

The Revolt of 1857

- **Question)** What began as a fight for religion ended as a war of independence as there is no doubt that rebels wanted to get rid of the alien government and restore the old order of which the King of Delhi was the rightful representative. Do you support this view?
- **Question)** What administrative changes were introduced in India after 1857 and what objectives of these changes?
- **Question)** Explain how 1857 was an important watershed in the evolution of British policy.
- **Question)** 1857 revolt was culmination of many small & big rebellions in 100 years of British rule. Elaborate. (*can be answered once Pre1857 revolts are done)
- Revolt of 1857 = Sepoy mutiny + Civil rebellion

Introduction

- On 29th of March 1857, Mangal Pandey at Barrackpur near Calcutta fired at European officers & his fellow sepoys refused to arrest him. All of them were hanged in April.
- On 10th of May Meerut Sepoys mutinied & on 11th May reached Delhi & proclaimed Bahadur Shah Zafar³⁷⁵⁷ as Emperor of Hindustan.
- Revolt spread to other cantonments in North West provinces and Awadh by end of May 1857 & civil population joined leading to collapse of Br rule from 11 May to 20th of September, 1857 in Delhi and overall till spring of 1858.
- There was a huge amount of violence on both sides and thus, British monopoly over violence was broken.

Reasons for Sepoy Mutiny:

- **Service-related -**

- **Racism:** discrimination between Indian sepoy and European sepoy in **salaries** and **pensions**. The **highest post** an Indian sepoy could reach was Subedar which gave only 60-70 rupees a month. Indian sepoy were subjects of **racist slurs** e.g. were referred to as Suar/pigs.
- **Economic:** to compensate for high war expenditure of past, Br **decreased salaries of Sepoy + allowance** for service outside their region was ended in 1856.

- **Socio-religious -**

- Initially, the British recruited sepoy in line with Indian traditions i.e. men from upper caste were recruited & Br respected caste & religious customs. (*to rule India, the Indian way * Ideology of orientalism - will be done later).
- However, as the British empire expanded in India, the EIC army became **heterogeneous** as different communities joined EIC army. Therefore, it was difficult for the British to respect the religious customs of upper castes.
- Br tried developing a **uniform culture** in the army as it would decrease loyalty to caste/religion and increase loyalty to employer, leading to better control over Sepoy.
- Thus EIC **reduced caste privileges** e.g. wearing religious symbols, food preferences etc & Sepoy were forced to go abroad which led to loss of caste (e.g. Burma, Sindh, Afghanistan) & those who refused were dismissed/punished.
- Also since **Charter act 1813**, there was focus on spread of Christianity in India & presence of Christian **missionaries** in barracks created fear of conversion.

- Rumour of mixing **cow and pig bone dust** with flour + rumour of **cartridges** of new Enfield rifle that replaced Brown Bess musket, having grease made of cow and pig fat. These were to be bitten off before loading. Sepoys feared that British want to make them lesser Hindu/Muslim for easier conversion to Christianity.
- **Political reasons -**
 - Majority of Sepoys in Bengal Army were from Awadh & nearly every family in Awadh sent a member to British Indian Army. Annexation of Awadh in 1856 was seen as a betrayal and it hurt loyalty of sepoy.
- **Agrarian grievance -**
 - British did summary settlement in Awadh that determined LR (land revenue) without proper field surveys leading to unreasonable LR demand.
 - When peasants could not pay LR, the govt auctioned off their lands + peasants became indebted to moneylenders to pay LR and then lost their lands due to indebtedness.
 - Sepoy was a peasant in uniform since he came from a peasant family and therefore was impacted by Br LR policies.
- Therefore, issue of cartridges was only a trigger that gave voice to multiple grievances. Revolt began **in Bengal Army as high caste identity** was maintained here + **ratio of British men to Indians** was lowest in Bengal Army.

Reasons for civil rebellion

- **Feudal Elements/Rajas/Nobility –**

- Loss of kingdom due to annexations e.g. under Doctrine of Lapse led to grievances among dispossessed rulers.
- Along with Nawab, the entire aristocracy was negatively affected. They offered leadership in the 1857 revolt.
- Example –
 - Nana Sahib in Kanpur (adopted son of Baji Rao II who was denied pension after Baji Rao II),
 - Begum Hazrat Mahal in Lucknow,
 - Khan Bahadur Khan Rohilla in Bareilly,
 - Rani Lakshmi Bai in Jhansi,
 - Kunwar Singh, a TALUQDAR in Jagdishpur (Bihar),
 - Bahadur Shah Zafar in Delhi- Canning announced in 1856 that Mughals will now be called Prince & vacate Red Fort.

- **Big Landowners/Taluqdars/Zamindars -**

- Application of Mahalwari settlement in North-West Provinces (*1801- half of Awadh annexed under Subsidiary Alliance) and Awadh (*annexed in 1856)- in this system land ownership in many cases was given to actual cultivator leading to loss of personal estates for Taluqdars. Thus there was loss of economic status.
- British focussed on building a strong centralised state and therefore, private forts and private armies of Taluqdars were disbanded. Thus loss of Military status.
- Also now there was to be rule of law under the British i.e. equality before the law. Thus their Social status was hurt.
- Hence, Taluqdars provided leadership to peasants.

