

PS AND VISIONS – MODERN HISTORY: 3

MODERN INDIAN HISTORY: 3

EARLY UPRISING AGAINST THE BRITISH AND REVOLT OF 1857

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Student Notes:

Early Uprising against the British and Revolt of 1857

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1. Introduction

After the battle of Plassey in 1757, the political control of the East India Company increased and by the end of the eighteenth century, the British emerged as the main power in India. As the Company gained in political sphere it became imperative to introduce and implement policies in the fields of land revenue, law and order, and set-up an administration. Implementation of such policies created turmoil in the Indian society and led to changes. Moreover, Company's main aim was to utilize the resources of India for the development of England. These changes led to dislocation in the socio-cultural, economic and political life of the people. The subsequent turmoil led to outbreak of rebellion in different parts of the country. Rebellions were not confined to the later period of the British Empire but were a constant feature of it from its very beginning, culminated in to the revolt of 1857. **Erosion of the traditional forms of authority** and **increased economic pressure** were two basic reasons for these uprisings.

The Revolt of 1857 was the most dramatic instance of traditional India's struggle against foreign rule. But it was no sudden occurrence. It was the culmination of a century long traditions of fierce popular resistance to British domination.

The establishment of British power in India was a prolonged process of piecemeal conquest and consolidation and the colonization of the economy and society. This process produced discontent, resentment and resistance at every stage.

Social base of the rebellions

At a time when the newly created class of urban intelligentsia was reaping the benefits of the British rule, it were the traditional sections of society whose lives had been almost completely changed for the worse, who rebelled.

The series of civil rebellions were often led by deposed rulers or their descendants, uprooted and impoverished zamindars, landlords and poligars (landed military magnates in South India) and ex-retainers and officials of the conquered Indian States. The backbone of the rebellions, their mass base and striking power came from the rack-rented peasants, ruined artisans and demobilized soldiers.

Political religious movements like Faqir uprising and Sanyasi uprising were led by the religious mendicants whose religious practices couldn't be understood by the British.

Causes of the rebellions

- The major cause of all these civil rebellions taken as a whole was the rapid changes the British introduced in the economy, administration and land revenue system. These changes led to the disruption of the agrarian society, causing prolonged and widespread suffering among its constituents.
- Above all, the colonial policy of intensifying demands for land revenue and extracting as large an amount as possible produced a veritable upheaval in Indian villages. In Bengal, for example, in less than thirty years land revenue collection was raised to nearly double the amount collected under Mughals. The pattern was repeated in other parts of the country as British rule spread and aggravating the unhappiness of the farmers was the fact that not even a part of the

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enhanced revenue was spent on the development of agriculture or the welfare of the cultivator.

- Thousands of zamindars and poligars lost control over their land and its revenue either due to the extinction of their rights by the colonial state or by the forced sale of their rights over the land because of their inability to meet the exorbitant land revenue demanded. The proud zamindars and poligars resented this loss even more when they were displaced by rank outsiders-government officials and the new men of money-merchants and money lenders. Thus they, as also the old chiefs, who had lost their principalities, had personal scores to settle with the new rulers.
- Peasants and artisans, as indicated earlier, had their own reasons to rise up in arms and side with the traditional elite. Increasing demands for land revenue were forcing large numbers of peasants into growing indebtedness or into selling their lands. The new landlords, bereft of any traditional paternalism towards their tenants, pushed up rents to ruinous heights and evicted them in case of non-payment. The economic decline of the peasantry was reflected in twelve major and numerous minor famines from 1770 to 1857.
- The new courts and legal system gave a further fillip to the dispossessors of land and encouraged the rich to oppress the poor. Flogging, torture and jailing of the cultivators for arrears of rent or land revenue or interest on debt were quite common. The ordinary people were also hard hit by the prevalence of corruption at the lower levels of the police, judiciary and general administration. The petty officials enriched themselves freely at the cost of the poor. The police looted, oppressed and tortured the common people at will. William Edwards, a British official, wrote in 1859 that the police were 'a scourge to the people' and that 'their oppression and exaction form one of the chief grounds of dissatisfaction with our governments.'
- The ruins of Indian handicraft industries, as a result of the imposition of free trade in India and levy of discriminatory tariffs against Indian goods in Britain, pauperized millions of artisans. The misery of the artisans was further compounded by the disappearance of their traditional patrons and buyers, the princes, chieftains and zamindars.
- The scholarly and priestly were also active in inciting hatred and rebellion against foreign rule. The traditional rulers and ruling elite had financially supported scholars, religious preachers, priests, pundits and maulvis and men of arts and literature.

Classification of the popular uprisings

Political-religious Movements - Fakir Uprising, Sanyasi Uprising, Pagal Panthis, Wahabi Movement, Faraizi Movement, Kuka Movement and Moplah Rebellions

Movement by deposed rulers and Zamindars- Velu Thampi and Polygar Rebellions

Movements by the dependents of the deposed ruler- Ramosi Uprising, Gadkari Revolt and Sawantwadi Revolt

Tribal Movements-

- Non-Frontier Tribal movements- These are divided in three phases
 - First Phase- 1795-1860: Santhal Rebellion and Khond uprising
 - Second Phase- 1860-1920: Munda uprising and Koya Rebellion

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- iii. Third Phase- 1920-1947: Rampa Rebellion and Chenchu tribal Movements
- b) Frontier Tribal Movements: Khasi Uprising, Singphos Rebellion and Rani Gaidiniliu's Naga Movement

2. Politico- Religious Movements

These movements erupted in the early phase of colonial expansion. In this phase religion provided the framework to locate and understand the colonial rule and articulate resistance. The main politico-religious movements were the Fakir Uprising, Sanyasi Rebellion, PagalPanthis, Wahabi Movement, Faraizi Movement and Kuka Movement and Moplah rebellion.

Fakir Uprising (Bengal, 1776-77)

Fakirs were a group of wandering Muslim religious mendicants. Shortly after the annexation of Bengal in 1776-77, Majnum Shah, the leader of these fakirs, began to levy contributions on the zamindars and peasants and, defied the British Authority. After Majnum Shah's death, Chirag Ali shah, supported by pathans, Rajputs and the disbanded Indian soldiers extended the operations to the northern districts of Bengal. Two famous Hindu leaders who supported him were Bhawani Pathak and Devi Chaudhaurani. The Fakir led by Chirag Ali Shah gained considerable strength and attacked English factories, seized their goods, cash, arms and ammunitions. There were a number of skirmishes between the fakirs and the Company's troops. The fakirs were finally brought under the control at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

Sanyasi Uprising (Bengal, 1770-1820s)

The Hindu Naga and Giri armed Sanyasis once formed a part of the armies of the Nawabs of Awadh and Bengal, and also of the Maratha and Rajput chiefs. The immediate cause of the rebellion was the restrictions imposed on the pilgrims visiting the holy places. The Sanyasis raided the English factories and collected contributions from the towns, leading to a series of conflicts between the large bands of Sanyasis and the British forces. After nearly half –a-century long strife, the Sanyasi Uprising ended in the second quarter of the nineteenth century.

Pagal Panthis

Karam Shah was the founder of the pagalpanth- a semi religious sect having influence in the northern district of Bengal. An activist fervor to the sect was imparted by Tipu, the son and successor of Karam Shah. Tipu was motivated by both religious and political motives and took up the cause of the tenants against the oppression of the Zamindars. Tipu captured Sherpur in 1825 and assumed royal power. The insurgents extended their activities to Garo Hills. The area remained disturbed till the 1830s and 1840s.

