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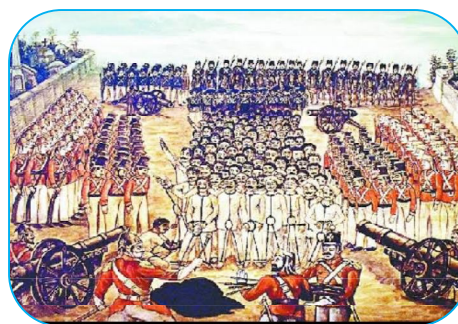


THE REVOLUTION OF 1857 : A LOOK OVER THE MAIN REASONS

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ABSTRACT:

At the mid of 19th century there were many uprising at large scale in the Eurasia continent. In those uprising the revolution of 1848 in the middle Europe , Taiping revolt of china and the revolt of 1857 in India can be listed in. There were no common reasons between these uprisings at political or social level. But they look same in terms of nature, expansion and results.¹



KEYWORDS: 19th Century, Revolution of 1857.

INTRODUCTION

In India the revolt of 1857 was not a sudden occurrence. The British East India company had established its empire and the company had made the means to exploit or plunder the Indians in every possible way. So the Indians flew into the rage against the British.²

So in this way there were many reasons behind the revolt of 1857. The all reasons can be classified like political causes, economic causes, social and religious causes and the most important immediate cause

of new enfield rifles. The bad behavior of British authority worked as the fuel to the fire.³

In the political cause first of all we can include the annexations of the princely states under Wellesley's subsidiary alliance and Dalhousie's doctrine of lapse. According to Dalhousie's doctrine of lapse the king who had no offspring could not adopt the sons and their dominions were annexed to the British empire. Under the that doctrine of lapse many states like Satara (1848), Jaitpura (1849), Sambalpur (1849), Bhagat(1850), Udaipur (1852) and Nagpur(1854) were annexed to the British empire. ⁴

Many of the kings were accused of mis -government and their titles and pensions were usurped. Therefore Nana Sahib, Rani Luxmi Bai, Mughal emperor Bahadur Shah and Nawab Wajid Ali Shah of Oudh were against the British.⁵ Because the most effecting annexation was the annexation of Oudh which made the other kings afraid. Gubbins , who was then Revenue commissioner at Lucknow , later compiled a report of the national rebellion in the region and recorded statements of Indians in touch with him. In one of his statements, it was stated: " The people of Hindustan like wise said , the country of Oudh belongs

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to Kings and whether he has done well or ill as regards his own Government, he has not injured or broken faith with the English in any way; if British Government dethrones the king who has ever been so faithful to him, what independent Nawab or Rajah is safe".⁶

So the fear of those Rajah and Nawab came true. British abolished the regal titles of Mughal emperor, Nawab of Carnatic and Tanjore . It hurt the feeling of Indian subjects and they felt as Malleson described that the policy of Dalhousie had created bad faith and Indians got the feeling that the British were playing the 'wolf in the garb of the lamb.'⁷

British were always remained foreigner to the Indians and their officers were always very arrogant and despotic as Marx characterized that "the company rule in India as European despotism planted upon Asiatic despotism."⁸ The British never tried to get closer to Indian people. Anderson also supported the fact that real rulers who ruled India were lived abroad. That was an another political cause and it had made the Indians, the enemies of the British. So despotism and arrogance of the British officers also was the important reason of the anger of the people.⁹

Another important factor of revolt was the economic and administrative chaos, which was circulated by the British in India. They had introduced the exploitative land revenue settlements. They had applied Permanent, Ryotwari and Mahalwari settlements. The implementation of those settlements had resulted in the loss of land for the landlords and heavy taxation for zamidars and cultivators¹⁰.

So in this way the British land policy implied and its devastating consequences were admitted by the ideological propagandist of British imperialism. For example, Sir John Strachey in his book, *India, its Administration and Progress*, which has served as a textbook for whole generation, has stated: "our policy has been to encourage the growth of private property in land Former government hardly recognized the existence of such property".¹¹

One side the British authority had imposed heavy revenue and on other hand they did not pay any attention towards the agriculture and land. Indian peasants look towards the British government as they were responsible for their pitiable condition¹².

