



THE REVOLT OF 1857 REASONS OF GENESIS: A STUDY

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ABSTRACT

The Revolt of 1857, also regarded as India's First War of Independence is an extremely important event of Indian history. In this research paper, we have summarized the causes, impact, importance, and outcomes of the revolt. The Revolt of 1857 was a prolonged period of armed uprising as well as rebellions in Northern and Central India against British occupation of that part of the subcontinent. Small precursors of brewing discontent involving incidences of arson in cantonment areas began to manifest themselves in January Later, a large-scale rebellion broke out in May and turned into what may be called a full-fledged war in the affected region. This war brought about the end of the British East India Company's rule in India, and led to the direct rule by the British Government (British Raj) of much of the Indian Subcontinent for the next 90 years. The Indian Mutiny of 1857-59 was a widespread but unsuccessful rebellion against the rule of British East India Company in India which functioned as a sovereign power on behalf of the British crown.

KEYWORDS-*Impoverishment, Ryotwari Settlement, Military Grievances, Subcontinent Patronage, Christian missionaries etc.*

INTRODUCTION

By the first half of the 19th century, the East India Company had brought major portions of India under its control, but still it had two purposes or aims : (i) To sustain its conquests and (ii) To exploit in the trade . To fulfill these aims, there was no limit of company's betrayal and avarice. Before 1857 A.D. many of the native dominations were annexed to the British Empire forcibly. The British Government was sucking the blood of both, the rulers and the people. Everywhere the revolts were taking place against British East India Company's rule. It was very easy to conquer the new territories but it was very difficult to keep those territories under the control of British East India Company. The East India Company's rule from 1757 to 1857 had generated a lot of discontent among the different sections of the Indian people against the British. The end of the Mughal rule gave a psychological blow to the Muslims many of whom had enjoyed position and patronage under the Mughal and other provincial Muslim rulers. The commercial policy of the company brought ruin to the artisans and craftsman, while the divergent land revenue policy adopted by the Company in different regions, especially the permanent settlement in the North and the Ryotwari settlement in the south put the peasants on the road of impoverishment and misery.

The Revolt

- It was the first expression of organised resistance against the British East India Company
- It began as a revolt of the sepoys of the British East India Company's army but eventually secured the participation of the masses.
- The revolt is known by several names: the Sepoy Mutiny (by the British Historians), the Indian Mutiny, the Great Rebellion (by the Indian Historians), the Revolt of

1857, the Indian Insurrection, and the First War of Independence (by Vinayak Damodar Savarkar).

Causes of 1857 Revolt

The issue of greased cartridges and military grievances has been over-emphasized, as the factor for the Revolt of 1857. However, recent researches have proved that the cartridge was not the only cause for this revolt. In fact, multiple causes i.e., social-religious-political- economic worked together to produce the rebellion.

Social and Religious Causes: The British had abandoned its policy of non-interference in the socio-religious life of the Indians. Abolition of Sati (1829), Hindu Widow Remarriage Act (1856). Christian missionaries were allowed to enter India and carry on with their mission of proselytizing. The Religious Disabilities Act of 1850 modified the traditional Hindu law. According to it, the change in religion would not debar a son from inheriting the property of his heathen father.

Economic Causes: British rule led to the breakdown of the village self-sufficiency, commercialization of agriculture which burdened the peasantry, adoption of free trade imperialism from 1800, de-industrialization, and drain of wealth all of which led to the overall decline of the economy.

Military Grievances: The extension of British dominion in India had adversely affected the service condition of the Sepoys. They were required to serve in an area away from their homes without the payment of extra Bhatta. An important cause of Military discontent was the General Service Enlistment Act, 1856, which made it compulsory for the sepoys to cross the seas, whenever required. The Post Office Act of 1854 withdrew the free postage facility for them.



Political Causes: The last major extension of the British Indian territory took place during the time of Dalhousie. Dalhousie announced in 1849, that the successor of Bahadur Shah II would have to leave the Red Fort. The annexation of Baghat and Udaipur was, however, cancelled and they were restored to their ruling houses. When Dalhousie wanted to apply the Doctrine of Lapse to Karauli (Rajputana), he was overruled by the court of Directors.

