leaders

The sepoys in Delhi asked Bahadur Shah Jafar, the Mughal emperor, to support their cause. At Bareilly, they were led by General Bakht Khan. In Kanpur, Nana Saheb, the adopted son of the late Peshwa Baji Rao II, spearheaded the uprising against the British administration. because he was exiled from Kanpur and refused to take on the family title. He therefore backed the soldiers. On June 4, 1857, Begum Hazrat Mahal seized control of the region around Lucknow. After her son Birjis Qadir was proclaimed the nawab, Muslims and Hindus came to serve in his government.

A zamindar from Jagdishpur named Kunwar Singh led the uprising in Bihar. When the sepoys arrived in Arrah from Danapur, he joined them. At Bareilly, Khan Bahadur Khan took part in the rebellion. Because the British government had refused to give him his pension, he was against the British. Another exceptional leader who demonstrated his agitation against British control was Maulvi Ahmadullah. He was the leader of the mutiny that opposed the British forces at Faizabad. When it started in Awadh in May 1857, he became a well-known leader. Rani Laxmibai, the sepoy leader at Jhansi, was another exceptional leader of a revolution. She desired to adopt a son in order to take the throne from her late husband, Raja Gangadhar Rao, as she did not have a legitimate heir.

The governor general, Lord Dalhousie, had declined to do so and, using the infamous Doctrine of Lapse, had annexed the state of Jhansi. So she battled alongside Tantia Tope, a close relative of Nana Saheb, against the British army. In Uttar Pradesh's Baghat, the movement was led by Shah Mal. He gathered 84 villages' worth of peasants and asked them to join the uprising against British rule. With the combined efforts of peasants and sepoys, these leaders were crucial to the liberation of the Indian country.

3. Causes of The Revolt's Origin

Certain administrative, socioreligious, political, and economic factors contributed to the uprising. The main factors have been determined by many historians. Below are all of the specific causes:

➤ Political causes:

The British firm conquered Jhansi, Jaitpur, and Sambalpur, imposed its avaricious policies on the peasantry, and instituted the lapse doctrine. India's populace and authorities were against these. The application of Indian rulers for their own gain resulted in thousands of people fleeing their land and challenging the annexation of Oudh. An excessive number of illegal regulations were introduced by the British administration and implemented in Indian society. These unlawful policies include the Doctrine of Lapse, Effective Control, and Subsidiary Alliance, among others. Dalhousie saw the policy as a lapse doctrine during his tenure. The nabobs' regalia were eliminated. Thus, these were the causes behind the start of the uprising.

➤ **Economic Causes:**

The customary economic flow of Indian society was disrupted by colonial practices. The peasants suffered a financial crisis as a result of the rule's high and hefty taxation. Because the native kings and nobility could not afford to support the craft workers, they ignored them, and the artisans and handicrafts also suffered from the policies' effects. The extremely talented craftspeople were compelled to change careers.

The enormous tariff levies imposed on products in India devastated the commercial class. As a result, it had an impact on Indian industry and raised demand for land products. The insurrection also emerged as a result of land revenue systems like the Mahalwari System and Permanent Settlement. The 1857 uprising had its roots in economic factors, one of which was the downfall of Indian manufacturers.

➤ **Socio-religious factors:**

Indians were publicly targeted for conversion by Christian missionaries and priests who presented them with special advantages. The Hindu community was incensed by the repeal of the Widow Remarriage Act, the Sati System, and the push for female education. Indians suffered greatly from the social discrimination policies of the British. Their attempt to force their purported racial superiority upon Indians proved to be a powerful selling point for the rebels. People protesting against colonial control also came together in response to the Religious Disabilities Act of 1856, which dealt with the alteration of Hindu rituals.

➤ **Administrative Causes:-**

The British control did not want to adhere to the traditional Indian administrative system, and the Indians despised the administration. Colonial rule's judicial system was extremely expensive, labor-intensive, and mechanical. Thus, it was rejected by the Indian populace. Indians were pushed to take part in the uprising by the imposition of excessive taxes and their exclusion from high-level services.

➤ **Military Causes:-**

Indian soldiers faced discrimination and were unable to rise to the highest rank equivalent to that of a British commander. The Indian Subedar received a lower salary than a recruit. The

Indian soldiers received no promotions. The General Services Act of 1856, which was put into effect by the British, mandated that all recruits in the Bengal army be prepared for duty in India, abroad, and elsewhere. As a result, the Indian troops were not to be granted any additional allowances.

An additional statute that was introduced was the Religious Disabilities statute, which stipulated that Native Americans would need to schedule a time to cross the ocean for military objectives. Indian soldiers believed that crossing the ocean was against their religious beliefs. After a while, the Indian troops uniformly opposed the British administration's proposal since it outlawed the usage of religious symbols in the armed forces. The development of the revolt is the critical reason that led to its outcome.

➤ **Immediate Causes:**

The General Services Act of 1856 compelled Indian troops to travel overseas for military operations, a move they refused to accept. The Indians were incensed when they learned that bone dust was added to wheat flour, and they vehemently objected to colonial rule. The news about the beef-based Enfield rifle cartridge and the pig fat also inspired the Indian soldiers to start a rebellion against the colonial government.

4. Suppression of Revolt

Beginning in May 1857, the uprising was completely put down in mid-1858 thanks to the determined actions of British army generals who confronted Indian troops with a hopeful outlook in support of their empire. On September 20, 1857, Delhi was taken by the British. In Calcutta, Lord Canning assembled British forces and dispatched them to liberate Delhi. After the royal princes were apprehended by Lieutenant Hudson and executed, Bahadur Shah II was sent to Rangoon prison, where he passed away in 1862.