Wahabi Movement

An Islamic revivalist movement founded by Syed Ahmed of Rai Bareilly, who was inspired by the teachings of Abdul Wahab (1703-87) of Saudi Arabia and Shah WaliUllah of Delhi. Syed Ahmed condemned the western influence on Islam and advocated a return to pure Islam and society.

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Syed Ahmed was declared as Imam (desired leader) and a countrywide organization with an elaborate secret code for its working under spiritual vice-regents (khalifas) was set up, and Sindh in north-western tribal belt was chosen as a base for operations. In India, its important centre was at Patna though it had its missions in Hyderabad, Madras, Bengal, UP and Bombay. Since the Dar-Ul-Harb (the land of kafirs) was to be converted into Dar-Ul-Islam (the land of Islam), a Zehad was declared against the Sikh kingdom of Punjab. After the defeat of the Sikh ruler and incorporation of the Punjab into East India Company's dominion in 1849, the British dominion in India became the sole target of the Wahabi's attacks.

A series of military operations by British in 1860s on the Wahabi base in Sindh and various court cases of sedition on the Wahabis weakened the Wahabi resistance, although sporadic encounters with the authorities continued into the 1880s and 1890s.

Faraizi Revolt

The Faraizis were the followers of a Muslim Sect founded by Haji Shariat-Allah of Faridpur in Eastern Bengal. They advocated radical religious, social- political changes. Shariat- Allah's son Dadu Miyan (1819-60) organized his followers with an aim to expel the English intruders from Bengal. The sect also supported the cause of the tenants against the Zamindars. The Faraizi disturbance continued from 1838 to 1857. Most of the Faraizis joined the Wahabi ranks.

Kuka Revolt

This movement was founded in 1840 by Bhagat Jawahar Mal (also called Sian Saheb) in western Punjab. When the British took the Punjab, the movement transformed from a religious purification campaign to a political one. Its basic tenets were abolition of caste and similar discriminations among Sikhs, discouraging the eating of meat and intake of alcohol and drugs, and encouraging women to step out of seclusion.

Moplah Rebellions (Malabar 1835-1921)

The Moplah rebellions of Malabar, South India, were not only directed against British but also the Hindu Landlords. The relations of the Arab traders with the Malayali society can be traced back to the ninth century. The traders helped the local Hindu chieftains and were granted concessions. Many of the Arab traders settled in Malabar marrying mostly Nayar and Tiyar women; and the subsequent descendants came to be known as Moplahs. Their numbers also increased with the conversion of Hindus from the lower castes, especially the Cherumars who were slave laborers and hoped to gain better social status upon conversion. Though the years the Moplahs settled, became agriculturalists and joined the ranks of landless laborers, cultivating tenants, fishermen and petty traders.

In the traditional Malabar land system, the Jenmi held land by birthright and were mostly high-caste Hindus, and let it out to others for cultivation. The other main sections of the Malabar society were the Kanamdar, who were mostly Moplahs, the verumpat agricultural laborers. The peasants were mostly the Muslim Moplahs. The land was given by the ruling raja to Namboodiri Brahmins whose obligation was to look after the temple and related institutions, and to the chieftains (mostly Nayars), who provided martial aid when needed. Traditionally, the net produce of the land was shared equally between the three. But during the reign of Haider Ali and Tipu Sultan, Namboodiri Brahmins and Nayar Chiefs fled and the

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subsequent vacuum was filled by the Moplahs.

The conflict arose when after Malabar's cession to the British in 1792 and the return of the exiled Namboodiri Brahmins and Nayars, the government re-established and acknowledged their landlord rights. The British by recognizing the Jenmis as the absolute owners of the land gave them the right to evict the tenants at will. This reduced the other two to the status of tenants and leaseholders. The courts and the law officers sided with the Jenmis. Once the Jenmi landlords, who had the backing of the revenue officials, the law court and the police started tightening their hold and demands on the subordinate classes, the Moplah peasantry rose up in revolt. According to Dhanagare, the first outbreak occurred in 1836 and during the period of 1834-54 there were 22 uprisings, with the ones in 1841 and 1849 being quite serious. The first phase of the uprisings from 1836 to 1854 witnessed 22 revolts and had messianic overtones. The faithful sacrificed their lives in the belief that as Ahadis they would go straight to heaven. The second phase of the revolt was recorded in 1882-85, while another spate of outburst in 1876 was also there.

3. Movement by the Deposed Rulers and Zamindars

This category of the rebellions was affected by the aggressive policy of annexation by the British and the subsequent disturbances in the economy of the regions. The problems were accentuated by the exacting land revenues. These uprisings are mainly known either by the name of the leader or the region where they occurred. Velu Thampi and Polygar Rebellions are two main Uprisings in this category.

Velu Thampi (Travancore, 18089-09)

In 1808-09, Velu Thampi, the Dewan of Travancore, rose up in rebellion against the British attempt to remove him from the Dewanship and the heavy burden imposed on the state through the Subsidiary Alliance System. In one of the ensuing skirmishes Velu Thampi was injured and died in forest. However, even though dead, he was publicly hanged as an example to the fate of those who rose against the British.

Polygar Rebellions (Kurnool, 1799-1805)

Polygars were the offshoots of the Nayakara system prevalent in the Vijaynagar Administration. The Polygars were quite similar to the Rajputs of North India, and were given land in exchange for military service when called upon. However, their influence and power increased beyond the traditional lines and they often acted as sovereigns, even to the extent of extracting taxes from the people. But as the company's government wanted to augment its own sources of revenues, it sought to control the Polygars. The conflict in this case, as in others, was on the question of the collection of taxes, rather on, who should collect it, the traditional classes or the Company Officials. In September 1799, in the first Polygar War, the poligars of Tirunelveli District rose up in open rebellion. A column of Company troops was speedily deployed against them, while dire warnings were issued to poligars in other parts of the south not to join the rebellion. Kattabomma Nayak of Panchalamkurichi was considered as the main leader of the rebellion. Though he managed to escape initially, he was later captured in Pudukottai, and publicly hanged in front of other Polygars as a warning. Subramania Pillai, a close associate of Kattabomma Nayak, was also publicly hanged and his head was fixed on a

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pike at Panchalamkurichi. Soundra Pandian Nayak, another rebel leader, was brutally assassinated by having his head dashed against a village wall.

The Second Polygar war of 1800-01, given the magnitude of participation, is also known as the "South Indian Rebellion". It was directed by a confederacy consisting of Marudu Pandian of Sivaganga, Gopala Nayak of Dundigal, Kerala Verma of Malabar and Krishnappa Nayak and Dhoondaji of Mysore. The rebellion broke out when a band of Polygar armies bombed the combined forces of the poligars. The suppression was followed by signing of the Carnatic Treaty on July 31, 1801, whereby the British assumed direct control over Tamil nadu. The Polygar system, which had flourished for two and half centuries, came to a violent end and the company introduced the Zamindari settlement in its place.

Incidentally Nana Sahib, Tantya Tope and Begum Hazrat Mahal were all deposed rulers and Kunwar Singh was one of the unsatisfied zamindars, who were local leaders in revolt of 1857.

4. Movement by the Dependents of the Deposed Rulers

These rebellions were caused by the aggressive policy of annexation by the British and the subsequent disturbances in the economy of the regions.

Three main revolts can be clubbed under this category were Ramosi Uprising, Gadkari Uprising and Sawantwadi Revolt. It is interesting to note that these three revolts occurred in the Maratha Region.

