

Revolt of 1857

These notes are your ultimate revision weapon to revise Revolt of 1857 history. We've distilled years of previous exam questions (PYQs) into one powerful, concise resource. Everything you need to know, nothing you don't.

- **PYQs, Decoded:** All key concepts from past exams, organized and simplified.
- **Revise in Record Time:** Short, precise, and designed for last-minute review.
- **Focus on What Matters:** Master high-probability topics and boost your confidence.

The Revolt of 1857: A Structured Overview

Causes & Triggers



Immediate Cause: The Enfield Rifle Cartridge Issue

- Introduced in the British Indian Army in December 1856.
- Training was held at Dum Dum, Ambala, and Sialkot.
- The immediate trigger was the suspicion of British interference in religion.
- Soldiers had to bite cartridges rumored to be greased with cow and pig fat, offending Hindu and Muslim religious sentiments.

Other Military Grievances

- Sepoy grievances included:
 - British efforts to spread Christianity.
 - Orders to travel on ships (against Hindu beliefs).
 - The stoppage of Bhatta (foreign service allowance).
- **Note:** The inefficiency of British officers was **not** a reason for the rebellion.

Primary Cause

- The main cause was the overall policy of the British Empire, encompassing political, economic, military, religious, and social exploitation.

Key Events, Timeline & Communication

- **Mangal Pandey Incident (March 29, 1857):**
 - Occurred at Barrackpore.
 - Mangal Pandey was a sepoy of the **34th Bengal Native Infantry**.
 - He killed a British officer and was punished.
 - The British Commanding Officer at Barrackpore was **Lieutenant General Sir John Bennet Hearsey**.
- **Outbreak (May 10, 1857):**
 - The revolt began from **Meerut**.
 - The first major event was sepoys marching to Delhi's Red Fort.
- **Symbolism & Planning:**
 - **Lotus flowers** and **Chapatis (bread)** were distributed as a method of communication and planning.
- **Emergency Headquarters:**
 - Governor-General Lord Canning moved the emergency headquarters to **Allahabad**.

Major Centers, Leaders & Key Personalities

Center of Revolt	Key Leader(s)	Key Events & Details
Delhi	Bahadur Shah Zafar, Bakht Khan, Nawab Hamid Ali Khan	• Sepoys from Meerut marched to Delhi and declared Bahadur Shah Zafar as the emperor. • Bakht Khan was a key leader; bestowed the title 'Saheb-e-Alam Bahadur'. • Recaptured by the British in September 1857.

Kanpur	Nana Saheb, Azimullah Khan, Tatya Tope	• Revolt began on June 5, 1857. • Nana Saheb was proclaimed as the Peshwa and declared independence. • Azimullah Khan was his advisor and secretary, titled "Krantidoot". • Tatya Tope was the commander-in-chief.
Lucknow (Oudh)	Begum Hazrat Mahal	• Revolt began on May 30, 1857. • She crowned her son, Birjis Qadr, as the ruler.
Jhansi	Rani Laxmibai (Maharani Laxmibai)	• Revolt began in June 1857. • Original name: Manikarnika. • Born: November 19, 1835, in Varanasi. • Died: Fighting against British General Hugh Rose at Gwalior on June 17, 1858. • Samadhi (tomb) is in Gwalior. • General Hugh Rose praised her as the most brave and capable rebel leader.
Bareilly	Khan Bahadur	• Khan Bahadur was later declared the Viceroy by Bahadur Shah.
Faizabad	Maulavi Ahmadullah Shah	• A fierce opponent of the British; a reward of Rs. 50,000 was offered for his capture. • Originally from Arcot, Tamil Nadu.
Jagdishpur/Arrah (Bihar)	Kunwar Singh	• A Zamindar from Jagdishpur. • Led the revolt from July 15, 1857, to January 20, 1858. • Occupied Arrah and was the leader in Patna. • Joined after losing his land due to British laws.
Allahabad	Maulvi Liyaqat Ali	• Took control of Khusro Bagh, declared India's independence, and became the Governor. • His rebellion was suppressed by General Neil.
Assam	Maniram Dutta (Maniram Dewan)	• A nobleman and the first Assamese tea planter.