According to Eric Stokes, the rebel sepoys exhibited an extraordinary "centripetal impulse to congregate at Delhi." British general Henry Lawrence put an end to Begum Hazrat Mahal's uprising in Lucknow. The rebellion in Kanpur, commanded by Nana Saheb, and in Bareilly, where Khan Bahadur Khan was in command of the army, were put down by Sir Colin Campbell. General Hugh Rose was in charge of the insurrection in Jhansi and Gwalior, where British troops

directly confronted Rani Laxmibai. Colonel Ocell was dispatched to Banaras and Allahabad to maintain control over the situation in which Maulvi Liyakat Ali was leading the rebellion. In Bihar, William Taylor's direct intervention resulted in a solution. Thus, the insurrection was quickly put down thanks to the efforts of British generals and soldiers.

5. Causes of Failure of Revolt

- The uprising had a small number of participants. A substantial portion of the country was unaffected by it. Not every class participated in the uprising. Large zamindars served as a "storm-break."
- Since the English supported the educated class, they were unable to support a revolution. They supported the British forces in quelling the uprising. The majority of Indian kings, including the Holkers of Indore, the Sindhia of Gwalior, the rulers of Patiala, Kashmir, and Sindh, frequently actively assisted the British and declined to join it.
- The Indian army lacked an efficient leader. Even though Nana Saheb, Rani Laxmibai, and numerous others were involved in the uprising, they were unable to lead the army with grace and unity.
- The revolt's defeat was attributed to a lack of resources. Armaments, troops, and money were in short supply. In India, however, the British possessed a large amount of cash, troops, and weaponry.
- Native Americans lacked an overarching philosophy and had no progressive policies. They stood for a variety of opinions, grievances, and conceptions of contemporary politics.

6. Nature of the Revolt

Various academics have discussed their perspectives on the nature of the uprising and attempted to make sense of its idea. It was only a "Sepoy Mutiny which was completely unpatriotic and selfish with no native support and no popular support," as British historians put

it, according to Sir John Seeley. Dr. K. Datta, presenting an opposing viewpoint, characterises the uprising as "the military outbreak, which was taken advantage of by certain discontinued princes and landlords whose interests had been affected by the new political order." Vinayak Damodar characterised the uprising at the start of the twentieth century as a "planned war of national independence." According to Savarkar's book, *The Indian War of Independence* (1857). He dubbed the uprising the Indian independence movement's first battle. In his book *Eighteen Fifty-Seven*, Dr. S.N. Sen saw the uprising as a struggle that started out as a religious conflict but ultimately turned into an independence war.

Marxist academics claim that "it was the struggle of the democratic soldier-peasant combination against foreign and feudal bondage." The rebellion was viewed by L.E.R. Rees as a "war of fanatical religionists against Christians." It was described as "the war between civilization and barbarism" by T.R. Holmes. It was described as "the first combined attempt of many classes of people to challenge a foreign power" by Indian historian S.B. Chaudhary. This is a genuine, if distant, approach to the later-era Indian liberation movement." In his book "The Great Rebellion," Ashok Mehta argued that the uprising was a national one. The "War of Nation's Independence" was how Tara Chand referred to it in his book, *History of Freedom Movement in India*.

7. Consequences of the Revolt

The Indian uprising of 1857 is regarded as the most significant event that had an impact on Indian society and changed the British government's policies significantly. Following the rebellion's put down, the following major measures were implemented:

- On August 2, 1858, the British Parliament passed an Act titled *An Act for the Better Government of India*. It also established the appointment of a Secretary of State for India and proclaimed Queen Victoria as the head of state of British India.
- The period of annexations and expansions had come to an end, and the native rulers' rights and dignity fell under British jurisdiction.

- The Indian states received a single charge and were referred to as the British Crown's paramount.
- Indians were given religious freedom from British authorities without hindrance.
- All Indians would be guaranteed equal and unbiased legal protection, with a commitment to upholding traditional Indian rights, customs, and practices. The position of Viceroy was created to replace the enhanced authority of the Governor-General. The first Viceroy was appointed as Lord Canning.
- The armies of the Crown and European forces were combined militarily. In the army, the ratio of Europeans to Indians has risen.
- To prevent the chance of a reunion in an anti-British rebellion, the Indian army sector was structured according to the "divide and rule" doctrine, which was based on caste and class. Divide and rule meant that different castes and tribes were mixed together to form Indian troops.

8. Conclusion

The principal result of the 1857 rebellion was the inception of the independence struggle, which was initially carried out against the brutal colonial authority of the British government. The 1857 rebellion was often seen as the start of the fight for independence from English rule. Therefore, it may be concluded that the powerful British administration, headed by the governor-general who was born in Britain, ruled the Indian nation for the most part. By the rebelling act of 1857, the British East India Company gave the British government control over its assets in India. Because of this, the British government in the periphery initially carried out a number of noteworthy administrative efforts with the primary goal of expanding their territory.

The 1857 uprising was beneficial to the history of the Indian nation because it brought to light the problems of the peasants and sepoys who served as the revolt's foundation. It is regarded as the most significant event in Modern India's history. It is evident that the

conservative segments of society were much alarmed by the rapidly spreading western civilization and began to rebel against British rule. Despite being ill-organized, the uprising had a significant impact on Indian society. Even though the uprising was unable to accomplish its objective, it did sow the seeds of nationalism among Indians.

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