



# INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

## THE GREAT REVOLT OF 1857 IN INDIAN HISTORY: A REVIEW

PARMOD KUMAR  
JAISHREE

DEPT. OF HISTORY,  
KURUKSHETRA UNIVERSITY  
KURUKSHETRA, HARYANA

DEPT. OF HISTORY  
INDIRA GANDHI UNIVERSITY  
MEERPUR, REWARI, HARYANA

### ABSTRACT

In the history of the world, there is no more remarkable story than that of the making of the British Empire in India. It resulted from a long process that started during the time of the British Empire. The English settlers came to India for trading purposes, but they observed the political and administrative setup of the Indian subcontinent, which was not very impressive in unity and integrity. They followed the Portuguese and the Dutch, who were on the level declining. Between 1757-1857 was not a peaceful and stress-free tenure but full of peasants' uprisings, agrarian riots, and civil rebellions. The year 1857 witnessed armed revolts in the parts of central and northern India, resulting from which effective British rule nearly collapsed. In 1857, a significant revolt came into existence, known as the revolt of 1857.

**KEYWORDS:** British, Empire, Dutch, Impressive, Rebellion, Significant, Witnessed.

### INTRODUCTION

The mutiny that took place on 10th May 1857 in Meerut followed in other parts of India after some time and in the leadership of different nationalists who were against the policies of the British Empire. It began in the lines of the native infantry, spread very speedy to the cavalry, and then to the city. All the people joined the mutiny with sepoys. The sepoys arrived at the Red Fort and gathered under the window of old Mughal emperor Bahadur Shah and told him: "We have come from Meerut after killing all the Englishmen there because they asked us to bite bullets that were coated with the fat of cows and pigs with our teeth." They demanded that the emperor give them his blessings. The emperor had no other option but to comply and join the revolt participants. The 19th Native Infantry at Berahampore, which refused to use the newly introduced Enfield rifle and broke out in mutiny in February 1857, was disbanded in March 1857. Mangal Pande, a young sepoy, fired at the senior officer of his unit. It was the beginning of the mutiny, followed by the sepoys of other military companies. On 24th April, 90 men of the 3rd Native Cavalry refused to accept the greased cartridges, and the British administration dismissed some men, and many others were sentenced to imprisonment. After that event, the incident of 10th May happened in Meerut with the efforts of Mangal Pande, which was the beginning point of the revolt.

### CENTRES AND LEADERS OF THE REVOLT

In Delhi, the sepoys requested the Mughal emperor, **Bahadur Shah Jafar**, to join the movement. **General Bakht Khan** led them at Bareilly. At Kanpur, the adopted son of the last **Peshwa Baji Rao II**, **Nana Saheb**, led the revolt who was against the British admin. Because he was refused to adopt the family title and banished from Kanpur. So, he supported the troops. **Begum Hazrat Mahal** took over the area of Lucknow on 04th June 1857. Her son, **Birjis Qadir**, was declared the nawab, and Muslims and Hindus joined his administration. In Bihar, the revolt was led by **Kunwar Singh**, a zamindar of Jagdishpur. He joined the sepoys when they reached Arrah from Danapur. **Khan Bahadur Khan** joined the mutiny at Bareilly. He was against the British because the pension was not granted to him by the British administration. **Maulvi Ahmadullah** was also an outstanding leader showing his agitation against the British power. He led the mutiny at Faizabad, who fought against the

British troops. He emerged as a famous leader when it broke out in Awadh in May 1857. Another outstanding revolt leader was **Rani Laxmibai**, who led the sepoys at Jhansi. She had not her legal successor, so she wanted to adopt a son to succeed to the throne after the death of her husband, Raja Gangadhar Rao. Lord Dalhousie, the governor-general, had refused to do so and annexed the state of Jhansi with the provision of the infamous Doctrine of Lapse. So, she fought against the British troops with the assistance of **Tantia Tope**, a close relative of Nana Saheb. **Shah Mal** led the movement in Baghpat of Uttar Pradesh. He organized the peasants of 84 villages and requested the people to join the rebellion against the British hegemony. These leaders played an essential role in the freedom of the Indian nation with the joint efforts of peasants and sepoys.

### **CAUSES OF THE ORIGIN OF THE REVOLT**

The revolt happened because of specific economic, political, socio-religious, and administrative reasons. Different Historians have identified the primary causes. Here are all the specific causes given below-

**(A) POLITICAL CAUSES** - The British company implemented its greedy policy on the peasants, introduced the lapse doctrine, and captured Jhansi, Jaitpur, and Sambalpur by the British. The rulers and people of India opposed these. The people challenged the annexation of Oudh, and thousands became unemployed and left their land because of the implementation of rulers of India for its benefit. The British administration introduced too many unlawful policies and applied them to Indian society. Effective Control, Subsidiary Alliance, Doctrine of Lapse, etc., are examples of those illegal policies. During the period of Dalhousie, he the policy as a doctrine of lapse. Regal titles of the nawabs were abolished. So, these were the reasons responsible for the origin of the revolt.

