

THE REVOLT OF 1857 (PART-2)

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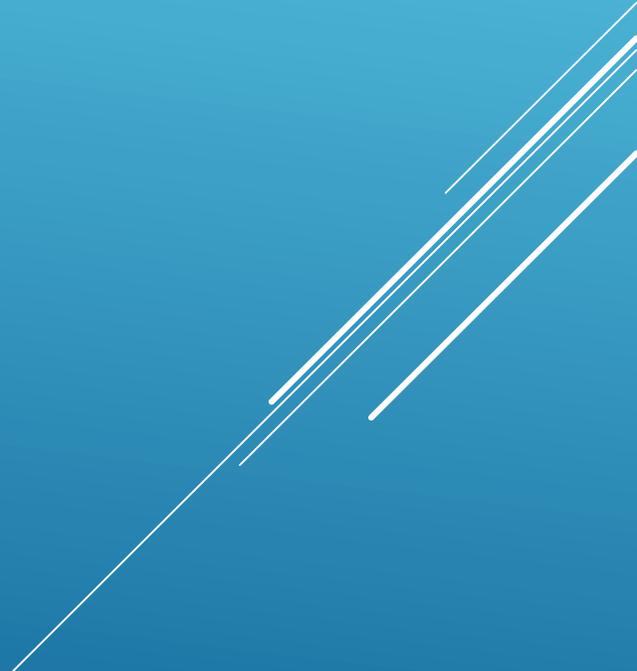
PG DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

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CAUSES

► Annexation of Princely States

The East India Company did not spare even its former allies. The native state of Awadh was annexed by Dalhousie in 1856 on the pretext that Nawab Wajid Ali Shah was mismanaging the state. Even before this he had annexed Satara in 1848 and Nagpur and Jhansi in 1854 on the pretext that the rulers of these states had no natural heir to succeed them after their death. These annexations embittered the rulers of these states, making Rani of Jhansi and Begums of Awadh staunch enemies of the British.



CAUSES

Further the British refusal to pay pension to Nana Sahib, the adopted son of Peshwa Bajji Rao II worsened the situation. The annexation of Awadh was also resented by the sepoys as most of whom came from there. This action hurt their patriotic loyalty and sense of dignity. Moreover, since their relatives had now to pay more taxes on land, it adversely affected the purses of the sepoys themselves.



CAUSES

▶ The Alien Rule

Another important reason of the unpopularity of the British was the alien nature of their rule. They never mixed with the Indian people and treated even the upper class Indians with contempt. They had not come to settle in India but only to take money home. So the Indians could never develop any affinity towards them.

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CAUSES

► Impact on the Sepoys

The revolt of 1857 originated with the mutiny of the Sepoys. These Sepoys were drawn mainly from the peasant population of North and North-West India. As we have seen, the rapacious policies followed by the East India Company were impoverishing and ruining the peasantry. This must have affected the Sepoys also. Infact, most of them had joined the military service in order to supplement their fast declining agricultural income. But as the years passed, they realised that their capacity for doing so declined.

CAUSES

They were paid a monthly salary of 7 to 9 Rupees out of which they had to pay for their food, uniform and transport of their private baggage. The cost of maintaining an Indian Sepoy was only one-third of his British counterpart in India. Moreover, the Indian Sepoy was treated roughly by the British officers. They were frequently abused and humiliated. The Indian Sepoy, despite his valour and great fighting capacity. Could never rise above the rank of a Subedar while a fresh recruit from England was often appointed his superior overnight.



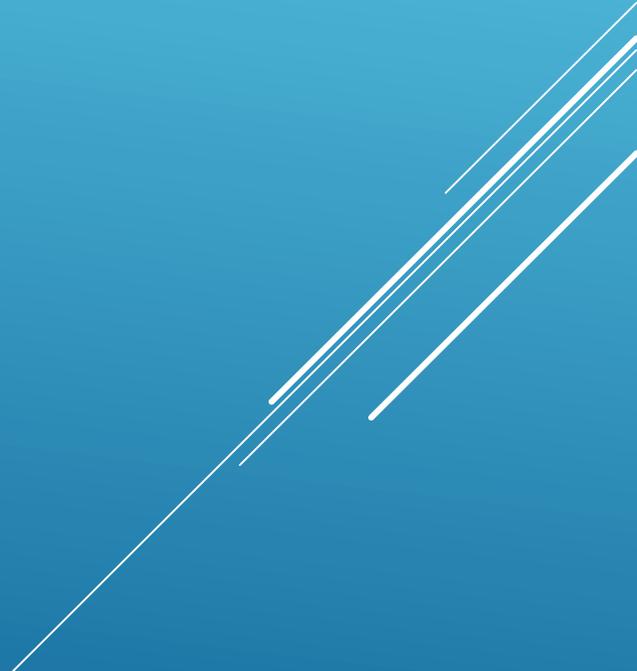
CAUSES

► Threat to Religion

Apart from degrading service conditions, another factor inflamed the feelings of the sepoys. An impression was created among them that their religion was being attacked by the British. This belief was also shared by the general civilian population. The proselytizing zeal of the missionaries and some of the British officials instilled fear in the minds of the people that their religion was in danger. At several places conversions to Christianity were reported to be made. The Government maintained the chaplains at its own cost and in some cases also provided police protection to the missionaries.