Ramosi Uprising (1822, 1825-26)

The Ramosis, who served in the lower ranks of the Maratha army and police, revolted in Satara in 1822, under the leadership of **Chittur Singh** in protest against heavy assessment of land revenue and the harsh methods of its collection. The Ramosis plundered the regions around Satara and attacked the forts. In 1825-26, they again rose up in rebellion under the banner of Umaji on account of acute famine and scarcity in Pune. For three years they ravaged the Deccan. Finally, the British Government pacified them not only by condoning their crimes but also by offering them land grants and recruiting them in the Hill Police.

Sawantwadi Revolt (1844)

The revolt in Sawantwadi region in Ratnagiri district of Maharashtra state, was led by **Phond Sawant**, a Maratha sardar, who with the help of other sardars and Desais, among whom Anna Sahib was prominent, captured some forts. When the British troops drove out these rebels from the forts, they escaped to Goa, leading to great turmoil in the region. A number of Sawantwadi rebels were tried for treason and sentenced to various terms of imprisonment. Ultimately, after the imposition of martial law and meting out brutal punishment to the rebels, order could be restored in Sawantwadi region.

Gadkari Revolt (1844)

The revolts in and around Kolhapur region of Maharashtra state, were led by **Gadkaris**. They were hereditary servants attached to Maratha forts, were disbanded. That is the reason; there

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was revolt, led by Daji Krishna Pandit.

5. Tribal Movements/ Tribal Uprisings

Tribal movements are further subdivided into two categories along two main divisions of tribes based on the geographical region occupied.

- Non- Frontier Tribe: constitute 89 percent of the total tribal population. The non-frontier tribes were mainly confined to central India, West-Central India and Andhra. Among the tribes that participated in the movements were Khonds, Savara, Santhal, Munda, Oraon, Koya, Kol, Gond and Bhil. The uprising of these tribes were quite volatile and constitute some of major uprising.
- Frontier Tribes: of the seven North-eastern frontier states of Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Assam, Manipur, Mizoram and Tripura.

Status of Tribes in relation to the mainstream society

Tribals are located on the fringes of the mainstream society and constitute the lower stratum. Tribals, Adivasis, Aboriginals were usually the original inhabitants of vast tracts in western, central, southern, eastern, and north eastern parts of the country. With the exception of the north east, they had been reduced to a minority with the influx of outsiders and exposed to rapid changes. Barring a few, especially the frontier tribes, most tribes had some form of contact with the mainstream society. The socio economic differentiation amongst them in comparison to the mainstream society was significantly less. The tribes were politically autonomous and had their own system of justice.

Economic Base of tribal population

Shifting agriculture, hunting, Fishing and forest produce form the mainstay of their economic base. Use of forest products and shifting agriculture were very important parts of the tribal economy.

Causes of Tribal Movements

- Imposition of Land revenue Settlement:** Expansion of agriculture by the non- tribals to tribal area or over forest cover led to the erosion of tribal traditions of joint ownership and increased the socio-economic differentiation in the egalitarian structure of the tribal society.
- Work of Christian Missionaries** brought about further changes in the socio economic and cultural equation of the tribals and the mainstream society plus in turbulent times, the tendency of the missionaries to refuse to take up arms or in discouraging people from rising against the government made the missionaries to be viewed as extension of colonialism and were often attacked by the rebels.

for the royal treasury increasing demand for gold from early nineteenth century

then railways, led to increasing control of government over forest land. The establishment of the **Forest department in 1864, Government Forest Act(1865)and Indian Forest Act in 1878** together established complete government monopoly over Indian forest land. Shifting Agriculture, a wide spread practice amongst the various

tribal communities was banned from 1864 onwards on the reserved forest. Restrictions were imposed on the previously sanctioned timber and grazing facilities.

4. Extension of settled agriculture led to influx of non tribals in the tribal areas. These outsiders exploited them and extension of settled agriculture led to the loss of land by the tribals which reduced them to agricultural labourers.
5. Some of the tribal uprising took place in reaction to the effect of the landlords to impose taxes on the customary use of timber and grazing facilities, police exaction, new excise regulations, exploitation by low country traders and money lenders, and restrictions on shifting cultivation in forest.
6. The rebellions by the non-frontier tribals were usually reactions against **outsiders (dikus)**, local landlords and rulers, the support provided to the later by the British administration and intervention by them in the life of the tribals. The indigenous names for these tribal movements were **Meli, Hool and Ul-Gulan**.
7. Introduction of the notion of private property- Land could be bought, sold, mortgaged which led to loss of land by the tribals.

Nature of Tribal Movements

The Colonial intrusion and the triumvirate of trader, money lender and revenue farmer in sum disrupted the tribal identity to a lesser or greater degree. **In fact, ethnic ties were a basic feature of tribal rebellions. The rebels saw themselves not as a discreet class but as having a tribal identity. At this level the solidarity shown was of a very high order. Fellow tribals were never attacked unless they had collaborated with the enemy.**

Three phases of the tribal movements

Tribal movements are divided into following three phases

The First Phase (1795-1860)

It coincided with the rise, expansion and establishment of the British Empire. The leadership emerged from the upper crust of the tribal society led by the traditional section whose privileges had been undermined by colonization of India.

Main Tribal Uprisings- Santhal rebellion; Khond Uprisings; Early Munda Uprisings

A. Santhal Rebellion:

Among the numerous tribal revolts, the Santhalhool or uprising was the most massive one. With the introduction of permanent settlement in Bengal in 1793, the Santhals were employed as labourers with the promise of wages or rent free lands. However they were forced to become agricultural surfs, exploited at will. The first rebellion of messianic character erupted in **1854 under Bir Singh of Sasan in Lachimpur**.

The second Santhal rebellion of 1855

elemental tribal passion and open denunciation of the british rule. The Santhal, who lived in the area between Bhagalpur and Rajmahal, known as Daman-i-koh, rose in revolt; made a determined attempt to expel the outsiders- the dikus- and proclaimed the complete 'annihilation' of the alien regime. The rebellion covering the districts of Birbhum,

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Singbhumi, Bankura, Hazaribagh, Bhagalpur and Monghyr in Orissa and Bihar was precipitated mainly by economic causes. The social conditions which drove them to insurrection were described by a contemporary in the Calcutta Review as follows: 'Zamindars, the Police, the revenue and court alas have exercised a combined system of extortions, oppressive exactions, forcible dispossession of property, abuse and personal violence and a variety of petty tyrannies upon the timid and yielding Santhals. Usurious interest on loans of money ranging from 50 to 500 percent; false measures at the haut and the market; willful and uncharitable trespass by the rich by means of their untethered cattle, tattoos, ponies and even elephants, on the growing crops of the poorer race; and such like illegalities have been prevalent. The Company's government too protected the oppressors rather than redressing the grievances which turned them against the British.

Under the leadership of two brothers **Siddhu and Khanu**, more than 10000 Santhals assembled in June 1855, when a divide order was issued asking the Santhals to break the control of their oppressors and "take possession of the country and set up a government of their own." Within a month a rebellion had assumed a formidable shape. The rebels cut-off the postal and railway communication between Bhagalpur and Rajmahal, proclaimed the end of the company's rule and commencement of the Santhal regime. They attacked the houses of money-lenders, zamindars, white planters, railway engineers and British officials. The open war with the British continued till 1856, when the rebel leaders were finally captured and the movement was brutally suppressed.

