

## Fist War of Independence Study Materials

#### FIRST WAR OF INDEPENDENCE

The uprising, which seriously threatened British rule in India, has been called by many names by historians, including the Sepoy Rebellion, the Great Mutiny and the Revolt of 1857; however, many prefer call itIndia's first war of independence. Undoubtedly, it was the culmination of mourning Indian resentment toward, British economic and social policies over many decades. Until the rebellion the British had succeeded in suppressing numerous and 'tribal' wars or in accommodating them through concessions till the Great Mutiny in the summer of 1857 during the wiceroyalty of Lord Canning.

# Important Leaders Connected with the Revolt

The heroine of this war of independence was Rani Lakshmi Bai of Jhansi who died on 17 June 1858, while fighting the British forces. Other notable leaders were Ahmadullah of Awadh, Nana Sahob of Konpur and his loyol commander Tantia Tope, Rao Singh. Azimullah Khan, Kunwar Singh Jagdishpur, Firuz Shah, Maulwi Ahmed Shah of Firozabad; the Begum of Awadh (Hazrat Mahal), Khan Bahadur Khan of Bareilly and Maulawi Ahmadullah of Faizabad. The nominal leader of the revolt, Bahadur Shah II, and General Bakht Khan, who led the revali of sepoys at Delhi have their own places in the history of 1857 revolt. Supporters of the English in the revolt were, the Mumbai and Chennai armies that remained loyal to them; the Rojas of Patiala, Jind, Gwalior, Hyderabad and Nepal helped them to suppress the revolt.

#### The Beginning of the Revolt

On 29 March 1857,-anIndian sepoy of the 34 Regiment, Mangal Pandey, killed' two British officers on parade at Barrackpore. The Indian soldiers present then refused to obey orders and arrest Mangal Pandey. However, he was arrested later on, tried and hanged. The news spread like wildfire to all cantonments in the country and very soon a countrywide sepoy revolt broke out in Lucknow, Ambala, Berhampur and Meerut.

On 10 May 1857, soldiers at Meerut refused to touch the new Enfield rifle cartridges. The soldiers, along with other civilians, went on a rampage shouting maro firangi ko. They broke open jails, murdered European men and women, burnt their houses and marched to Delhi. Next morning, in Delhi the soldiers signalled the local soldiers by marching, who in turn revolted, seized the city and proclaimed the 80-year-old Bahadur Shah Zafar, as the Emperor of India.

Popular Movements And Revolts Upto	
<u>1857</u>	
Year	Movement/Mutiny
1764	Mutiny of sepoys in Bengal
1766	Chuar and Ro rising in Chhotanogpur and
	Singbhum regions where the Chaur.He and
	Munda tribes revolted till 1772 due to
	famine, enhanced demands and economic
	privation
1770	Sanyasi Revolt
1806	Vellore Mutiny
1817	Bhil movement in the Western Ghats
1822	Romosi rising under the leadership of
	Chittar Singh
1824	Mutiny of sepoys of the 47th Regiment at
	Barrackpore
1828	Ahams Davalt against the company for non
1020	Ahams Revolt against the company for non- fulfilment of pledges after the Burmese War
	1829. First Koli rising against dismantling
	of forts of independent Koli tribes
1831	Kol rising of Chhotanagpur against the
1031	transfer of land from heads of Kol tribesmen
	to outsiders
1833	Khasi Rising in the hilly region of Jaintia
	and Garohills. The revolt was lead by Tirath
	Singh, the ruler of Nunklow and resented by
	Khasis in the region
1838	FARAIZI Movement under the leadership of
	Titu Mirit later merged into the Wahabi
	Movement
1839	Second Koli rising
1844	Third Koli rising
1844	Surat Salt Agitation against raised salt duty
1844	Mutiny of the 34th Native Infantry
1844	Kolhapur and Savantvadi Revolts
1849	Mutiny of the 22nd Native Infantry
1850	Mutiny of the 66th Native Infantry
1852	Mutiny of the 37th Native Infantry
1855	Santhal rebellion in the Rajmahal hills
1057	region of Bihar
1857	Revolt of sepoys of 3rd Cavalry at Meerut
	and later mutinies in Punjab, Mathura,
	Lucknow, Bareilly, Shahjahanpur, Kanpur,
	Banaras, Jhansi, Allahabad and many other