CAUSES

Even the army maintained chaplains at state cost and Christian propaganda was carried among the sepoys. Furthermore, the sepoys were forbidden to wear their caste marks, and in 1856 an Act was passed under which every new recruit had to give an undertaking to serve overseas, if required. The conservative beliefs of the sepoys were thus shaken and they sometimes reacted strongly.



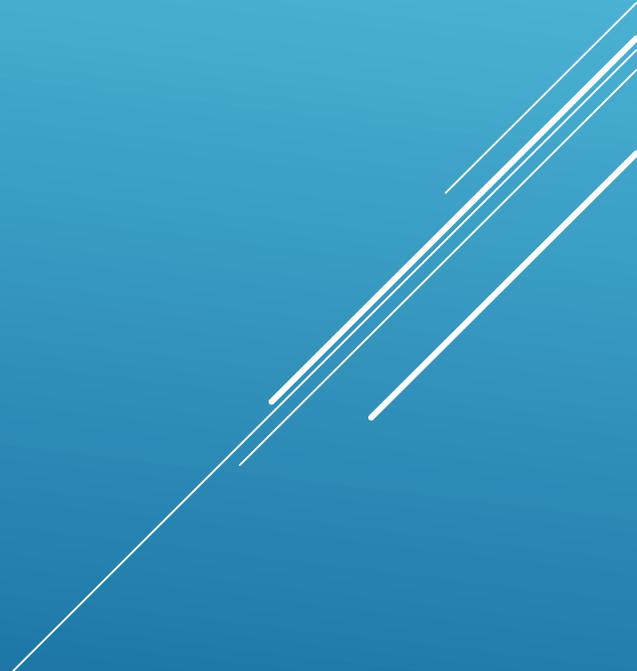
CAUSES

For example in 1824, the 47th Regiment of sepoy at Barrackpore refused to go to Burma by sea-route because their religion forbade them to cross "black water". The British reacted ruthlessly, disbanded the Regiment, and put some of its leaders to death. In 1844, seven battalions revolted on the question of salaries and batta (allowance). Even during the Afghan War from 1839 to 1842 the soldiers were almost on the verge of revolt.



CAUSES

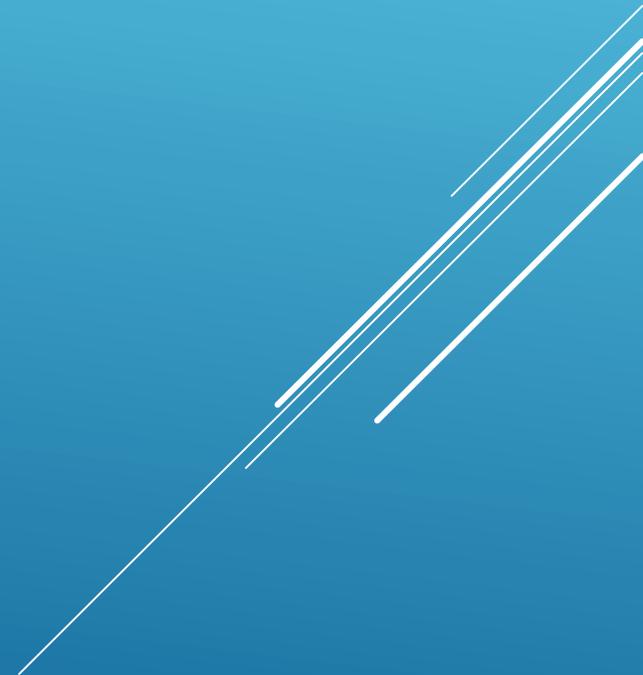
Like sepoys, the people of India had also risen in revolt against the oppressive British rule. The most important of these uprisings were the Kutch rebellion (1816-32), the Kol uprising in 1831 and the Santhal uprising in 1855-56. The main point with regard to the 1857 challenge, however, was that both the military and civilian revolts merged and this made it really formidable.



CAUSES

▶ The Immediate Cause

The atmosphere was so surcharged that even a small issue could lead to revolt. The episode of greased cartridges, however, was a big enough issue to start the rebellion on its own. Dry tinder-box was there and only a spark was needed to set it ablaze.



CAUSES

Cartridges of the new Enfield rifle which had recently been introduced in the army had a greased paper cover whose end had to be bitten off-before the cartridge was loaded into rifle. The grease was in some instances made of beef and pig fat. This completely enraged the Hindu and Muslim sepoy and made them believe that the government was deliberately trying to destroy their religion. It was the immediate cause of the revolt.