Causes of Failure

- Some of the local rulers like Scindia of Gwalior, the Holkar of Indore, the Nizam of Hyderabad, the Raja of Jodhpur, the Nawab of Bhopal, the rulers of Patiala, Sindh, and Kashmir, and the Rana of Nepal provided active support to the British.
- The military equipment of the rebels was inferior. Comparative lack of efficient leadership.
- The modern intelligent Indians also didn't support the cause.

Impact of the Revolt

- The revolt was mainly feudal in character carrying with it some nationalist elements.
- The control of Indian administration was passed on to the British Crown by the Government of India Act, 1858.
- The army was carefully reorganized to prevent the recurrence of such an event.
- The Revolt of 1857 was an extremely important event in Indian history. It was merely a product of Sepoy but was accumulated grievances of the people against the Company's administration and of their dislike for the foreign regime.

Outbreak of The Revolt Of 1857: In Barrackpur, On 29th March, the soldiers of 34th Native Infantry refused to use the greased cartridges and a sepoy named Mangal Pandey broke the lines and fired at Lieutenant Baugh. Mangal Pandey was arrested and executed. At Behrampur, which also had disobeyed the authorities were disbanded. The First major outbreak that finally led to the Revolt of 1857 occurred at Meerut. Following the court martial of eighty-five sepoys of the Cavalry Regiment for refusing to use the greased cartridges, on 10th May 1857, the sepoys broke out in open rebellion, shot their officers, released their fellow sepoys and marched towards Delhi. On 12th May, the sepoys captured the city of Delhi and occupied the palace proclaimed Bahadur Shah II as the emperor of India. 23 Within a short period, the revolt spread to Lucknow, Kanpur, Agra, Jhansi, Central India, Bihar, Orissa, and many other places. However, the Indian rulers remained loyal to the British and rendered valuable service in the suppression of the revolt. The British were on the defensive during the early part of the revolt. First of all, they made a sustained effort to recapture Delhi from the sepoys. In September 1857, Delhi was recaptured by the British. Emperor Bahadur Shah II was arrested and exiled to Mandalay, Burma, where he died a few years later. Two of his sons and a grandson were shot dead. Thus, The British ended the Mughal dynasty from the Indian scenario.

The revolt was localised and not country-wide: Though the revolt was Formidable and widespread though the revolt was, it was yet to a great extent localised, limited and illorganised. The Mutiny was not universal. Dr. R.C Mazumdar says: It was never an all India character but was localised, restricted and poorly-organised. The area affected was the Punjab, the United Provinces, Rohilkhand, Oudh, the Territory between the Narbada and the Chambal and the Western parts of Bengal and Bihar on the North-East. Afghanistan was friendly under Dost Mohammad. Sindh was quite, Rajputana was loyal. India South of the river Narbada made no movement of importance, though the native regiments mutinied at Kolhapur in the Southern Marathan country and there were also many dangerous outbursts of feelings at Hyderabad, the Nizam's Capital. Central and Eastern Bengal were undisturbed and Nepal rendered the British valuable assistance in putting down the revolt. Thus, the revolt was only local and not nation-wise.

Superiority of the English in Many Fields: The resources of the British Imperialism were unlimited. Fortunately for them, the Crimean War and other wars in which the Britishers were involved out of India had come to an end by 1856.

- The British army was excessive in number which was brought into India in large numbers from different parts of the world and many more soldiers were recruited in India itself, for the suppression of the Mutiny.
- The British had superior Weapons than the rebels had The British had modern guns and rifles. The Indians had canons which were old and few in numbers. They were mostly fighting with swords and spears.
- The British had superior Navy. At the same time British were also supreme in Naval Power.
- The Electric System, also contributed in the success of the British. Through that system the British Commander-in-chief got all the information regarding the plans of the rebels and he could make suitable arrangements. Due to these supremacies of the British the Indians remained unsuccessful.