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#### places in North India

Within a month of the capture of Delhi, the revolt spread to different parts of the country: Kanpur, Lucknow, Banaras, Allahabad, Bareilly, Jagdishpur and Jhansi. In the absence of any leader from their own ranks, the insurgents turned to traditional leaders of Indian society. At Kanpur, Nana Saheb - the adopted son of last Peshwa, Baji Rao II - led the forces. Rani Lakshmi Bai in Jhansi, Begum Hazrat Mahal in Lucknow and Khan Bahadur in Bareilly were the others in command. However, apart from a commonly shared hatred for alien rule, the rebels had no political perspective or a definite vision of the future. They were all prisoners of their own past, fighting primarily to regain their lost privileges.

Unsurprisingly, they proved incapable of ushering in a new political order, John Lawrence rightly remarked that had a single leader of ability arisen among them (the rebels) we would have been lost beyond redemption'.

### Failure of The Revolt

The rebels were dealt a powerful blow when the British captured Delhi on 20 September 1857 and imprisoned Emperor Bahadur Shah. The British military then dealt with the rebels in each centre, by term. The Rani of Jhansi died fighting on 17June 1858. Nana Saheb refused to give in and finally escaped to Nepal in January 1859, hoping to renew the struggle, Kunwar Singh died in May 1858, trying to escape from the British, and Tantia Tape, who successfully carried out guerrilla warfare against the British until April 1859, was betrayed by a fellow rebel and was captured and put to death by the British, thus re-establishing British authority over India.

Causes of Failure of the Revolt

- (i) Disunity of Indians and poor organization.
- (ii) Lack of complete nationalism Scindia, Holkors, the Nizam and others actively helped the British.
- (iii) Lack of coordination between sepoys, peasants, zamindars and other classes.
- (iv) All participants had different motives for participating in the revolt.

#### **Spread of the Revolt**

The rebellion soon engulfed much of North India, including Awadh and various areas that were once under the control of Maratha princes. The capture of Delhi and the proclamation of Bahadur Shah as the Emperor of Hindustan (Shahenshah-e-Hindustan) gave a positive, meaning to the revolt and provided a rallying point for the rebels by recalling the past glory of the imperial city. The revolt at Meerut and the capture of Delhi were the precursors to a widespread mutiny by the sepoys and rebellion almost, over North India, as well as in central and western parts of the country. The south remained quiet and Punjab areBengal were only marginally affected. Almost half company's sepoy strength of 2,32,224 opted out of loyalty to their regimental colours and overcame the ideology of the army, which had been meticulously constructed over a period of time through discipline. Isolated mutinies also occurred at military posts in the centre of the subcontinent. Initially, the rebels, although divided and uncoordinated, gained the upper hand, while the unprepared British were terrified, and even paralysed, without replacements for the casualties. The Result of 1857, an unsuccessful but heroic effort to eliminate foreign rule, had begun. The civil war inflicted havoc on both the Indians and the British as each exited its fury on the other, each community suffered humiliation and triumph in battle as well, although the final outcome was victory for the British. The last major sepoy rebels surrendered on 21 June 1858, at Gwalior (Madhya Pradesh), one of the principal centres of the revolt. A final battle was fought at Sirwa Pass on 21 May 1859 and the defeated rebels fled to Nepal.

The spontaneous and widespread rebellion later fired the imagination of the nationalists who would debate the most effective method of protest against the British rule. For them; the rebellion represented the first Indian attempt at gaining independence. This interpretation, however, is open to serious question.

#### Significance of the Revolt

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The important element in the revolt lays in Hindu-Muslim unity. People exhibited patriotic sentiment without the touch of communal feelings. All rebels, irrespective of their religion, recognized Bahadur Shah as their emperor. It no doubt began as a mutiny of soldiers but soon turned into a revolt against the British rule in general.

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