**(B) ECONOMIC CAUSES** - The colonial policies destroyed the traditional economic flow of Indian society. The rule had imposed heavy taxes with high rates, so the peasants faced a financial crisis. The artisans and handicrafts also faced the policies' results because they were ignored by the native rulers and nobles who could not afford to be patrons of the craft workers. The highly skilled artisans were forced to adopt another occupation. The trading class was crippled because of the imposition of high tariff duties on goods in India. So, it affected the Indian industry, increasing the pressure on land products. Land Revenue Systems such as Permanent Settlement, Mahalwari System, etc., were also responsible for the emergence of the revolt. The decline of Indian manufacturers also was an economic reason behind the origin of the revolt of 1857.

**(C) SOCIO-RELIGIOUS CAUSES** - Christian missionaries and priests openly tried to convert Indian people by offering them unique benefits. Abolition of the Sati System, the Widow Remarriage Act, and the promotion of girl education angered the section of Hindus. The British policy of social discrimination resulted in great resentment among Indians. They tried to impose their alleged racial superiority on Indians, which became an impressive point for the rebels. The Religious Disabilities Act, 1856, which was related to the modification of Hindu customs, also gathered people against the colonial rule.

**(D) ADMINISTRATIVE CAUSES** - The Indians disliked the British administration, and the British rule did not want to follow the old Indian administrative system. The judiciary system of colonial rule was very costly, time-consuming, and mechanical. So, it was not accepted by the people of India. Imposition of heavy taxation and excluded the Indians from high services forced Indians to participate in the revolt.

**(E) MILITARY CAUSES** - There was discrimination against the soldiers of Indian society, and they could not achieve the highest rank, the same as a British officer. The pay given to the Indian Subedar was less than the pay of a recruit. There was no promotion for Indian soldiers. The British implemented general Services Act, 1856 was related to the order for all recruits of the Bengal army to be ready for service in India, outside India, and even overseas, and for it, the Indian troops would not be entitled to get extra allowances. Another act introduced was the Religious Disabilities Act, in which it was clear that the Indians would have to make an appointment for crossed the ocean for military purposes. For Indian soldiers, it was not in favor of them according to their religion to cross the ocean. After some time, the use of religious symbols in the military was also abolished, so all the Indian troops rejected the proposal of the British administration. It resulted from the critical reason is the emergence of the revolt.

**(F) IMMEDIATE CAUSES** - General Services Act, 1856 forced the Indian troops to go beyond seas for military purposes, which was not accepted by them. News of the mixing of bone dust in wheat flours angered the Indians, and they completely opposed the colonial rule. The news related to the cartridge of the Enfield rifle was made of beef, and pork fat also encouraged the Indian troops to originate a revolt against the colonial rule.

## SUPPRESSION OF REVOLT

The revolt, which was started in May 1857, was entirely suppressed in the middle of 1858 with the efforts of British army generals who faced Indian troops with determination and a positive attitude in favor of their empire. The British captured Delhi on 20th September 1857. Lord Canning gathered British troops at Calcutta and sent them to free Delhi. Lieutenant Hudson captured and butchered the royal princes, and Bahadur Shah II was taken to prison in Rangoon, where he died in 1862. As Eric Stokes has argued, the rebel sepoys showed a remarkable "centripetal impulse to congregate at Delhi." In Lucknow, the revolt led by Begum Hazrat Mahal was suppressed by British general Henry Lawrence. Sir Colin Campbell suppressed the mutiny in Kanpur, where Nana Saheb led it, and in Bareilly, from where Khan Bahadur Khan was leading the troops. In Jhansi & Gwalior, the mutiny was controlled by General Hugh Rose, where Rani Laxmibai faced the direct challenge of British troops. Colonel O'Neill was sent to Allahabad and Banaras to control the situation where the mutiny was led by Maulvi Liyakat Ali. In Bihar, the issue was solved with the direct interference of William Taylor. So with the efforts of British troops and generals, the mutiny was suppressed in a short time.

## CAUSES OF FAILURE OF REVOLT

(A) Limited participation of people was a part of the revolt. A large part of the nation remained unaffected by it. All classes did not join the rebellion. Big zamindars acted as "break-water to storm". The English helped the educated class, so they could not be in favor of revolt. They helped the British troops to suppress the rebellion. Most Indian rulers refused to join it as the Rulers of Gwalior, the Holker of Indore, the rulers of Patiala, Kashmir, and Sindh and often gave active help to the British.

(B) There was no effective leader to lead the Indian troops. Although Nana Saheb, Rani Laxmibai, and many others were participating in the revolt, they could not perform as a well-mannered leader for the unity and guidance of the troops.

(C) Limited resources became a reason for the revolt's failure. There was a lack of money, men, and armaments. On the other side, the British had much money, men, and arms in India.

(D) There was a lack of unified ideology among Indians, and they had not any forward-looking program. They represented diverse views with different grievances and concepts of current politics.

