

War Of Independence (1857)

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War Of Independence (1857)

War of Independence is an important landmark in the history of Sub-Continent. This War was fought in 1857 by Indians against the British in order to get rid of their domination. It is also given names as Indian Rebellion, Indian Mutiny as well as Indian Revolt. The main causes of the War were political, social, economical, military and religious. It was an extreme effort made by Indians, but they failed due to certain reasons including mutual jealousies, disunity, and lack of central leadership etc.

This war was not spread throughout India but it was limited to few areas mainly Meerut, Delhi, Kanpur, Lucknow etc. The main event which became the immediate cause of the war was the refusal of the Sepoys to use the grease covered cartridges (greased with fat of pig and cow) on January 23, 1857. At the same time, an Indian sepoy killed two British officers at Barrackpore, when he was forced to use greased cartridges. He was arrested and hanged to death on April 8, 1857. This news spread as fast as jungle fire.

Meerut

On 6th May, 1857 A.D. 85 out of 90 Indian soldiers at Meerut refused to bite the greased cartridges with their teeth. These 85 soldiers were court-martialled and imprisoned for 10 years. They were stripped off their uniforms in the presence of the entire Indian crowd. It was too much of a disgrace and this incident sent a wave of indignation. On 10th May 1857, the Indian soldiers at Meerut broke into open revolt. They released their companions and murdered a few European officers. On the night of 10th May the mutineers marched to Delhi and reached there on 11th May.

Delhi

The revolutionaries reached from Meerut to Delhi on 11th May, 1857 and the small British garrison at Delhi was not able to resist and consequently fell into their hands within 2 days. The Mughal Emperor, Bahadur Shah Zafar, was proclaimed Emperor of India. In order to regain Delhi, Sir John Lawrence sent a

strong British force commanded by John Nicholson. After a long siege of four months, the British recovered Delhi in September 1857 A.D. The Mughal Emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar was captured, his two sons and a grandson were shot dead before his eyes and he was sent to Rangoon where he died in the year 1862 A. D.

Kanpur

At Kanpur the struggle for Independence was led by Nana Sahib Dondu Pant (The adopted son of Peshwa Baji Rao II). A number of British fell into his hands and he showed great kindness to them. But when he heard about inhuman attitude of Gen. O'Neil towards Indians, he became very furious and killed all the British. General Havelock captured Kanpur after defeating Nana Sahib in a hotly contested battle on June 17, 1857. Later on Nana Sahib, with the help of Tantya Topi, recaptured Kanpur in November, 1857 but not for a long time and British defeated them once again in a fierce war from December 1 to 6, 1857. Nana Sahib fled towards Nepal, where he probably died, while Tantya Tope migrated to Kalpi.

Lucknow

The struggle for independence at Lucknow was led by Nawab, Wajid Ali Shah. The Chief Commissioner, Sir Henry Lawrence, sought refuge with 1000 English and 700 Indian soldiers inside the Residency. The Indians did not make any concession and killed most of the Englishmen, including Sir Henry Lawrence and the notorious English General O'Neil. At last, the Commander-in-Chief General Collin Campbell, marched towards Lucknow and captured it after a fierce battle in March 1858.

Jhansi and Gwalior

The leader of the revolutionaries in Central India was Rani Laxmi Bai of Jhansi. General Sir Hume Rose attacked Jhansi in March 1858 but the brave Rani Laxmi Bai kept the British General unnerved for quite some time. She with the help of Tantya Tope created problems for the British troops. Both fought many successful battles against the British. A fierce battle was fought between the British and the revolutionaries under Rani Laxmi Bai and Tantya Tope from June 11 to June 18, 1858 A. D. But the personal valour of Rani and Tantya Tope could not match the resources at the command of the British. Tantya Tope was betrayed by the Gwalior Chief Man Singh and fell into the hands of the British. He was subsequently hanged on April 18, 1859.

Bihar

In Bihar, the Revolt was led by Kunwar Singh, a zamindar of Jagdishpur. Though he was eighty years old, he played a prominent part in the revolt. He fought the British in Bihar and then joined Nana Sahib's forces and took part in various encounters with the English in Oudh and Central India. He died on April 27, 1858, leaving behind a glorious record of valour and bravery.

Conclusion

Most of the European historians have pointed out that it was a revolt of Indian soldiers who were offended at the use of greased cartridges. In their opinion, the discontented sepoys were incited by the landlords and the deposed native princes and the people of India were not directly involved in this rebellion. They further assert that it was not a national war of independence, in as much as the revolt was confined to a particular region and not to the whole of India; large areas like the Punjab, Sind and Rajputana remained unaffected. It was admittedly a great and courageous effort by patriotic Indians to get rid of the foreign domination. It was a glorious landmark in our history in as much as Hindus and Muslims fought shoulder to shoulder to win back their lost independence. One cannot but admire the patriotic spirit of boatmen of Lucknow who refused to carry British soldiers across the river. The sepoys and the people fought gallantly up to the very end. Though the revolt was unsuccessful, the spirit of the people remained unshaken. The revolt left an impression on the minds of the Indian people and thus paved the way for the rise of a strong national movement.