Lack of Unity of Purpose and Organization: The Indian rebels were not properly organised or if they were at all organised, their central organisation was very weak. Their was no dearth of bravery and boldness in its leaders, but one thing that was very conspicuous by its absence in them was the absence of experience in organisation and concerted action. It was not possible for them to regain their lost independence by mere small depredations and sudden attacks which are specially noticed in the Gorilla tactics of War. The British government at the centre and the provincial governments made an enquiry concerning the mutiny through commissions and boards but these commissions and boards failed to get any clue which made him enable them to know the origin of any organised conspiracy of mutiny. Rather the case started against Bahadur Shah II, the Mughal emperor on the other hand that the mutiny was a surprise to him as much as it was to the Britishers. In other words there was no organisation amongst the leaders of the rebellion. Then mutineers suffered also from



lack of unity of purpose. The mutiny had broken out all of a sudden and nobody had the idea of that turn it would take; there was no understanding between the Hindus and the Muslims. They were divided in their aims with no common political object. There was no Unity among them and they were unable to combine effectively for the execution of the common plan or the common aim. A close and careful study of the mutiny records reveals a very sad story of everyone for himself and no one for the country. The Mughal emperor the problem the head of the mutiny the Queen's and The Princess and other leaders of the revolt all pulled in their own directions and played a double game to secure their own ends and interests. The sepoys of Avadh fought for the restoration of their own king while Nana Sahib and the queen of Jhansi on the other hand pressed their own claims. A number of smaller adventures not inspired by any patriotic impulses sprang up to take advantage of the opportunity offered by the mutiny for their personal advantage. Khan bahadur khan the grandson of Hafiz Rehmat Khan declared himself as the viceroy or naib Nazim of Rohilkhand. The banjaras of Saharanpur set up a new king of their own. The Gujjars had different Rajas in different areas, Fatuna having proclaimed himself as the king of the Gujjars. One Devi Singh proclaimed himself the king of 14 villages in the Mathura district. Similarly Mahima ji Wadi a decoit and Belsare, a Maratha Brahmin were attracted to the Rebel came to improve their fortunes. It was a reckless aimless revolt and perished as such.

Negative Effects:- Increase in Racial Animosity between the British and the Indians: The mutiny left behind it a sort of racial animosity as its legacy. the British described Indians as untrustworthy. And consequently the Indians were humiliated and insulted. this resulted in the racial animosity between the English and the Indians. It was from this date that the social estrangement between the two races commenced in this country. Consequently there was no love lost between the rulers and the ruled. the English officers during the suppression of the Mutiny perpetrated untold and gruesome oppressions in the Punjab and North India. As a consequence, this policy of terror was to create strong feelings of hatred between the English and the Indians during the post-mutiny India. British considered themselves as an occupying power garrisoning a hostile land. On the other hand Indians tried to seek self-respect and honor within the bounds of their traditional culture. The British had formed a separate community in India. During the Revolt of 1857, stunned and shocked the British saw the obedient sepoys suddenly transformed into a disobedient Hence, the British felt that safety could be found only among their own countrymen. On the other hand, the manner in which the Revolt of 1857 was crushed by the British and the ruthlessness in which the sepoys were treated left a deep sense of hatred among the Indians against the British. The British also massacred thousands of civilian population in the country.

Setback to Social Reforms: The Revolt of 1857 convinced the British the futility of interfering in the traditional socio-religious customs of India. The strong opposition to the social legislation especially coming from the orthodox elements in both the Hindu and the Muslim community put the British on the defensive. The self-

confidence of the British and their plans for the rapid westernization of India through social reforms were shattered. The British, after the Revolt of 1857, decided to concentrate in providing a sound and efficient administration rather than introducing western ideas and reform in a traditional Asian Society.

The Policy of Divide and Rule: After the Revolt of 1857, the British had patronaged and applied the most unscrupulous policy to divide the Indians in different castes and classes. The British used one class or caste against the other. The Muslims were made to fight with the Hindus and the high caste Hindus were excited against the low caste Hindus. Thus, There was a deterioration in the whole country.

