

Welcome to this session of History..

The Paper- Indian National Movement, (1857 - 1947)

Unit I - The Revolt of 1857,

Module - The Causes of the Revolt of 1857 : Political,Economic and Socio- Religious.

In this session, I'm going to talk about

The background to the Revolt of 1857: the Political / Administrative causes,

Economic ,and Socio- religious causes of the Revolt.

Your learning outcomes :

Identifying the reasons for the outbreak of the Revolt in 1857.

Understanding the nature of colonialism in India under the rule of the British East India Company..

1857- it was the Centenary Year of the establishment, of the rule, of the British East India Company in Bengal.

All was not quite well beneath the surface, though the official mood was one of celebration.

The introduction of the Enfield rifles in the British Indian Army made 1857,

a memorable year but for different reasons.

We will now deal with the causes of the Revolt.

Political and Administrative causes.

Lord Dalhousie was the Governor General of India from 1846 - 1856.

He was singularly responsible for the Revolt of 1857.

Lord Dalhousie was an Annexationist, and he was determined to extend the British Empire in

India to the maximum. He tried different methods for his expansion plans in India.

One of the ways was by fighting battles.

In fighting battles, he succeeded in annexing Punjab in 1849. Pegu, (Upper Burma) in 1852 and Sikkim in 1850.

But the method that he used to annex Indian States for which he is most remembered was, adopting the policy called 'Doctrine of Lapse'.

He applied it to Princely States where the ruler had no natural male heir to the throne.

The Company decided that they would not recognize an adopted child as a legal heir to the throne.

This was against the traditions that were practiced in India, whereby if a ruler did not have a natural heir to the throne, then he would adopt a male child from within the family, who would enjoy full legal rights.

Using the 'Doctrine Of Lapse' Lord Dalhousie annexed the States of Satara in 1848,

Jaitpur and Sambalpur in 1849, Baghat in 1850, Udaipur in 1852. Jhansi in 1853 and Nagpur in 1854.

Besides using the 'Doctrine of Lapse', Lord Dalhousie also annexed territories in India on the grounds of administrative mismanagement . A classic example of this was Awadh, which he annexed in 1856.

Awadh , was a close ally of the British in India. When the British no longer needed its friendship and support, they found reason to annex the province of Awadh on the pretext of administrative mismanagement.

Lord Dalhousie used yet another approach, that is, he derecognized the royal titles and privileges that the Indian Princes enjoyed under the patronage of the British East India Company in India.

These were privileges that had been promised to them. He felt that the Company no longer needed the support of these Indian Princely States and therefore these privileges should be discontinued.

Here, we have the Nawab of Carnatic and Nawab of Tanjore becoming victims of this policy.

Even the last Mogul Emperor of India, Bahadur Shah II, was told that he would no longer be able to stay at the Red Fort and that he would have to shift his residence..

Yet another tactic that Lord Dalhousie used was, to discontinue the pensions that had been promised to the Indian Princes who had lost their states and thrones, to the British East India Company..

One such victim who eventually became a prominent player in the Revolt of 1857 was

Nanasaheb Peshwa- the adopted heir of the Maratha Peshwa Baji Rao II.

Last but not the least, another of the many important reasons, was the confiscation of huge land estates.

India had a very large class of such traditional land owners. By an Act in 1852, the Inam Commission was appointed and all those who had huge land, estates had to present their papers of legal ownership of the estates to the British East India Company, and if they could not, their lands were confiscated on the grounds that they were not the rightful owners.

Over 20 thousand families were dispossessed of their hereditary estates in different parts of India.

Nature of the Company's Administration in India.

The Indians had to adjust to a Government that was foreign in both structure and functioning.

They were used to the old system of the King and the Princes.

But now they had to cope with an administrative setup which was so alien to them.

The Rule of Law, which was a part of that System, was very harsh and biased.

The Courts were expensive, the Police were very insensitive to the Indians.

Government officials were arrogant and inaccessible.

Punishments were unjust and severe, and justice for the Common Man

was very rare , under the Company's rule in India.

The Administration also had a Revenue system where the taxes were very high.

Tax officials were insensitive to the poor farmers, craftsman and traders, who could scarcely afford to eke out a living and yet they had to pay very high taxes.

Tax collectors use the Army and the Police to intimidate the poor farmers , traders and those who were not able to pay taxes to the Company on time.

Economic causes of the Revolt of 1857.

The Company's monopoly of the economic resources of India and trade was a privilege that had been granted to them by the Queen of England.

The Company used this privilege to such an extent that Dadabhai Nauroji would later on regard it as the 'complete drain of wealth' from India.

India was reduced to a state of extreme dependence upon the Colonial Masters, for what it produced and what it sold.

This 'drain of wealth' was to affect India's flourishing economy permanently thereafter.

The British succeeded in destroying the Indian cottage industry and the handicraft industry, which at one time was a very flourishing sector in the Indian economy.

The peasants were victims of the British East India Company's agriculture policy and tax policies.

Even the landed aristocracy- the traditional Zamindars who were used to privileges, who occupied very important positions in society, suffered under the land, agrarian and revenue policies.

All this led to growing indebtedness. Extreme poverty of the farmers, traders, artisans and craftsman who lost their means of livelihood and found no other way to compensate for their loss of income.

Loss of jobs for disbanded army men and all who were serving the ruling class in India.

Ever since the British East India Company took over India, the Princely class was gradually wiped off the slate of Indian subcontinent which resulted in large numbers of army men being sent home. All those who earned a living from serving the ruling class in India also suffered unemployment. The result of all this was anger and frustration with the creation of a typical colonial economy that was totally subservient to the economic interests of Britain.

The third set of causes are the Socio-religious causes of the Revolt of 1857.

When the British acquired power in India, one of the areas where they tried to effect change was in the socio-religious beliefs and practices of the Indians.

They tried in many ways to change Indians' beliefs and practices not only by criticizing them, but also by passing of legislations which though may appear to be good, from the modern point of view, they greatly hurt the sentiments of the Indians then, who were strongly attached to their beliefs and practices.

In 1829, Sati was abolished by Lord William Bentinck.

The Widow Remarriage Act was passed in favour of widows who suffered great injustice.

Then they promoted the education of girls, which was so unacceptable in traditional Indian society.

All this hurt the sentiments of the Indians, especially the Brahmin class who considered themselves custodians of India's social religious beliefs and practices.

Racial discrimination.

The 'white man' considered themselves conquerors, rulers and therefore superior to the Indians and they treated them accordingly.

Disregard for the castesystem.

Indian society was Caste based. Caste was disregarded by the British in India.

Tax on lands belonging to temples and mosques was also another aspect that hurt the Indian sentiments.

The Religious Disabilities Act of 1850 allowed converts to inherit the property of the family.

This also was an act that greatly hurt the custodians of India's social religious beliefs and practices,

Finally the activities of the Missionaries, especially after 1813 when Christian missionaries were allowed to freely move into British India. They moved in for education but along with education they were accused of encouraging conversion to Christianity.

They were accused of using means that often hurt the religious sentiments of the Indians.

We have been looking at the causes of the Revolt of 1857.

The Revolt of 1857, may have been sparked off with the introduction of the Enfield rifles in the Army,

In reality, it was the nature of the British East India Company's rule in India for a 100 years that was greatly responsible for this outburst- unique and one of its kind till then.

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