

June 17, 1858	Death of Rani Jhansi while fighting at Kalpi.
July-December 1858	Re-establishment of English authority in India.
April 1859	Capture and hanging of Tantia Tope on April 1859.

**Q. 2. Analyse the political, socio-religious and immediate causes of the Mutiny of 1857. What were its results?**

(Punjab University, April 1998, Oct. 1997)

or

**Discuss the causes of the uprising of 1857. What led to its failure?**

(Punjab University 1997)

or

**Discuss the causes and results of the uprising of 1857.**

(Punjab University 1991)

or

**How would you explain the failure of the Revolt of 1857?**

(Rajasthan University 1997)

**Ans. *Manifold Causes of the Revolt of 1857***

The Revolt of 1857 was an eruption of the volcano of the various pent-up forces and feelings of the people of India. It came as a culmination of popular discontent with the British policies which had led to a great exploitation of the people. There were several cultural, economic, military, political, religious, social and immediate causes of the Revolt.

As a matter of fact even before 1857, several revolts on a minor scale but in different parts of the country by several sections had taken place and which were ruthlessly crushed. Discontent has been brewing since the conquest of Bengal. For about 100 years the people of India had witnessed the enormous loot and plunder of wealth from India to Britain. Every policy of the British *i.e.*, cultural, educational, military, political and social was aimed at the benefit of the British people. Several sections of population felt suffocated under the tyranny of the foreign rulers. They, therefore, revolted and attempted to free themselves but failed in 1857.

Views of some historians in this regard are given below.

1. *Dr. Ishwari Prasad* points out two most important reasons of the Revolt.

(i) Disregard of Indian philosophy and culture by the English and

(ii) Economic drain.

Regarding the cultural policy of the British rules, he writes. "The English happy, in their ignorance of Indian philosophy attempted to introduce western notions of inheritance, marriage and succession and thereby consciously and unconsciously trampled upon the most sensitive portion of a Hindu's life. This was great degradation and was the result of a well settled policy. It has been a common belief of all imperialism that to degrade the conquered, to disrupt their social system, to make them forget their past, to impoverish them and then to lure them to the religion of the conquerer is better guarantee of stability than mere military strength. In its application to Indian society,

However, the policy recoiled on its promoters. It stirred the people, brought back to them the reminiscences of their glorious past and cemented the causes of rebellion."

2. About the impact of the economic drain, *Ishwari Prasad* has observed, "The political changes prior to the advent of the British, the rise and fall of empires in Delhi had little or no effect upon the economic structure and life of the people. The reason for this was that the wealth remained in the country and whatever power ruled over Delhi it had no sympathies beyond the boundaries of India. With the English, however, it was quite different. Though paramount in India, they were subordinate to the Crown of England and their economic policy was subservient to their mother country. Indian wealth flew out of the country. Indian economy began to be fashioned to meet the needs of Industrial England. With the Industrial Revolution of the early 19th century, England ceased to be a mere commercial nation and was transformed into a manufactory of the world. Raw material for her factories and markets for her finished goods became England's prime needs. British policy in India was developed to meet those needs. The once famous Indian industry died of English competition and neglect; the burden on agriculture increased and India became a land exporting raw materials and importing finished goods. English capital flowed into the country and as it carried away both interest and profits, the results were ruinous. India became a milch cow to feed England while her own sons were gradually pushed to the verge of starvation."

3. About the use of cartridges, *Lord Roberts* in his book "*Forty years in India*" has remarked: "The recent researches of Mr. Forrest in the records of Government of India prove beyond doubt that the lubricating mixture used in preparing the cartridges was actually composed of the objectionable ingredients-cow's fat and lard and that incredible disregard of the soldiers' religious prejudices was displayed in the manufacture of these cartridges."

4. Regarding cruel treatment towards the Indians, *Sir Thomas Munroe* remarked, "The foreign conquerors have definitely treated the Indians very cruelly, but never was such a humiliating treatment meted out to them as we have done unto them. Never have they been charged that their whole nation was dishonest and was not worthy of confidence and that they would never get any job in the administration unless there was no way out for the British East India Company."

5. *Dr. V.S. Smith* observes that, "The movement was a revolt of the old against the new, of Indians' conservatism against aggressive European innovation."

6. The assertion of *Mangles*, the Chairman of the Court of the Directors of the Company regarding conversion of Indians to Christianity is that it had created fears. According to him, "Providence has entrusted the extensive empire to England in order that the banner of Christ should wave triumphant from one end of India to the other. Every one must exert all his strength that there may be no dilatoriness on any account in continuing in the country the grand

work of making all Indians Christians."

7. Major Edwards had openly declared, "The conversion of all Indians to Christianity was the ultimate aim of our occupation of India."