B. Khond Uprising:

The Khonds lived in vast hill tracts stretching from Tamil-nadu to Bengal, covering central provinces, and in virtual independence due to the inaccessible mountainous terrain. Their uprisings from 1837 to 1856 were directed against the British, in which the tribals of Ghumsar, China-ki-medi, Kalahandi and Patna actively participated. The movement was led by **Chakra Bisoi** in the name of the young Raja. The main issue was the attempt by the government to suppress human sacrifice (Mariah), introduction of new taxes by the British and the influx of Zamindars and sahookars (money-lenders) into their areas which was causing the tribals untold misery. The British formed a Maria agency, against which the Khonds fought with Tangi, a king of battle axe, bows-arrows and even swords. Latter **Savaras** and some local militia clans also joined in, led by **Radha Krishna Dand Sena**. Chakra Bisoi disappeared in 1855 after which the movement pattered out.

C. Early Munda Uprising:

In the period of 1789-1832, the Munda rose up in rebellion seven times against the landlords, dikhush, money-lenders and the British, who instead of protesting them sided with the oppressors. In the post 1857 period with a hope of better future many Mundas turned to the Evangelical Lutheran mission, which was overseeing mission work in Chhotanagpur. However, many apostates became more militant and broke away, spearheading the cause of seeking redressal of their grievances once they realized that the missionaries could not provide the solution to them. Their movement identified as 'sardariladai' or 'war of the leaders' was fought with the aim of expelling dikhush; and restoration of the Munda domination over their homeland. The tribal chiefs rose up against the erosion of **Khuntkatti System or Joint tenures**. While it failed it did not peter out but remained dormant and in need of a charismatic leader. It was given a new life by **Birsa**

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Munda in 1899.

D. Bhils and Kolis Uprisings:

The Bhils were concentrated in the hill ranges of Khandesh in the previous Maratha territory. British occupation of this region in 1818 brought in, the outsiders and accompanying dislocations in their community life. A general Bhil insurrection in 1817-19 was crushed by the British Military forces and though some conciliatory measures were taken to pacify them, they again revolted under the leadership of **Seva Ram** in 1825 and the situation remained unsettled until 1831 when the Ramosi Leader Umaji Raje of Purandhar was finally captured and executed. Minor revolts again took place in 1836 and 1846 as well.

The Bhils' local rivals for power, the Kolis of Ahmednagar district, also challenged the British in 1829, but were quickly subdued by a large army contingent. The seeds of rebellion however persisted, to erupt again in 1844-46, when a local Koli leader successfully defied the British government for two years.

The Second Phase (1860-1920): It includes **Munda Uprising** under **Birsamunda; Koya Rebellion**. It will be discussed in next chapter.

The Third Phase (1920-1947): It includes **Tanabhagat movement/Oraon Movement, Rampa rebellion, and Chenchu tribal movement**. It will be discussed in next chapter.

Movements of the frontier tribes

The other region to have witnessed tribal movements of considerable proportion was the North-Eastern frontier. The region differed substantially from the rest of the tribal India in two basic aspects. Here the tribals formed an overwhelming majority and thus were relatively economically and socially secure. The other factor was that because of their geo-political situation and historical background of living in the vicinity of the international border in relative isolation, this region was not completely integrated with in the politico-economic system of colonialism and remained somewhat cut-off from the cultural patterns of the main land.

These characteristics affected the types of movements that occurred here. In the first place with one striking exception these movements tended to remain aloof from the freedom struggle often incorporating a demand for political autonomy either within the Indian union or as a separate unit. This was also because many of the tribes were living on the international frontier and thus shared ethnic and cultural affinities with tribesmen across the border. Similarly in contrast to central-India, there was hardly any agrarian forest-based movement as the tribals remained in possession of land and surrounding forests except Tripura.

The movements in the north-east were by and large revolutionary or revivalist, rather than having **sanskritising tendency** which the plains tribal movement often incorporated. This again was partly on account of their relative isolation from the Hindu society, and a strong Christian missionary influence in their process of modernization. The movements in the North tended to be political and secular with a definite progressive course, unlike those of Chhotanagpur which were often followed by long periods of dormancy or even extinction.

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Two aspects may be noted in these movements, which differentiated them from the anti-British movements in the plains-

First tribals deeply resented British penetration in their areas, which took place somewhat later here than in the plains. The British penetrated the area during the First Anglo-Burmese War (1824-26), Annexed the Jaintia hills in 1832, including the earlier 25 khasi states. Each of these events was followed by revolts. **Second**, these movements under the traditional chiefs continued much later than in the plains.

Main frontier uprisings before 1857 were: -Khasi Uprising, Ahom Revolt and Singhphos Rebellion.

A. Khasi Uprising:

As a result of the Burmese war, the British occupied the hilly region between Garo and Jaintiahills, in intention of building a road linking the Brahmaputra valley with Sylhet passing through the entire length of the Khasi domain. Conscriptions of labourers for road construction led the khasis to revolt under the leader ship of **Tirut Singh**, a khasi chief. The Garos joined them. The long and harassing warfare with Khasis continued for four years and was finally suppressed in early 1833.

B. Ahom Revolt:

The british had pledged to withdraw after the first Burma war(1824-26) from Assam but in contrast, the British attempted to incorporate the Ahoms territories in the company's dominion after the war. This sparked off a rebellion in 1828 under the leadership of **Gomdhar Konwar**. Finally the company decided to follow a conciliatory policy and handed over upper Assam to Maharaja Purandar Singh Narendra and parts of the kingdom was restored to the Assamese king.

C. Singhphos rebellion:

While the British were engaged in a harassing warfare with the Khasis, the Singhphos broke into open rebellion in early 1830, which was suppressed after 3 months. But the Singhphos remained in a mood of sullen discontent and again rose in rebellion in 1839, when they killed the British political agent. In 1843 the **Singhphos Chief Nirang Phidu** attacked the British garrison and killed several soldiers. In 1849, **Khasma Singhphos** attacked British village in Assam and was captured in 1855.

Rani Gaidiniliu's Naga Movement (1905-31) was another such movement which will be covered in later chapters.

6. Peasant movements

When the elites of the Indian society were busy in initiating and social reforms to change their society from within to answer the moralistic critiques of the West, the rural society was responding to the imposition of colonial rule in an entirely different way. In contrast to the urban intelligentsia, who were also the chief beneficiaries of colonial rule, the response of the

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traditional elite and the peasantry, who were losing out as a result of colonial impositions, were that of resistance and defiance, resulting in a series of unsuccessful attempts at restoring the old order. Not that peasant revolts were unknown in Mughal India; indeed, they became endemic in the first half of the eighteenth century as the rising revenue demands breached the Mughal compromise and affected the subsistence provision of the peasants, and the Mughal provincial bureaucracy became ever more oppressive and rigorous in collecting it. The tendency became even more pervasive as the colonial regime established itself, enhanced its power and introduced a series of revenue experiments, the sole purpose of which was to maximize its revenue income. Ruin of handicraft added to the situation. Thus it can be said that resistance to colonial rule was there as old as the rule itself. Some of the peasant rebellions in pre-1857 India were participated exclusively by the tribal population whose political autonomy and control over local resources were threatened by the establishment of British Rule and the advent of its non-tribal agents. But as the time line of peasant movement mainly stretches from 1857 to 1957 we will discuss it in detail in next chapters.

Thus it is evident that the colonial rule even, during the days of the east India Company witnessed numerous uprising and disturbances. The nature of these disturbances varied from elitist grievances as manifested in the rebellions headed by deposed rulers to the popular grassroots or people's movement, as exemplified by various tribal movements. These varied grievances reached their climax in the revolt of 1857, which in spite of targeting certain groups of Indians remains the prominent uprising against the British before the beginning of the Indian Freedom movement.