Apart from the revenue and land system British rule also meant misery to the artisans and handicraftsmen. The annexation of Indian states by the company cut off their major source of patronage. Added to this, British policy discouraged Indian handicrafts and prompted British goods. The highly skilled Indian craftsmen were deprived of their source of income and were forced to look for alternate sources of employment that hardly existed, as the destruction of Indian handicraft was not accompanied by the development of modern industries.¹³

Other economic losses and disadvantages can be counted as follows:-

1. Many taxes were imposed on the Indians which were merely oppressions. That's why Indians started to hate the British.
2. In Southern Bengal, all the feoffees were dismissed from their post. They became displeased with the British.
3. The employees who belonged to those states, which were annexed to the British empire, were dismissed from their posts.
4. The educated Indians were not given the post of higher ranks. In the military the highest post for the Indians was the rank of Subedar. In this way the Indians had realized that the British wanted them to be poor and destitute.¹⁴

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Social and religious reasons also played a crucial role in rising the people anger Indian people were provoked when they had seen that now British government had been started interfering in the religion of them. The British began to propagate Christianity in India. The British officers started to attract the native soldiers by saying that if they would be Christians, then they would be promoted. The missionary society of America has established a press at Agra and they propagated a lot against the Hindu religion.¹⁵

The reforming zeal of British officials under the influence of utilitarianism had also aroused considerable suspicion, resentment and opposition. The orthodox Hindus and Muslims feared that through social legislation the British were trying to destroy their religion and culture. Moreover, they believed that legislation was undertaken to aid the missionaries in their quest for evangelization. The orthodox and religious, therefore arrayed against the British. Several proclamation of the rebels expressed this cultural concern in no uncertain terms.¹⁶

Social reforms which were brought by the British government also considered as a blow over the religion. The British endeavoured to eradicate social evils, like the customs of sati sacrifice, child marriage etc. and they also encouraged the widow remarriage. The Indians believed from all such types of activities that the British were interfering in their religion and they thought that British were doing such types of activities in order to make the Indians, Christians.¹⁷

Apart from religion, the company rule was hated by Indian people because of racialism. It was a feature of the company's regime ever since its beginning and produced its inevitable consequences. Shore, who wrote at the very beginning of the establishment of the company's power in India, stated that the Indians were considered not better than "nasty heathen wretches".¹⁸

Another direct consequence of the despotic racist British regime was to exclude the natives of India from all higher appointments which involved trust and responsibility. So the India suffered all the indignities and humiliations that follow from such a racist attitude and ultimately began their struggle against the alien regime based on racialism.¹⁹

Sir Syed Ahmad Khan served the British during the revolt and after revolt's suppression wrote his famous book *The Causes of Indian Revolt*, where he stated: "Another reason for the dissatisfaction of the natives of India, and more especially of Mohammedans was the exclusion of natives from high appointments".²⁰

Lieutenant Karnal William Hunter also supported the fact of discrimination and bad behavior of British officials with Indian natives.²¹ Thus due to that type of discrimination, the systematic exclusion of the Indians from the official employment of a superior character was an anti-Indian policy and the justified discontent of the Indian upper classes against it, was a national factor of great importance among the causes that led the Indian people to revolt against their rule.²²

Besides the social and religious reasons, military reasons also played a crucial role in uprising. The Indians were not satisfied with the military administration. The discrimination which was spread in the social life of people was also an important feature of British army officers.²³

The excessive number of Indian soldiers in the army was also a reason of revolt because the number of Indian soldiers was six times more than the British soldier. So, the knowledge of that excessive number of Indian soldier raised a feeling of courage to fight against indiscriminate.²⁴

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The other reason which was related to the military was the law of recruitment of common servants. In 1856, Canning government passed the law of the recruitment of common servants, according to which every soldier had to sign the agreement at the time of recruitment. In which he would be ready to go anywhere even outside India. Those soldiers who went to Afghanistan to fight were expelled from their caste because of religious belief. One other rule which affected soldiers was to Post Office Act of 1854. Now the soldiers could not send letters to their homes free of cost as before.²⁵

Apart from that the soldiers were unhappy with their emoluments. A sepoy in the infantry got seven rupees a month. A sawar in cavalry was paid 27 rupees out of which he had to pay for his own uniform and food.²⁶ After that insufficient salary he was always made to feel a subordinate at every step and was discriminated in the matter of promotion and privileges. As T. R. Holmes explained "he knew that he could never attain the pay of an English subaltern and that the rank to which he might attain, after 30 years of faithful service, would not protect him from the insolent dictation of an English fresh from England".²⁷

The discontent of the sepoys was not limited to matters of military. The sepoy, in fact, was a 'peasant in uniform' whose consciousness was not divorced from the rural population.²⁸

So after those all reasons one immediate cause played a role final stroke. The immediate cause was of greased cartridges, which were to be cut with the help of teeth before loading the gun. The rumor spread that the fat of cows and pigs was put on the cartridges. Those soldiers who refused to use that greased cartridges were made captive. That incident made their other companions furious and on 10th May, 1857 they revolted against British.²⁹

So the great revolt of 1857 was not happened at once. A number of reasons had set the ground for its happening. Apart from all the reasons the revolt had proved to the British that the people of India were now gradually being together against the unlawful rule of the British. That revolt had opened up the eyes of British authority and led to the number of change in their policies towards India.

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