8. To the same effect wrote Rev. Kennedy, "Whatever misfortune may come on us, so long as our Empire in India continues, so long let us not forget that our chief work is the propagation of Christianity in the land until Hindustan from Cape Commorin to the Himalayas, embraces the religion of Christ and until it condemns the Hindu and Muslim religions, our efforts must continue persistently. For this work we must make all the efforts we can and use all power and all the authority in our hands."

Following were the important causes of the Revolt.

1. **Cultural factors.** The foreign rulers wanted to impose their culture *i.e.*, their etiquettes and manners on the people of India. Lord Macaulay very emphatically stated that through the introduction of the new system of education, there in India would emerge as a class of people Indian in blood and colour but English in manners and tastes etc. Lord Macaulay also used very uncalled for remarks when he termed Indian arts, literature and sciences as 'false'.

2. **Economic factors.** These included: (i) Ruin of Indian economy (ii) Wealth drain from India (iii) Decay of indigenous crafts (iv) Stagnation of agriculture (v) Decline of Indian industries on account of discriminatory import and export duties on the manufactured Indian goods (vi) High revenue demands and impoverishment of Indian peasants (vii) Lack of irrigation and other facilities (viii) Poverty and famines.

(3) **Military Causes.** (i) Cruel treatment of Indian soldiers by foreign officers (ii) Lack of promotional prospects (iii) Anti-religious rules like denial of putting sectarian marks on their foreheads, shaving off their beard, crossing the sea, an act which was considered by soldiers as against their religion (iv) Non-provision of special allowance for serving in distant lands (v) Lord Canning's General Service Enlistment Act under which all the soldiers had to march wherever ordered (vi) Forcible annexation of Oudh and discontentment among Oudh soldiers.

4. **Political Causes.** (i) Annexation policy of Lord Dalhousie (ii) Denial of adoption to several Indian rulers like refusal to continue the pension to Nana Saheb, the adopted son of the Peshwa Baji Rao II, Rani Lakshmi Bai of Jhansi, (iii) Annexation of Oudh.

5. **Religious Causes.** (i) Anti-Indian religion activities of the Christian missionaries (ii) Interference in religious customs of the people (iii) Displacement of 'Mullahs' and 'Pandits' from employment and prestige with the introduction of the new system of education based on the supremacy of the English language and European arts, literature and sciences.

6. **Social Causes.** (i) Abolition of the Sati Practice (ii) Prohibition of child marriage (iii) Widow remarriage (iv) Breaking barriers of caste system through

the introduction of railways (v) Racial arrogance of the English people.

7. *Immediate Cause.* Introduction of cartridges smeared with cow's and pigs' fat and resultant unrest among Hindu and Muslim soldiers.

8. *Psychological Causes.* A general belief prevailed among the people that the British rule in India would last for a century. The foundation of this rule had been laid in 1757. Therefore, the year 1857 was considered to be the last year of the British rule in India.

*Beginning and ending of the Revolt.* Usually, the beginning of the Revolt is attributed to the Third Cavalry whose sepoy at Meerut on May 10, 1857 revolted and killed some British officers.

The first shot of revolt was fired in March 1857 by Mangal Pandey, a sepoy at Barrackpore in Bengal when he refused to use the greased cartridges. He was hanged and he became the first martyr. On May 9, 1857, 85 sepoy of 3rd Cavalry at Meerut were jailed for refusing to use the greased cartridges. On May 10, 1857, sepoy at Meerut rose to a man, attacked their officers and released their colleagues from jail and marched towards Delhi. The 85-year Mughal Emperor Bahadur Shah II was proclaimed the Emperor of India. Thus began the Revolt which gradually spread to other areas.

At Kanpur, the Revolt was led by Nana Saheb, the adopted son of Peshwa Baji Rao II. He was assisted by his trusted general Tantia Tope and other officer Azimullah Khan.

At Lucknow, Hazrat Mahal, the Begum of Oudh, led the Revolt.

Rani Laxmi Bai of Jhansi was the leader at Jhansi. Her courage and military skill inspired her countrymen. She fought gallantly but Jhansi was captured by the English with the help of some traitors. She died fighting on June 17, 1858.

Bakhat Khan led the Revolt at Bareilly.

A Rajput Zamindar Kanwar Singh of Arrah (Bihar) led the movement in Bihar and at several places in Central India. Though he was nearly 80 year of age at that time, he was perhaps the most outstanding leader and strategist of the Revolt.

The Revolt began at Meerut, 58 km, from Delhi on 10th May 1857, and ended on April 18, 1859 with the hanging of Tantia Tope.

Delhi became the centre of the Revolt and Bahadur Shah its symbol. Bahadur Shah wrote letters to all the chiefs and rulers of India asking them to fight against the British regime.

The entire Bengal army rose in Revolt. Oudh, Rohilkhand, Bundelkhand, Central India, several parts of Bihar and East Punjab shook off British authority. In several states in India, the rulers remained loyal to the British Government but their soldiers revolted. Several chiefs in Rajasthan and Maharashtra revolted. In several territories common people rose up in arms and fought with their axes and spears, bows and arrows etc.