7. Revolt of 1857

The Revolt of 1857 has been hailed as the **watershed** in the colonial history of British India. Battle of Plassey in 1757 marked the beginning of the political influence of the England East India Company, an influence which ended in 1858 when the Crown rule was established in British India. A decade short of a century later in 1947, India gained independence. It is also regarded as an historic landmark for its suppression was followed by some fundamental changes in the administration of India.

The Revolt of 1857 was fundamentally different from earlier rebellions by the soldiers, peasants and tribal's of the nineteenth century. Prior to this, the mutinies and rebellions had remained sporadic or local affairs. However, unlike these, the scale and spread of the Revolt of 1857 was larger; sepoys at many centre mutinied and this was accompanied by civil disturbances. Unexpected as it was, it managed to shake the British. Though by the end of 1857 itself the British had started to regain control, the Revolt of 1857 remains a significant event.

What differentiated the Revolt of 1857 from the earlier uprisings was that unlike the preceding mutinies and revolts, which were limited to a relatively smaller area, within a town or at the most a few districts, the 1857 Revolt escalated to an unprecedented degree and the participation was wider

Areas affected by the Revolt of 1857- In Bengal, it was primarily the Bengal army which was recruited from North Western Provinces and especially Awadh, that rose up in mutiny. The sepoys were joined by the civilians from the North, Central and Western India.

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Areas that did not participate in the Revolt -The Punjab, Bengal, most of Central Provinces, The coast and the south remained largely unaffected by it. While the Bombay and the Madras regiments did not participate in the revolt, the Gurkha and the Punjabi Soldier fought on behalf of the English to put down the rebels.

8. Causes of the Revolt

The revolt did not happen overnight rather it was a product of the character and policies of colonial rule. The Cumulative effect of British expansionist policies, economic exploitation and administrative innovation over the years had adversely affected the positions of all- rulers of Indian states, sepoys, zamindars, peasants, traders, artisans, pundits, maulvis etc. The simmering discontent burst in the form of a violent storm in 1857 which shook the British Empire in India to its very foundations.

The causes of the revolt emerged from all aspects- socio-cultural, economic and political- of daily existence of Indian population cutting through all sections and classes. These causes were

Economic Causes

The colonial policies of East India Company destroyed the traditional economic fabric of Indian society. The peasantry was never really to recover from the disabilities imposed by the new and a highly unpopular revenue settlement. Impoverished by heavy taxation, the peasants resorted to loans from money lenders/ traders at usurious rates, the latter often evicting the former on non-payment of debt dues. These moneylenders and traders emerged as the new landlords, while the scourge of indebtedness has continued to plague Indian society to this day.

British rule also meant misery to the artisans and handcraftsmen. The annexation of Indian states by the company cut off their major source of patronage. Added to this, British policy of discouraged Indian handicrafts and promoted British goods. The highly skilled Indian craftsmen were forced to look for alternative sources of employment that hardly existed, as the destruction of Indian handicrafts was not accompanied by the development of modern Industries. Karl Marx remarked in 1853:"It was the British intruder who broke up the Indian handloom and destroyed the spinning Wheel England began with depriving the Indian cottons from the European market; it then introduced twist into Hindustan and in the end inundated the very mother country of cotton with cottons"

Zamindars, the traditional landed aristocracy, often saw their land rights forfeited with frequent use of a quo warranto by the administration. This resulted in a loss of status for them in the villages. In Awadh, the storm centre of the revolt, 21000 taluqdars had their estates confiscated and suddenly found themselves without a source of income, "**unable to work, ashamed to beg, condemned to penury**". These dispossessed taluqdars seized the opportunity presented by the sepoy revolt to oppose the British and regain what they had lost.

d land, ~~the operation~~ of Indian industry increased the pressure on development in which resulted in pauperization of the country in general.

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Political Causes

The east India company's greedy policy of aggrandizement accompanied by broken pledges and oaths resulted in loss of political prestige for it, on the one hand, and caused suspicion in the minds of almost all ruling princes in India, on the other, through such policies as of 'Effective Control', 'Subsidiary Alliance' and 'Doctrine of Lapse'. The right of succession was denied to Hindu princes. The right of succession was humbled when on Prince Fariquddin's death in 1856, whose succession had been recognized conditionally by Lord Dalhousie, Lord Canning announced that the next prince on succession would have to renounce the regal title and the ancestral Mughal palaces, in addition to renunciations agreed upon by Prince Fariquddin.

The Annexation of Awadh in 1856 was a blow to the prestige of the ruling classes, the local population and the sepoys. Apart from Delhi, Awadh was the second most important centre of the revolt. Multiple causes were present here in their true form. About three-fourth of the Company's sepoys were recruited from Awadh and any change in the agrarian set-up and in the cultural fabric would also be acutely felt by them. Annexation of Awadh in 1856 on the pretext of maladministration became an important cause for many of those who participated. The annexation led to disbanding of the Nawab's army and also affected the entire aristocracy, which in turn severely affected the economy of the region.

Initially, when the British were expanding their hold over India and consolidating their rule, they were careful in showing due deference to Indian Princes and their privileges. But as their confidence grew, there was an attempt by the British to take away the nominal authority of the native Princes and their pensions were greatly reduced. This created unease among the various regional kingdoms. The earlier treaties made with the Indian Princes came to be increasingly disregarded. Policy of 'Doctrine of Lapse' was aggressively followed under Lord Dalhousie and came to be widely resented. By following the Doctrine of Lapse, the adopted sons of the deceased kings were derecognized as heirs to the throne, which subsequently led to the annexation to a large number of Kingdoms. Satara (1848), Nagpur, Sambalpur and Baghat (1850), Udaipur (1852) and Jhansi (1853) to name a few, were annexed by the British.

However, each of these states was brought under the British rule for their strategic, administrative and military value. Annexation of Jhansi was important in order to further improve the Company's internal administration in Bundelkhand. **Satara** was geographically placed between two principal military stations in the Bombay Presidency; and lay along the main lines of communication between Bombay and Madras. **Nagpur** was "placed right across the main lines of communication between Bombay and Calcutta". Aside from administrative expediency, Lord Dalhousie had a firm belief that if placed under the direct administration of the Company's Government, people would enjoy disgruntled and deposed Princes or guardians of some of these annexed states became leaders of the revolt in their regions.

Annexation of the Princely or Native States, which were previously left largely undisturbed, added to the growing apprehension amongst the Princes regarding the future of their sovereignty. The forfeiture or reduction of the princely pensions also affected them and their dependents.

The collapse of rulers- the erstwhile aristocracy- also adversely affected those sections of the Indian society which derived their sustenance from cultural and religious pursuits.

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Administrative causes

Rampant corruption in the Company's administration, especially among the police, petty officials and lower law courts, and the absentee sovereignty character of British rule imparted a foreign and alien look to it in the eyes of Indians

Socio- Religious Causes

Racial overtones and a superiority complex characterized the British administrative attitude towards the native Indian population. The activities of Christian missionaries who followed the British flag in India were looked upon with suspicion by Indians. The attempts at socio-religious reform such as abolition of sati, support to widow remarriage and women's education were seen by a large section of population as interference in the social and religious domains of Indian society by outsiders. These fears were further compounded by the Government's decision to tax mosque and temple lands and legislative measures, such as the **Religious Disabilities Act, 1856**, which modified Hindu Customs, for instance declaring that a change of religion did not debar a son from inheriting the property of his heathen father.