## NATURE OF THE REVOLT

Different scholars have explained their views about the nature of the revolt and tried to clarify its concept. According to the **British historians**, it was merely a "Sepoy Mutiny which was completely unpatriotic and selfish with no native support and no popular support," said **Sir John Seeley**. On the other side of views, **Dr. K. Datta** explains the revolt as "The military outbreak, which was taken advantage of by certain discontinued princes and landlords whose interests had been affected by the new political order." At the beginning of the twentieth century, **Vinayak Damodar** explained the revolt as a "planned war of national independence." Savarkar, in his book, *The Indian War of Independence, 1857*. He named the revolt the first war of Indian independence. **Dr. S.N. Sen**, in his book, *Eighteen Fifty-Seven*, considers the revolt as a fight that began for religion but ended as a war of independence. According to **Marxist scholars**, "it was the struggle of the soldier-peasant democratic combination against foreign and feudal bondage." **L.E.R. Rees** considered the mutiny a "war of fanatic religionists against Christians." **T.R. Holmes** explained it as "the war between civilization and barbarism. Indian historian **S.B. Chaudhary** observed it as "the first combined attempt of many classes of people to challenge a foreign power. This is a real, if remote, approach to India's freedom movement of a later age." **Ashok Mehta**, in his book 'The Great, Rebellion' expressed that the revolt was national. **Tara Chand** described it as the "War of Nation's independence" in his book, *History of Freedom Movement in India*.

## CONSEQUENCES OF THE REVOLT

The revolt of 1857 is known as the most important event which affected the Indian society and led to far-reaching amendments in the policies of the British government. The main changes came into existence after the suppression of the rebellion-

(A) British Parliament passed an Act on 2nd August 1858 as An Act for the Better Government of India. It declared Queen Victoria the sovereign of British India, and another change was related to the appointment of a Secretary of State for India.

(B) Now, the era of annexations and expansions had ended, and the British were responsible for the dignity and rights of the native princes.

(C) The Indian states were known as the paramountcy of the British Crown and were treated as a single charge.

(D) The people of India were promised freedom of religion without interference from British officials.

(E) Equal and impartial protection under law would be provided to all Indians and promised to respect the old Indian rights, customs, and practices. The power of the Governor-General was increased, and now, the post of Viceroy was introduced in its stead. Lord Canning was appointed as the first Viceroy.

(F) In the military field, the troops of European forces were merged with the Crown troops. The proportion of Europeans to Indians in the army has increased. The army section of Indians was organized on the principle of "divide and rule" based on caste and class to avoid the possibility of reuniting in an anti-British uprising. Indian regiments were made up of a mix of caste and groups based on the policy of divide and rule.

## **CONCLUSION**

The main outcome of the uprising in 1857 was the start of the independence movement, which was initially conducted in opposition to the ruthless colonial dictatorship of the British administration. The uprising of 1857 was also regarded as the beginning of the struggle for independence from the English hegemony. Thus, it is largely inferred that the Indian nation was mostly governed by the strong British government, which was primarily represented by the British-born governor-general. The British East India Company transferred the British possessions in India to the British government through the revolting act of 1857. As a result, the British government in the periphery originally implemented a variety of significant administrative initiatives to primarily expand their territorial legacy. The rebellion of 1857 proved helpful in the history of the Indian nation, which showed up the grievances of the people and sepoys who were the basis of the revolt. It is known as the most momentous event in the history of Modern India. It is clear that the fast-approaching tide of the western civilization caused a great alarm in the minds of the conservative sections and made their combat against the British rule. The revolt was not fully organized but affected Indian society on a large scale. Though the revolt could not achieve its goal, it sowed the seeds of nationalism in the Indian people.

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

1. Bipan Chandra, History of Modern India, Orient Blackswan, 2009
2. Chandra Bipan, India's Struggle for Independence (1857-1947), Penguin, New Delhi,
3. Chaudhuri, S.B., Theories of Indian Mutiny (1857-59), Calcutta, 1965
4. Chattopadhyaya, The Sepoy Munity : 1857, Calcutta
5. Duff. Alexnder; The Indian Rebellion, London, 1858.
6. Holmes, T. Rice, History of the Indian Mutiny, Fifth Edition, London, 1904.
7. Kaye, J.W., History of the Indian Mutiny of 1857-58, London,
8. Mehta, Ashoka, 1857: The Great Rebellion, Bombay, 1946
9. Nanda, S.P., (2003). "History of Modern India (1757-1947)", New Delhi: Dominant Publishers and Distributors.
10. Savarkar, V.D., The Indian War of Independence, 1857, New Delhi, 1970. (First Published in London in 1909)
11. Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, From Plassey to Partition and After: A History of Modern India, Orient Blackswan, 2004
12. Sen, S.N., Eighteen Fifty-Seven, New Delhi, 1957
13. Yadav, K.C., The Revolt of 1857 in Haryana, Delhi, 1977.