

UPSC Civil Services Examination

UPSC Notes [GS-I]

Topic: Revolt of 1857 - First War of Independence Against British

[Modern Indian History Notes for UPSC]

The revolt of 1857 was the conscious beginning of the Independence struggle against the Britishers. There are various names for the revolt of 1857 – India's First War of Independence, Mutiny of Sepoy, etc.

The revolt began on May 10, 1857, at Meerut as sepoy mutiny. It was initiated by sepoys in the Bengal Presidency against the British officers.

This war of Independence marked the end of rule by the British East India Company. Post this, India was directly ruled by the British government through representatives called as Governor-General.

This article provides all relevant information related to the Revolt of 1857 and its causes and effects. This is an important topic for the [Civil Services Exam](#) and other government exams.

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Immediate Reason of Revolt of 1857

The immediate factor was the introduction of the 'Enfield' rifle. The cartridge had to be bitten off before loading it into the gun. Muslims had a belief that the cartridge was greased with pig fat where Hindus believed the grease was made from cow fat. Thus the Hindu and Muslim soldiers were reluctant to use the 'Enfield' rifle. This was a flashpoint to enrage the soldiers against the Britishers. This was believed to be the [immediate factor for the revolt of 1857](#).

Causes of Revolt of 1857

The revolt of 1857 was initiated due to various factors which are stated below:

- Religious & Social Causes – racism or racial discrimination was believed to be a major reason for the revolt of 1857 wherein Indians were exploited and were kept away from mixing with Europeans. The whites also started interfering in the religious and cultural affairs of Indians and tortured them as well. This enraged Indians and led to the revolt of 1857.

To know more about the [Social causes for revolt of 1857](#), refer to the linked article.

- Political Causes – The British expansion had unjust policies that led to the loss of power from the Nawabs and Zamindars residing at various places of India. The introduction of unfair policies like the policy of Trade and Commerce, the policy of indirect subordination ([subsidiary alliance](#)), the policy of war and annexation, policy of direct subordination ([doctrine of lapse](#)), policy of misgovernance (in which Awadh was annexed) greatly hampered the interests of the rulers of the native states, and

they one by one became victims of British expansionism. Therefore, those rulers, who lost their states to the British, were naturally against the British and took sides against them during the revolt.

- Economic Factors - There were various reforms in the taxation and revenue system that affected the peasants' heavily. British Government had imposed and introduced various administrative policies to expand their territory.

The major policies are listed below:

- [Permanent Settlement in Bengal](#)
- [Mahalwari settlement in Central India & Ryotwari settlement in southern India](#)

To more about such important [land revenue systems](#), check the linked article.

These three settlements were highly exploitative, and in particular, the Permanent settlement had created a devastating impact. Thus the peasants were greatly encouraged to overthrow the British Government from India and led to their active participation in the revolt of 1857.

Military Factors – The Indian soldiers went through a lot of torture by the British officials with respect to their salaries, pensions, promotions. Indians were subjugated in the military while their European counterparts faced no such discrimination. This arose discontent and was a major military factor that resulted in the revolt of 1857.

To know more about [military factors](#) in detail, refer to the linked article.

Vellore Mutiny

The [Vellore Mutiny](#) took place even before the revolt of 1857(50 years before). It erupted on 10th July 1806 in Vellore, present-day Tamil Nadu, and lasted only for a day, but it was brutal and it was the first major mutiny by the Indian sepoys in the East India Company.

Impact of Revolt of 1857

The revolt of 1857 shook the foundation of British East India Company and disclosed their inefficiency in handling the Indian administration. The major impact was the introduction of Government of India act which abolished the rule of British East India Company and marked the beginning of British raj that bestowed powers in the hands of the British government to rule India directly through representatives.

To know more about the major [Impact of the revolt of 1857](#), refer to the linked article.

Causes of Failure of the revolt of 1857

The revolt was eventually not successful in ousting the British from the country because of several factors.

1. The sepoys lacked one clear leader; there were several. They also did not have a coherent plan by which the foreigners would be routed.
2. Indian rulers who aided the revolt did not envision any plan for the country after the British were defeated.

- Majorly northern India was affected by this revolt. The three presidencies of Bengal, Bombay and Madras remained mostly unaffected. The Sikh soldiers also did not take part in the rebellion.

List of Important Leaders associated with the revolt of 1857

Place	Revolt of 1857 -Important Leaders
Delhi	Bahadur Shah II, General Bakht Khan
Lucknow	Begum Hazrat Mahal, Birjis Qadir, Ahmadullah
Kanpur	Nana Sahib, Rao Sahib, Tantia Tope, Azimullah Khan
Jhansi	Rani Laxmibai
Bihar	Kunwar Singh, Amar Singh
Rajasthan	Jaidayal Singh and Hardayal Singh
Farrukhabad	Tufzal Hasan Khan
Assam	Kandapareswar Singh, Maniram Dutta Baruah
Orissa	Surendra Shahi, Ujjwal Shahi

Frequently Asked Questions – Revolt of 1857

Who coined the name Sepoy Mutiny?

In India, the term First War of Independence was first popularized by Vinayak Damodar Savarkar in his 1909 book The History of the War of Indian Independence.

What was the immediate reason for the revolt of 1857?

The immediate factor was the introduction of the 'Enfield' rifle. It was said that the cartridge of this rifle was wrapped in the fat of cow and pig. The cartridge had to be bitten off before loading it into the gun. Thus the Hindu and Muslim soldiers were reluctant to use the 'Enfield' rifle.

What are the causes of revolt 1857?

There are many reasons that led to the revolt of 1857. Major reasons for the revolt can be broadly classified into – Political, Social, Economic, Religious, Military, etc. The causes have been discussed in this article under respective sections.