Creation of Misunderstanding between Hindus and the Muslims:

The collapse of the Mutiny created a misunderstanding between the Hindus and the Muslims. The Muslims had shown a keener and more widespread sympathy for the rebels. Even in South India where their number was small many conspiracies were formed among them against the British between 1857 and 1859. When the rebellion began, both the Hindus and the Muslims took part in it in large numbers. But the Muslims were more violently disposed towards the British than the Hindus. The British feared more from Muslims than the Hindus. The result was that the hand of repression fell more heavily on the Muslims than on the Hindus. Many of their leading men were hanged or exiled e.g. the Nawab Sahibs of Jhajjar, Balabgarh, Farukh Nagar, and Farukhabad. 24 Shahzadas were hanged at Delhi on 18th November, 1857, in one day alone. Muslim quarters were mostly the target. Muslim property was widely confiscated. This created ill feelings and misunderstanding amongst the Muslims against the Hindus.

Territorial conquest were replaced by Economic Loot:

With the failure of the Great rebellion, the era of British territorial conquest came to an end and the territorial conquests gave place to economic exploitation of the Indians by the Britishers. The British government had no more fear of any kind from feudal India. The English people exploited India economically to a great extent. Now the British government had to face a new challenge from the progressive elements in the Indian society, a challenge which was favorably reacting due to the progressive thoughts of John Stuart Mill and other progressive elements in England.

The Muslim renaissance received a set-back: Another bad effect of the Mutiny was that the Muslim renaissance which had been growing in Delhi before the Mutiny got an irreparable set-back. The cultural blossoms were blighted. According to C.F. Andrews, it's not difficult to trace the fatal havoc to budding spiritual life which one year of Mutiny wrought. Decay immediately overtook the revival of learning in Delhi from which it never recovered.



Calcutta, the centre of Hindu renaissance, escaped the horrors of the Mutiny and was saved.

CONCLUSION

The revolt of 1857 was an unprecedented event in the history of British rule in India. It united, though in a limited way, many sections of Indian society for a common cause. Though the revolt failed to achieve the desired goal, it sowed the seeds of Indian nationalism. After the analysis of the Revolt of 1857 it came to know that historians have expressed different views depending on their perceptions. Mostly they fall into two categories namely Europeans and the Indians. The former group of historians tried to paint the Revolt as the sepoy mutiny means due to their grievances, the sepoys came together and revolted against the British. But this view is not correct. Some of the Indian nationalist historians have tried to point the Revolt as the first War of Indian Independence. The other English historians have characterized it as the Hindu, Muslim conspiracy to overthrow the British rule out of India. In his 39 discovery of India, Jawaharlal Nehru maintains that the Revolt of 1857 was more than a sepoy mutiny. Although, initially it started as a mutiny of the Indian soldiers, but when it spread rapidly assumed the nature of a mass rebellion. He further maintains that the Revolt of 1857 was essentially a feudal uprising although there were some nationalistic elements in it. Some of the moderate historians like Dr. R.C. Majumdar and Dr. S.N. Sen also expressed the similar view. They further say that it was a wholly national war of independence, means it was some where between the two views. Although the Revolt of 1857 was suppressed completely, it had been created great shock waves in the heart of people and the British Crown in England. The British, therefore, examined the whole administration of India and brought about several changes in it. Among them the First was the transfer of power from the East India Company to the British Crown. Then followed the abolition of the Mughal dynasty of Delhi, reconstruction of the army, guaranteeing freedom of religion and equal treatment to Indians, association of Indians in the British administration of the country and introduction of several reforms. The British Government tried to do this through the Queen's Proclamation of 1858, The Revolt of 1857 brought about some positive and negative changes. Among the negative effects were the increase of racial animosity, introduction of the divide and rule policy and increase in the systematic economic loot of India. Even then it started the new era in the history of India and the British Imperialism.

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