- **Peasants-**

- High LR and indebtedness to money lenders due to high LR. Therefore, peasants were oppressed by the British government and

money lenders. Traditionally, they enjoyed occupancy rights but now there was loss of land in govt auctions due to non payment of LR & to the moneylenders due to indebtedness.

- The new British courts supported the moneylenders and thus completed the process of loss of land. Therefore, moneylenders also became targets of peasant attacks.

Religion - The whole rural society had a fear that their religion is under threat -

- Since 1813, there was inflow of Christian missionaries and forced conversions under police protection.
- The socio-religious reforms of the British, escalated the fear that the British wanted to destroy traditional customs and religious practices.
- for example –
 - Sati Abolition in 1829; Widow Remarriages Act 1856
 - Lex Loci Act 1850 (or Removal of Religious Disabilities Act or Removal of Caste Disabilities Act)- gave rights of inheritance to converts to other religions & therefore escalated conversions to Christianity.
- British began taxing revenue-free lands of religious sects, of mosques and temples and therefore, Hindus and Muslims both felt a threat to their religion + **Pundits and Maulvis spread hatred** against the British among people.
- There was a common feeling among the Indians that British rule is immoral due to all of the above-mentioned grievances and therefore, the goal of the 1857 revolt was to restore the pre-British order - political, economic, social and religious.

Why British won?

- Sepoys lacked financial resources.
- Lack of modern weapons and training among peasants.
- British had better leadership, a strong centralised bureaucracy and army and an effective communication system.
- Lack of a unified **leadership** on the Indian side as there were multiple regional leaders but no effective central leadership. Therefore, coordination suffered.
- Tactical mistakes - rebels/sepoys focused on coming to Delhi due to which the movement did not spread properly and the defeat of Delhi meant defeat of the movement/revolt
- Due to localised nature of the uprisings, British could defeat rebels one after another.
- Whole British Indian Army did not revolt: Bombay and Madras regiments were quiet while Punjabi and Gurkha soldiers actively helped the British. (max size was of Bengal Army, therefore, overall half of the Indian army had revolted.)
- Civil rebellion was limited to central and north India and only minor participation elsewhere.

Question) Was it a war of Independence?

- The colonial view is that it was primarily a sepoy mutiny and civil rebellion was nothing but unruly elements taking benefit of the breakdown of law and order.
- V.D. **Savarkar** called it Indian War of Independence fought for Swadharma & Swaraj(1909 Book). **Karl Marx** also argued that it was a nationalist revolt.
- Mainstream stand is that it was much more than a mutiny but modern nationalism was absent, hence not a proper war of independence based on modern nationalism.
- **Arguments in favour of it not being a war of independence and not having modern nationalism**
 - (Modern nationalism elements - Nation not equal to land but summation of people who are equal and feel one + Power to the nation that is people are supreme that is democracy and republic. Therefore, there can not be any monarch + Liberty, Equality, Fraternity).
 - **Whole India did not participate-** only central and north India participated and those sections which benefitted from colonial rule did not participate.
 - Example - In ryotwari areas, the ryots benefitted as they became landowners (Sindh, Coorg, Assam, Madras, Bombay - Scam B) + in Punjab, middle-class peasants benefitted from Canal construction + in Bengal, Zamindars benefitted as they became landowners under permanent settlement of 1793 + western educated middle class benefitted from jobs created by British rule and they also believed in the providence of British rule that is British rule is good for India and will modernise India + princes who did not lose power did not support + Taluqdars who did not lose land did not support.

- Whole of Indian Army did not participate.
- There was no proper **planning** and revolt was **spontaneous** outburst. Modern political movements have elements of planning & coordination (*which represents Fraternity).
- There was no modern alternative in form of **democracy** as goal was to restore the old political order where there was the rule of Monarchs/feudal elements.

Arguments in favour that the revolt of 1857 was much more than a mutiny -

- (*Modern nationalism has important elements of liberty, equality and fraternity/unity and democracy)
- Yes, modern nationalism was absent, however –
 - Common enemy was there.
 - Common hatred was there against disruptions brought by British rule (*political annexations, high LR, loss of lands, oppression of money lenders and EIC officials, destruction of Indian industry).
 - Sepoys declaration went beyond their selfish grievances (* listed reasons for mutiny) -
 - High land revenue
 - Increase in Chowkidari tax (for payment to Village Watchman)
 - Increase in unemployment of artisans and learned man
 - Toll Tax for travelling on public roads
 - Decrease in status of Indian ruling class,
 - therefore, sepoys were fighting for all Indians
 - Common fear of religion under threat.
 - Hindu-Muslim unity was there as there was belief that Hindustan is for Hindus and Muslims.

