

Lecture-15



The Revolt of 1857

Mutiny or First War of Independence, widespread but unsuccessful rebellion against British rule in India in 1857–59. Begun in Meerut by Indian troops (sepoys) in the service of the British East India Company, it spread to Delhi, Agra, Kanpur, and Lucknow. In India it is often called the First War of Independence and other similar names.

Background

To regard the rebellion merely as a sepoy mutiny is to underestimate the root causes leading to it. British paramountcy—i.e., the belief in British dominance in Indian political, economic, and cultural life—had been introduced in India about 1820. The British increasingly used a variety of tactics to usurp control of the Hindu princely states that were under what were called subsidiary alliances with the British. Everywhere the old Indian aristocracy was being replaced by British officials. One notable British technique was called the doctrine of lapse, first perpetrated by Lord Dalhousie in the late 1840s. It involved the British prohibiting a Hindu ruler without a natural heir from adopting a successor and, after the ruler died or abdicated, annexing his land. To those problems may be added the growing discontent of the Brahmans, many of whom had been dispossessed of their revenues or had lost lucrative positions.

Another serious concern was the increasing pace of Westernization, by which Hindu society was being affected by the introduction of Western ideas. Missionaries were challenging the religious beliefs of the Hindus. The humanitarian movement led to reforms that went deeper than the political superstructure. During his tenure as governor-general of India (1848–56), Lord Dalhousie made efforts toward emancipating women and had introduced a bill to remove all legal obstacles to the remarriage of Hindu widows. Converts to Christianity were to share with their Hindu relatives in the property of the family estate. There was a widespread belief that the British aimed at breaking down the caste system. The introduction of Western methods of education was a direct challenge to orthodoxy, both Hindu and Muslim.

The mutiny broke out in the Bengal army because it was only in the military sphere that Indians were organized. The pretext for revolt was the introduction of the new Enfield rifle.

To load it, the sepoys had to bite off the ends of lubricated cartridges. A rumour spread among the sepoys that the grease used to lubricate the cartridges was a mixture of pigs' and cows' lard; thus, to have oral contact with it was an insult to both Muslims and Hindus. There is no conclusive evidence that either of these materials was actually used on any of the cartridges in question. However, the perception that the cartridges were tainted added to the larger suspicion that the British were trying to undermine Indian traditional society. For their part, the British did not pay enough attention to the growing level of sepoy discontent.

MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS:

1. What was the role of Tatia Tope in the 1857 mutiny?

- A. He was commander-in-chief of the army of Nana Saheb
- B. He organized Bhils of Panchamaharaj region against the British
- C. Both A and B
- D. Neither A nor B

Ans. C

2. Who was the governor-general during the Revolt of 1857?

- A. Lord Canning
- B. Lord Irwin
- C. Lord Lytton
- D. Lord Wellington

Ans A

3. Who was the prominent leader in Lucknow during the Revolt of 1857?

- A. Begum Hazrat Mahal
- B. Rani Laxmi Bai
- C. Kuar Singh
- D. Bahadur Shah Zafar

Ans. A

4. Sir Hume described whom as 'the best and bravest military leader of the rebel'?

A. Begum Hazrat Mahal

B. Rani Laxmi Bai

C. Kuwar Singh

D. Bahadur Shah Zafar

Ans. B

5. Who is the author of the book "The First Indian War of Independence- 1857-59"?

A. Karl Marx

B. Syed Ahmad Khan

C. R. C. Mazumdar

D. S. N. Sen

Ans. A