Rajasthan	Thakur Kushal Singh of Auwa	• Defeated the joint army of the British and Jodhpur at Bithoda and Chelawas. • Major centers: Ajmer, Neemuch, Auwa. Jaipur was not a major center.
Bhopal	Fazil Mohammad Khan	• Led the main movement in Bhopal and sacrificed his life.

Composition of the Rebels

- The largest number of Indian sepoys came from the region of **Oudh (Awadh)**.
- Nearly every family in Oudh had a member who joined, totaling **over 75,000 sepoys**.

Support and Opposition

Rulers who Supported the British

- **Scindias of Gwalior** provided the maximum support.
- **Holkars of Indore** and the **Nizam of Hyderabad** also helped.
- The Minister of Gwalior, **Sir Dinkar Rao**, was highly praised by the British.

Social Groups Opposed to the Revolt

- The **educated middle class** remained largely **neutral**.
- **Landlords** and **moneylenders (Sahukars)** were against it.
- Many **Westernized Indians** did not support it.

Areas NOT Affected by the Revolt

- **Chittor** was not affected.
- In **Bihar**, the city of **Munger** was unaffected.
- **Punjab, Hyderabad, and Gwalior** remained largely loyal to the British.
- The **Rajput states** remained passive.

VI. British Response & Key Figures

- **British Prime Minister:** Viscount Palmerston (1855-1858).
- **Governor-General/Viceroy:**
 - **Lord Canning** was the Governor-General during the revolt.
 - He became the first **Viceroy** of India after the British Crown took over.
 - His tenure saw the Indian High Court Act (1861) and the law allowing widow remarriage (1856).
- **British Casualties:**
 - **In Lucknow:** Sir Henry Lawrence, Major Havelock, and General Neil died.
 - **In Delhi:** General John Nicholson died.
- **Non-Participants:** British officers like Col. St. Legar, Lt. Col. Gibbs, and Col. Wallace were not associated with the revolt.

Causes of Failure

1. **Primary Reason:** Lack of a common strategy and central organization.
2. **Other Factors:**
 - Lack of unity of purpose among Indian sepoys.
 - British soldiers were better equipped and organized.
 - Most native rulers did not support the revolutionaries.
 - The educated Indian middle class did not offer support.
 - The leadership of Bahadur Shah Zafar lacked popular support.

Historical Interpretations

Historian/Figure	Perspective / Terminology	Key Work / Note
V.D. Savarkar	First to call it the "First War of Independence"	
S.N. Sen	Official historian of the Indian freedom struggle.	Wrote about the revolt.
Sir James Outram & W. Taylor	Termed it a "Conspiracy" by Hindus and Muslims.	
R.C. Majumdar	Argued it was "neither first, nor national, nor a war of independence"	Noted large parts of the country were unaffected.
Sir Syed Ahmed Khan	First Indian to analyze the causes of the revolt.	Asbab-e-Bhaghawat-e-Hind (1859)
W.H. Russel	Reported on widespread anti-British sentiment.	Correspondent for The Times of London.

Consequences & Aftermath

- **End of Company Rule:** The revolt ended the East India Company's rule in India.
- **Queen Victoria's Proclamation (November 1, 1858):**
 - Transferred Indian administration to the British Crown.
 - Key object: To disclaim any intention to annex Indian states.
 - The only major assurance fulfilled was the abandonment of the policy of annexation.
- **Army Reorganization:**
 - The **Peel Commission** was formed to reorganize the Indian army.
 - Post-revolt, the British recruited from **Gurkhas, Sikhs, and Punjabis**, losing trust in soldiers from U.P. and Bihar.

Cultural Context

- **Mirza Ghalib:** The famous Urdu poet witnessed the events of 1857. He was born in Agra (1797) and died in Delhi (1869).
- **Pre-1857 Rebels:** The Raja of Vijayanagar, the Polygar of Tamil Nadu, and Dewan Velu Thampi of Travancore had rebelled earlier against the British East India Company.

Know More About the Revolt of 1857:

- [Revolt of 1857– Old Year Questions and Answers](#)
- [Revolt of 1857 One Liner Questions & Answers](#)