- Common goal of restoring moral order disturbed by the British i.e. restore pre-British way of life - political, economic and social.
- All agreed among rebels that **capital** should be Delhi with Bahadur Shah Zafar as emperor
- (@**Democracy**) Rebels did not desire 17th century centralised rule/unitary structure but wanted 18th century decentralised setup with provincial autonomy, with Mughal emperor as weak centre with real power at province level, therefore, desired element of federalism.
- They did not want British out of their area but **out of Hindustan** (* out of area would imply selfish interests, out of Hindustan imply fraternity and brotherhood). Hence, this time rebels were not restricted to their area and there was communication between regional leaders (*though not perfect).
- Most importantly, it was a **movement of masses** and not of elites -
 - Elites were forced to take up leadership in many cases by those who revolted. Example - Bahadur Shah Zafar + Nana Sahib in Kanpur + Jhansi ki Rani, therefore initiative was of common man.
 - In many cases, peasants and artisans continued revolt despite surrender by Taluqdars.
 - Main initiative was of Sepoy who was peasant in uniform and now removed his uniform to be peasant again and therefore, main initiative was of peasants (who are masses in an agrarian society).

Question) Why revolt of 1857 is an important watershed in Indian history?

Political Impact of 1857 revolt

- EIC was blamed for mismanagement of Indian affairs in Britain and public pressure increased in favour of ending absentee sovereignty (*real sovereign power was Br but it was absent as ruler in India and ruled India through an agent that is EIC). Therefore, **GOI Act 1858**/Act for Better Government of India 1858 ended EIC rule -
- a) It declared Queen Victoria as sovereign ruler of India with direct rule over British India and relationship of paramountcy between the Crown and Indian princes. Therefore, Queen was now 'Kaiser-i-Hind' that is Empress of India.
- b) A Secretary of state for India, a cabinet member, replaced President of Board of Control and he was to be top authority in Britain on India.
- c) Queen issued a proclamation on 1st of November 1858, which promised religious tolerance and that India would be governed as per its traditions and customs. therefore, socio-religious reforms took a backseat and also spread of Christianity.

Ideological Impact

- British became distrustful towards Indians + racism increased + authoritarianism increased.
- Therefore, Indians were now considered racially inferior and beyond reforms and British did not want Indians in senior positions in bureaucracy, police, military and did not want to share power with Indians, therefore became more autocratic. That is, now they wanted firm control over India.
- However, this frustrated educated middle class Indians who wanted share in power and this anger led to them starting the modern nationalism based Indian national movement (INM) in second half of the 19th century.

Administrative impact

- Now, there was focus on effective policing and collection of information and intelligence.
- 1860 - Police Commission led to Indian Police Act, 1861 which established structure and functions of police which continued till 1947.
- **Police Act, 1861 -**
 - a) State police concept implemented properly throughout British India.
 - b) Provincial police was to be under an Inspector General who reported to Governor + district police under Superintendent of Police who reported to District Collector/District Magistrate + Thanas/ Police stations under Sub-Inspector who reported to SP. Therefore, for the first time, proper hierarchy of specialists with proper chain of command implemented.
 - Therefore, from 1857, a Police Raj was created and Indians were excluded from all important positions.
- **Changes to Civil Services -**
 - Exam was introduced under Charter Act of 1853 but now it was not to be held simultaneously in India + maximum age of eligibility was kept low that is between 19 to 23 that is to prevent Indians from clearing the exam as British were highly insecure and also racists and therefore did not want Indians in senior positions.
 - In 1870, statutory civil services idea came but implemented in 1878 by Lytton 7680. Under this, Indians could now be nominated to some posts earlier held by CCS (Covenanted Civil Services) officers but only loyal elites were chosen.

Changes in Army

Peel Commission after 1857 revolt led to many changes in military -

- a) **prevent homogeneity** by having heterogeneous mix of different castes and nationalities in a regiment. This to prevent caste based bonds of unity among sepoys like in Bengal Army in 1857 revolt.
- b) **prevent inter-region interaction** within army to prevent pan-India unity among regiments, British benefitted from lack of unity between its regional armies in 1857 revolt.
- c) Now **recruitment was done on the basis of race** - martial races idea started by British that is Jats, Rajputs, Sikhs, Gurkhas etc were termed as martial race which have characteristics of loyalty, courage and were good fighters but for British they were also incapable of leadership. Therefore, martial races and those regions which stayed loyal were preferred in recruitment.
- Now British focused on building the **culture of loyalty to the salt** and promoted idea of sacrifice for employer for honour of one's community.
- Now British maintained **a very large standing army** to counter any future revolts.
- British ensured at least **1:2 ratio between Europeans and Indians** in the Army (Not having this in Bengal Army was a mistake).
- Minimum or **no Indians in senior military position**.
- Financial control over Army to civilian authority.
- There was high use of British army against INM and peasant revolts. Also, British wanted to ensure that sepoys live in Barracks to minimise political influence of INM on them.