

THE REVOLT OF 1857: IMPACT

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Despite the fact that the revolt of 1857 failed, it gave a severe jolt to the British administration in India. The structure and policies of the re-established British rule were, in many respect, drastically changed.

► Transfer of Power

The first major change was that the power to govern India passed from the East India Company to the British Crown through an Act of 1858. Now a Secretary of State for India aided by a Council was to be responsible for the governance of India. Earlier this authority was wielded by the Directors of the Company.

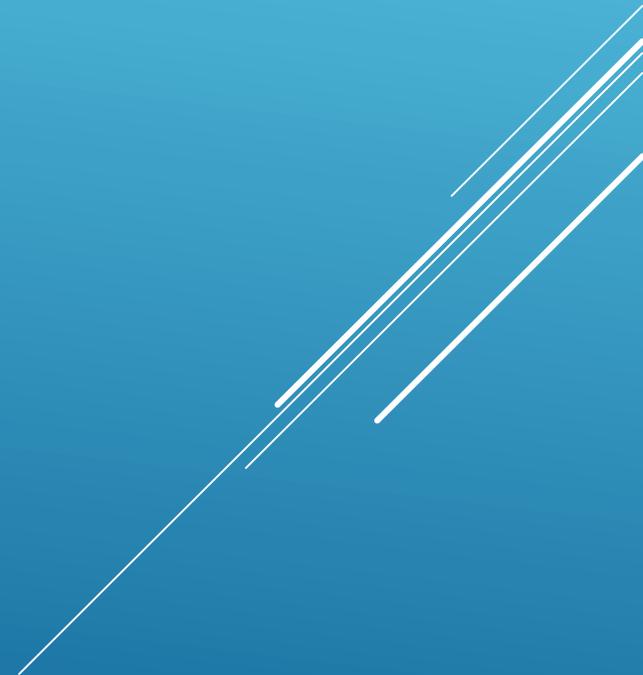
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► Changes in Military Organisation

The second drastic change was effected in the army. Steps were taken to prevent any further revolt by the Indian soldiers. Firstly, the number of European soldiers was increased and fixed at one European to two Indian soldiers in Bengal Army and two to five in Bombay and Madras armies. Moreover, the European troops were kept in key geographical and military positions. The crucial branches of the army like artillery were put

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exclusively in the European hands. Secondly, the organisation of the Indian section of the army was now based on the policy of "divide and rule". Regiments were created on the basis of caste, community and region to prevent the development of any nationalistic feeling among the soldiers.



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► Divide and Rule

This policy of "divide and rule" was also introduced in the civilian population. Since the British thought that the revolt was a conspiracy hatched by the Muslims the latter were severely punished and discriminations made against them in public appointments and in other areas. This policy was later reversed and a belated appeasement of Muslims began. A policy of preferential treatment of the Muslims was adopted towards the end of the 19th century. These policies created problems for Indian freedom struggle, and contributed to the growth of communalism.

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► New Policy towards the Princes

Another important change was in the British policies towards the Princely states. The earlier policy of annexation was now abandoned and the rulers of these states were now authorized to adopt heirs. This was done as a reward to those native rulers who had remained loyal to the British during the revolt. However, this authority of the Indian rulers over particular territories was completely subordinated to the authority of the British and they were converted into a Board of privileged dependents.

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Besides these changes, the British now turned to the most reactionary groups among the Indians, like the zamindars, princes and landlords, for strengthening their fortune in the country. In fact, the revolt of 1857 brought to the surface the real reactionary nature of the British rule in India. It made most of the Indians realise that the British rule in India was essentially anti people and it was bound to be oppressive and hostile to their national interest.

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The events of 1857 are important not only because they represented the crystallisation of popular feelings against the alien rule but also because of the many changes that they produced in the country. These changes pertained not only to the policy formulation and the political structure but also to popular beliefs, ideas, and attitude regarding the nature of British rule. The invincibility of the British rule was shattered once for all and the stage was set for an organised and long drawn out struggle against the alien rule. This led to the beginning of the National Movement which ultimately, ended the foreign rule and brought independence to the country in 1947.