Influence of outside Events

The revolt of 1857 coincided with certain outside events in which the British suffered serious losses- the first Afghan War (1838-42), Punjab War (1845-49), Crimean Wars (1854-56), Santhal rebellion (1855-57). These had obvious psychological repercussions.

Discontent among Sepoys

The conditions of service in the Company's Army and cantonments increasingly came into conflict with the religious belief and prejudices of the sepoys. Restrictions on wearing caste and sectarian marks and secret rumors of proselytizing activities of chaplains (often maintained on company's expenses) were interpreted by Indian sepoys, who were generally conservative by nature as interference in their religious affairs.

To the religious Hindu of the time, crossing the seas meant loss of caste. In 1856 Lord Canning's Government passed the **General Service Enlistment Act** which decreed that all future recruits to the Bengal Army would have to give an undertaking to serve anywhere their services might be required by the Government. This caused resentment.

Then Indian Sepoy was equally unhappy with his emoluments compared to his British counterpart. A more immediate cause of the sepoys' dissatisfaction was the order that they would not be given the Foreign Service allowance (bhatta) when serving in Sind or in Punjab. The annexation of Awadh, home of many of the sepoys, further inflamed their feelings.

The Indian sepoy was made to feel a subordinate at every step and was discriminated against limited to matters military; it reflected the general disenchantment with and opposition to British rule. The sepoy, in fact, was a '**peasant in uniform**' whose consciousness was not divorced from that of the rural population. The Army voiced grievances other than its own; and the movement spread beyond the Army.

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Finally, there had been a long history of revolts in the British Indian Army- in Bengal (1764), Vellore (1806), Barrackpore (1825) and during the Afghan Wars (1838-42) to mention just a few.

9. Main Events of Revolts

The immediate trigger for the start of the uprising was apparently trivial. The 'Brown Bess' smooth bore muskets of the military were replaced by the new Enfield rifles because of the light weight and having already proven its efficacy in the Crimean war. To load the rifle the soldiers had to extract from a pouch a cartridge which had a patch greased reportedly with pork fat. The patch had to be opened by using teeth. The Muslim soldiery showed reluctance for this drill because of their religious considerations and many non-Muslim troops also joined out of solidarity with their Muslim brethren. To the British commanding officers this was an act of gross indiscipline. The soldiers' stubborn refusal was first noticed in the 19th Native Infantry in Behrampur. The entire regiment was disbanded and the soldiers marched towards their homes in Awadh. This was followed by shooting of Sergeant Major by Mangal Pandey and wounding two British officers on 29 March 1857. He was subsequently caught and hanged. His regiment the 34 Native Infantry was disbanded and the soldiers too started marching towards their homes. Matters precipitated when on 23 April 1857, 80 soldiers of the 3 Light Cavalry who refused to use the cartridges were ordered to be court martialled. The court sentenced every single one of them to 10 years imprisonment but they were all got released from the quarter guard by their comrades who after killing and wounding their British superiors started a free for all march. They reached Delhi on 11 May 1857 where Bahadurshah Zafar was proclaimed the Emperor of India. Soon after Rani Laxmibai of Jhansi, Tantya Tope, the Begum of Awadh and Thakur Kanwar Singh of Arrah joined the uprising.

Initial success of the rebels can be attributed to the absence of British forces in significant numbers from the scene of action as bulk of them were still deployed in the Punjab in the aftermath of the Afghan wars. They were however quick to redeploy and within less than a month supremacy of the British Arms was restored. The Rani of Jhansi was killed. Bahadurshah Zafar was tried and exiled to Rangoon where he breathed his last. The Begum of Awadh and some Maratha leaders escaped to Nepal and the first war of India's independence from the British colonial masters came to an end.

10. Prominent leaders of the Revolts

At Delhi the nominal and symbolic leadership belonged to the **Mughal emperor, Bahadur Shah**, but the real command lay with a court of soldiers headed by **General Bakht Khan** who had led the revolt of Bareilly troops and brought them to Delhi. The court consisted of ten members, six from the army and four from the civilian departments. The court conducted the affairs of the state in the name of the emperor. Emperor Bahadur Shah was perhaps the weakest link in the chain of leadership of the revolt. His weak personality, old age and lack of leadership qualities created political weakness at the nerve centre of the revolt and did incalculable damage to it.

last Peshwa ~~Atakbari~~ the natural choice was Nana Saheb,

He was refused the family title and, banished from Poona, was living near Kanpur. Nana Saheb expelled the English from Kanpur, proclaimed himself the Peshwa, acknowledged Bahadur Shah as the emperor of India and declared himself to be his governor. Sir Hugh Wheeler, commanding the station, surrendered on June 27, 1857.

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Begum Hazrat Mahal took over the reins at Lucknow where the rebellion broke out on June 4, 1857 and popular sympathy was overwhelmingly in favour of the deposed Nawab. Her son, **Birjis Qadir**, was proclaimed the Nawab and a regular administration was organized with important offices shared equally by Muslims and Hindus. Henry Lawrence, the British resident, the European inhabitants and a few hundred loyal sepoys took shelter in the residency. The residency was besieged by the Indian rebels and Sir Henry was killed during the siege. The command of the besieged garrison devolved on Brigadier Ingles who held out against heavy odds. The early attempts of Sir Henry Havelock and Sir James Outram to recover Lucknow met with no success. Finally, Sir Colin Campbell, the new commander-in-chief, evacuated the Europeans with the help of Gorkha regiments. In March 1858, the city was finally recovered by the British, but guerilla activity continued till September of the same year.

At Bareilly, Khan Bahadur, a descendant of the former ruler of Rohilkhand, was placed in command. Not enthusiastic about the pension being granted by the British, he organized an army of 40,000 soldiers and offered stiff resistance to the British.

In Bihar, the revolt was led by Kunwar Singh, the zamindar of Jagdishpur. An old man in his seventies, he nursed a grudge against the British who had deprived him of his estates. He unhesitatingly joined the sepoys when they reached Arrah from Dinapore.

Maulvi Ahmadullah of Faizabad was another outstanding leader of the revolt. He was a native of Madras and had moved to Faizabad in the north where he fought a stiff battle against the British troops. He emerged as one of the revolt's acknowledged leaders once it broke out in Awadh in May 1857.

The most outstanding leader of the revolt was Rani Laxmibai, who assumed the leadership of the sepoys at Jhansi. Lord Dalhousie, the governor-general, had refused to allow her adopted son to succeed to the throne after her husband Raja Gangadhar Rao died, and had annexed the state by the application of the infamous 'Doctrine of Lapse'. Driven out of Jhansi by British forces, she gave the battle cry- "main apni Jhansi nahin doongi" (I shall not give away my Jhansi). She was joined by **Tantya Tope**, a close associate of Nana Saheb, after the loss of Kanpur. Rani of Jhansi and Tantya Tope marched towards Gwalior where they were hailed by the Indian Soldiers. The Scindia, the local ruler, however decided to side with the English and took shelter at Agra. Nana Saheb was proclaimed the Peshwa and plans were chalked out for a march into the south. Gwalior was recaptured by the English in June 1858.

For more than a year the rebels carried on their struggle against heavy odds.

11. Suppression of the Revolt

Towards the middle of 1857, the English started regaining the lost control. Under the Governor-General Lord Canning, who gained the sobriquet of "Clemency Canning" on account of his voice of reason against the demands for brutal retributions by his own countrymen on the rebels, troops from Calcutta, the Punjab and Madras were galvanized. By July of 1858, the Revolt was declared to be officially over. On July 16, 1857, Bithur and Kanpur were wrestled away from Nana Sahib, who, it is claimed, escaped to Nepal. Tantya Tope, his prime minister, threw his forces behind Rani Laxmibai.

