

Significance of the Boston Tea Party for UPSC Exam

The American Revolution is an important topic in world history for the UPSC mains exam. In this article, we talk about the Boston Tea Party for the IAS exam.

The Boston Tea Party was one of the most important events in History, as it paved the way for the American revolutionary war to break out, which eventually resulted in freedom from British rule. This article will highlight the details of the events.

Background of the Boston Tea Party

The Boston Tea Party was merely the explosion following a long trail of the proverbial powder keg(s). The powder kegs in question were two contentious issues that had irked the British Empire

1. The poor finances of the British East India Company (Formed on 31st December 1600)
2. The dispute of the British Parliament over the American Colonies or even the very existence of that said authority

Another reason was the heavy taxation imposed on the colonies by the parliament without the proportionate representation usually practised in other British colonies. It was only aggravated post the conclusion of the French-Indian Wars where the taxes were raised for the upkeep of British troops in the colonies.

The reason why tea, in particular, was targeted during the events of the Boston Tea Party is that the British government sought to monopolise its hold on the international tea trade by eliminating its competition by introducing acts such as an act in 1721 that required colonists to import their tea only from Great Britain. The East India Company did not export tea to the colonies; by law, the company was required to sell its tea wholesale at auctions in England. British firms bought this tea and exported it to the colonies, where they resold it to merchants in Boston, New York, Philadelphia, and Charleston.

Events of the Boston Tea Party

Since the British government had levied taxes on tea, the colonists relied on purchasing smuggled tea, in order to avoid the heavy taxes. The British government realized this and passed the Tea Act, which they thought could stem the rise of consumption of smuggled tea. The Tea Act gave the East India Company a monopoly on the sale of tea and made it cost about half of what the colonists were spending on smuggled tea.

Thus, the colonists now had a cheaper alternative than purchasing smuggled tea. It must be noted that the colonists loved tea, and that tea was a symbol of status, comfort and prestige. At Boston harbour, Samuel Adams, the founder of the Sons of Liberty organisation and his followers disguised themselves as Mohawk Indians, boarded three ships in the Boston harbour and dumped 342 chests of tea overboard. So, why was it that tea that was cheaper was thrown overboard? Well, the American colonists wanted to send a message to the British Parliament. They wanted to give vent to their demands such as, "No taxation without representation". Samuel Adams defending these actions stated that the Tea Party was "not the act of a lawless mob, but a principled protest and the only remaining option the people had to defend their Constitutional rights."

This single act spread throughout the colonies and demonstrated how far the Americans were willing to go to speak out for their freedom. The Boston Tea party served as a catalyst for the revolutionary war to break out in the following years that eventually translated into American independence from British rule.

Legacy of the Boston Tea Party

Many other Americans considered tea drinking to be unpatriotic following the Boston Tea Party. Tea drinking declined during and after the Revolution, resulting in a shift to coffee as the preferred hot drink.

The issue was never the tax but how the tax was passed without American input; the United States Congress taxed tea from 1789 to 1872.

The Boston Tea Party has often been referenced in other political protests. When Mahatma Gandhi led a mass burning of Indian registration cards in South Africa in 1908, a British newspaper compared the event to the Boston Tea Party. When Gandhi met with the British viceroy in 1930 after the Salt Satyagraha campaign, Gandhi took some duty-free salt from his shawl and said, with a smile, that the salt was "to remind us of the famous Boston Tea Party."