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Sir Archdale Wilson, Nicholson and Sir John Lawrence were the Military officers who freed Delhi from rebels. The Kashmiri Gate in Delhi was blown up in September; the city and the Red Fort were captured after desperate fighting. The city was sacked by the British Soldiers and the people were massacred mercilessly.

Delhi was captured on September 20, 1857, after prolonged and bitter fighting, with Bahadur Shah II surrendering. He was found guilty by trial and exiled with his favorite Queen Zinnat Mahal and her sons in Rangoon. He died on November 7, 1862. Three of his younger sons were shot dead publicly on September 2, 1857 at Khooni Darwaza, Delhi. In retribution, the British forces almost depopulated Delhi. The siege of Delhi lasted from July 1, 1857 to September 20, 1857.

Thus the great House of Mughals was finally and completely extinguished. In Awadh, Lucknow was captured in March 1858, with Begum Hazrat Mahal escaping to Nepal and Maulvi Ahmadullah killed in an encounter in June 1858. The struggle was carried forward by the distressed taluqdars till late 1858.

Rani Laxmibai of Jhansi is perhaps the most famous personality of the Revolt of 1857. Apart from her bravery in combating the British forces, she is famous for her capture of the Gwalior Fort in May-June, 1858. By capturing Gwalior, she had hoped to break the lines of communication between the British in North India and the Bombay Presidency Province, while simultaneously garnering the support of the Marathas against the British. Alarmed, British Army was dispatched under Commander Sir Hugh Rose to capture Gwalior. Rani met her death on June 17, 1858, during the battle for Gwalior.

The renowned Maratha leader and a close accomplice of Nana Sahib, Tantya Tope managed to escape to the Jungles of central India where he continued to fight the British in guerrilla warfare only to be betrayed by a zamindar friend. He was captured while sleeping and sentenced to death on April 15, 1859. By the end of 1859, all leaders of the revolt were dead with two of them, Begum Hazrat Mahal and Nana Saheb escaping to Nepal.

By the end of 1859, British authority over India was fully re-established. The British Government had to pour immense supplies of men, money and arms into the country, though Indians had to later repay the entire cost through their own suppression.

The revolt was ruthlessly crushed by the British. The British adopted the policy of '**no prisoners**', which meant that the rebels were executed en masse. Large numbers of rebels were simply tied to the mouth of the cannons and blown to bits. Sometimes the entire pro-rebel villages were wiped out. This British retaliation is called '**the Devil's Wind**' and reflects the hostile mood of the time.

12. Reasons of its failure

- The revolt of 1857 failed because it suffered from weak leadership and was hardly organized with any coordination or central leadership. The principal rebel leaders- Nana Sahib, Tantya Tope, Kunwar Singh, and Laxmibai- were no match to their British opponents in generalships. On the other hand, the East India Company was fortunate in having the services of men of exceptional abilities in the Lawrence Brothers, John Nicholson, James Outram, Henry Havelock, Edward etc.

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- The Indian Soldiers were poorly equipped materially, fighting generally with swords and spears and very few guns and muskets. This proved a major handicap when dealing with the well trained and equipped British troops, who were equipped with the latest weapons of war like the Enfield rifle. The electric telegraph kept the Commander-in-Chief informed about the movements and strategy of the rebels.
- The revolt failed to extend to all parts of the country and large sections of the population did not support it. And some section infacts threw their support behind the British acted as "Break waters to storm". Some of the loyalists were the Nizam of Hyderabad, Sikander Begum of Bhopal, Sir Jang Bahadur (Minister of Nepal) and Maharaja Scindhia of Gwalior. There was absence of Support from the intelligentsia, who viewed this revolt as backward looking and mistakenly hoped the British would usher in an era of modernization.
- The different groups of rebels fought for different reasons and served their respective leaders. Each sought restoration of the older order of their leaders. By hailing Bahadur Shah as the Emperor of Hindustan, the rebels sought to revert back to the medieval political order rather than replace it with an alternate political authority. Nana Sahib and Tantya Tope sought to revive the Maratha power while Rani Laxmibai, her own control over the lost territories.
- Punjab didn't rise in revolt because of which the British army deployed in large numbers in the region could be redeployed for tackling the rebels; the Gurkha soldiers sided with the British.

13. Changes Introduced after the suppression of the Revolt

British control was re-established but some major changes in the administrative policies and set-up were introduced.

- After the revolt, the English East India Company's rule came to an end by an Act for Better Government of India, 1858, declaring Queen Victoria as the sovereign of British India. The administration of India was taken over directly by the British Crown.
- The Governor-General of India was given an **additional title**, the **Viceroy** and was a representative of the Crown. By a special Act both, the Board of Directors and the Board of Control were abolished. In their place the office of the Secretary of State for India was created. He was assisted by an Indian Council of 15 members.
- The Indian Army was thoroughly reorganized. It had a higher proportion of Europeans in it and they were to be responsible for manning the artillery and the field.
- The importance of having Native States as allies was realized during the revolt. Had more Native States allied with the rebels then the British suzerainty would have faced a real threat. Henceforth, concrete efforts were made to woo the Native Princes as allies. The policy of ruthless conquest in India was given up. The British realized the mistake of antagonizing the rulers of the Indian states. Under the Proclamation, also known as the

Canning at a Durbar **Magna Carta of the Indian people**

held in Allahabad on November 1, 1858, the earlier treaties of the English East India Company with the Princes were affirmed. The Queen's Proclamation thus sought to pay due regard to the ancient traditions and customs of India. Indian Princes were given to right to adopt. It marked an end to the policy of annexation and establishment of almost feudal like relations between the Crown and the native princes.

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- The Proclamation declared that all Indians would be eligible to enter the **administrative services** on the basis of their education and ability, irrespective of race and creed. Administrative changes were made in the executive, legislative and judicial arenas with greater participation of Indians. This change was visible in the **Indian Councils Act of 1861**, the **Indian High Court Act of 1861** and the **Indian Civil Services Act of 1861**. The beginnings of elective representation of Indians in politics, which created competition amongst the various communities, can be traced back to the post-revolt period.
- Unconditional pardon was granted to the rebels except those who had been responsible for the murder of the British during the revolt.
- The post-revolt period saw the British actively pursuing the policy of "**Divide and Rule**" towards the general populace. Two opposite policies were at work. While on one hand, India was being brought under a unified system of administration and governance, on the other hand, for political necessity, India's diversity was being highlighted in order to depict the claims and needs of different sections as divergent. As late as 1942, Sir Stafford Cripps claimed "in the great subcontinent of India there are more than one people..." This claim of diversity was later countered by the efforts of the nationalists to affirm the uniformity of Indians, which in turn often led to papering over of the divergent demands of the different communities, regions and sections.
- The British believed that the Revolt of 1857 was instigated primarily by the Muslims when the sepoys hailed the Mughal Emperor, Bahadur Shah II as the Emperor of Hindustan. Moreover, the English were the direct successors of the Mughal rule, which lent credence to the belief of the Muslim instigated revolt. Consequently, the British adopted a conservative attitude towards the Muslims for almost a decade after the revolt. It was only under the Governor-Generalship of Lord Mayo and with the publication of Sir William Hunter's book, "The Indian Musalmans", in 1871 which addressed the grievance of the Muslims of Bengal and their backward status in comparison to the Hindus, that the British Government undertook some measures to alleviate the conditions of Muslims. The book presented the loss of Muslims as the gain of the Hindus. Later this work and belief led to the growth of Muslim separatism and widened the fault lines between the two communities.
- In the aftermath of the Revolt, India was made to bear the entire financial burden of the outbreak and suppression of the revolt. The public debt of India increased approximately by 98 million sterling, which in turn added 2million sterling to the annual interest charges.

14. Significance of the Revolt

The significance of the Revolt of 1857 lies in the fact that it voiced, through violently, the grievances of various classes of people. The British were made to realize that all was not under control in British India.

- Modern Nationalism was unknown in India yet the revolt of 1857 played an important role in **bringing the Indian people together and imparting to them the consciousness of belonging to one country**. It had seeds of nationalism and anti-imperialism but the concept of common nationality and nationhood was not inherent to the revolt of 1857. One may say that the revolt of 1857 was the first great struggle of Indians to throw off

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British Rule. It established local traditions of resistance to British rule which were to pave the way for the modern national movement.

- **Hindu Muslim Unity Factor-** During the entire revolt, there was complete cooperation between Hindus and Muslims at all levels- people, soldiers, leaders. All rebels acknowledged Bahadur Shah Zafar, a Muslim, as the emperor and the first impulse of the Hindu sepoys at Meerut was to march to Delhi, the Mughal imperial Capital. Rebel and sepoys, both Hindu and Muslims, respected each other's sentiments. Immediate banning of cow slaughter was ordered once the revolt was successful in a particular area. Both Hindus and Muslims were well represented in leadership, for instance Nana Saheb had Azimullah, a Muslim and an expert in political propaganda, as an aide, while Laxmibai had the solid support of Afghan Soldiers.
Thus the events of 1857 demonstrated that the people and politics of India were not basically communal before 1858.
- The Revolt was written about and discussed not only within the confines of India but also in England, France and Germany. Benjamin Disraeli in the House of Commons on 27 July 1857, asked, "Is it a military mutiny, or is it a national revolt?" Karl Marx in the summer of 1857 expressed the same doubt in the pages of New York Daily Tribune: "What he (John Bull) considers a military mutiny", he wrote, "Is in truth a national revolt". According to Marxist historians, the 1857 revolt was "the struggle of the soldier-peasant democratic combine against foreign as well as feudal bondage". Some views such as those of L.E.R. Rees Christians or T. R. Holmes who saw in it a **conflict between civilization and barbarism** were also forwarded.

15. British policies during 1861-1900

Indian Civil Service Act of 1861

During company's time, all post in Presidency was reserved and many more appointments were made than actually planned. These all appointments were regularized and schedule for future was created (Schedule Post). For being a Civil Servant, 7 year service in India was required and appointment was invalid if it was not approved by Secretary of State within 12 months.

Indian High Court Act of 1861

It amalgamated Supreme Court and Sadar Diwani Adalat in Presidency town and British Crown establish High Court of Bombay, Calcutta and Madras by which former Supreme Court, Sadar Nizamut Adalat and Faujdari Adalat were abolished and each High Court was a Supreme Court in its region. Similarly by the High Court Act of 1865, Governor General was empowered to alter the limits of jurisdiction. e.g. by the Act of 1869, Jurisdiction was extended to all Indian Subjects (from native Christian)

Royal Title Act of 1876

Queen Victoria assume the title of "Empress of India"

Indian Council Act of 1861

There was change in composition of Governor General Executive council for legislative

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purposes. Power of legislation was restored to Bombay and Madras which was taken away by Charter Act of 1833. Similarly Governor General was empowered to appoint President of Council in case of his absence from Head Quarter. His decision could be overruled by Crown through Secretary of State. Governor General was having power to issue ordinance in extraordinary circumstances valid for 6 months. There was no distinction between Legislative Power of Centre and Local Council however Governor General Sanction was required in certain cases. Councils were proposing for Bengal, Punjab and North West under Lieutenant Governor and Nominated Member.

Indian Council Act of 1892

Circumstances included Role of Congress resolution in 1885 and 1889 demanding reforms and expansions with increase proportion of elected members. Local Councils were to be setup for Punjab, North West and Awadh. Governor General council was enlarged and was empowered to make regulations and prescribe the manner in which regulation were to be put in effect so Secretary of State believed it was possible for Governor General to make arrangement by which certain person might be presented to him.

There was Official Majority in Council and representative element was introduced as District Board, Municipalities, Universities, and Chamber of Commerce were empowered to return their member to council so for 1st time, representative element were introduced through indirect election. The members could ask questions but no supplementary question could follow. Similarly, member could discuss budget but were not allowed to vote and could ask question on public interest with some restrictions.

Other Major Financial and Administrative Policies

In terms of financial policies and separation of power since 1833, financial power with Governor General Council and Provincial Government were not having any power of taxation. It was Lord Mayo inaugurated financial devolution in India with heads of expenditure i.e. Reserved and Transfer head in 1860. In times of Lord Lytton, it was John Strachey who transferred Heads of expenditure like revenue (land), excise, stamps and General administration to provincial government. It was Lord Rippon who abolished the System of Fixed grant by central government to provinces and assigns certain source of revenue and share from central source to provincial government i.e. Imperial Head, Provincial Head and Divided Head. There was **Royal Commission on Decentralization** in 1907 which had focus upon Distribution of Finances on need based attitude and central government was not to interfere with revenue assignment to provincial government.

In terms of Local Self-government, Presidency Town were having Municipal Government But it was Act X of 1842 that 1st attempt was made in Bengal to have Municipal Government to enable public to have better public health and conveyances. Therefore different Municipal Act were passed and report were submitted by **Royal Army Sanitary Commission(1863)** authorizing process of election to be used for constitution of municipal institution. Similarly in 1881, Government of Rippon passed resolution for sense of responsibility, action and involvement of Public representation on Local Bodies leading to Local Self Government Act of 1882 resulting in formation of local board throughout the country having sufficient fund and in rural areas, these board will replace Local Consultative committee having independent status and non official chairman as far as possible and same was true for urban board and district councils.

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Previous Years Questions

1. 'What began as a fight for religion ended as a war of independence, for there is not the slightest doubt that the 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 viewpoint? (1999/ 15 marks)
2. What administrative changes were introduced in India after 1858? What were the objectives of these changes? (2001/30 marks)
3. What are the salient features of Government of India Acts of 1858? (2007/15 marks)
4. Examine the Policy of Subordinated Union towards Princely states. (2005/ 30 marks)
5. Discuss the character of major Tribal Uprisings in British India in the nineteenth Century. (2003/15 marks) (1994/15 marks)
6. Trace the growth and development of University education till 1919 (1991/15 marks)
7. 'The recruitment of Indians to the Civil Services was the most important question in the last quarter of the nineteenth century.' Explain. (1989/ 15 marks)
8. How did the British illustrate lord Canning's policy in treating the Indian Princes as 'Breakwaters in the storm' (1995/ 10 marks)
9. "Dalhousie's predecessors had acted on the general principles of avoiding annexations, if these could be avoided. Dalhousie acted on the principles of annexation, if lie could do so legitimately. His annexations were both of war and peace." Analyze (2010/ 25 Marks)
10. The economic policies followed by the British led to the transformation of India's economy in to a colonial economy. They disrupted the traditional structure of the Indian economy. Explain how this happened with special reference to agricultural rural employment and development of our industries. (1983/ 35 marks)

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