

Q 1857 Revolt was a war of Independence or Mutiny? Explain with arguments.

A. Introduction:

1857 Revolt broke out as a small rebellion of Indian soldiers against greased rifles soon turned into massive and widespread rebellion on an extensive scale. In this revolt, military and civilians actively took part against the atrocities of the British oppressors. Brutal social, political and economical policies of the English drove the Indians to break the shackles of their masters. This was a desperate attempt of the Indians which was the manifestation of their hatred for the English.

B. DEBATE: MUTINY OR WAR OF INDEPENDENCE:

1857 era was the major transition between two civilization, educational systems and philosophies of life. After the British stranglehold on India, people were subjected to the brutalities, atrocities and harsh policies of the English. Indians were hardly left in all the economical, political, social and cultural areas by the Britishers.

Some of the major causes of The Indian Revolt of 1857 are elaborated below.

1 ECONOMICAL CAUSES:

i- New Agrarian policies, heavy tax and domination over Trade

The brutal economic exploitation of the Indians at the hands of the English was a major phenomenon in the human history. New agrarian policies were introduced in which farmers and zamindars were supposed to have documental proof of their land holdings otherwise they would be deprived of their lands. Moreover, heavy taxes were levied on the farmers. Indians were made short of economic resources and were hit by financial problems. Similarly, EIC (East India Company) took control over major trade routes and illegal private trading as well as business transactions. Plundered the wealth of the Indians.

-ii- Stamp Act and destruction of local Industry:

Similarly, Stamp act was introduced which not only caused the difficult attainment of justice in courts but also proved to be an economic pressure over the civilians. Along with this, the local industry

of India was also hardly hit. The Indian silk could easily compete with the European silk. According to Shieldon, England soon stopped the import of silk from Italy and France. The Indian silk was cheap and at the same time was of high quality as compared to the European silk.

2 POLITICAL CAUSES:

i) Military discrimination and doctrine of Lapse:

One of the major reasons which fueled the fire of the Indian Revolt was military rebellion. Indian soldiers were highly discriminated against the English soldiers. The standard of living and salaries of the Indian soldiers were much less than that of the English soldiers. It can be gauged from the fact that the salary of an Indian infantry was 7Rs as compared to the English (cavalry) cavalry whose salary was 27Rs per month. Indian soldiers would know that even if they would be as gallant as Hyder, they would never get rank equivalent to the British soldiers. Similarly, the recognition of their achievement was premature retirement. Another brutality of the English was Doctrine of Lapse, in which the (heir of) "adopted son of a ruler would not be recognized as a heir of throne". Due to this

Rani of Jhansi and Nana Sahib could not access to the Throne. Due to which, these rulers were in the major forefronts of the war.

(ii) Accession of states.

To have control over the whole India was a long, cherishing desire, cherished desire of the company which resulted in the accession of states on a massive scale in the period of Lord Dalhousie. Eight states were annexed which included Jaitpur, Sambhalpur, Aradh, Sitara, Jhansi, Carnatic and Tanjore.

The annexation of these states exploited people economically associated with the courts of these states. And about 80,000 soldiers found themselves jobless. The annexation of Aradh was a result of subsidiary alliance. People were short of good stuff and major necessities of life which entailed hatred in their hearts against Britishers.

RELIGIOUS CAUSES:

(i) Patronage of christian missionaries
and non-religious laws.

After control over India, christian

missionaries resorted to spread the christianity. Dr. Pfander made scathing comments in his book Mizan-ul-Haq on the life of the holy prophet. In Madras 1806, a ban was imposed on the Hindu soldiers for using Tilak which hardly touched the religious sentiments of the soldiers. They tried to bring the whole India under the christian banner by fully patronising the christian missionaries officially. Many laws which were anti-religious laws for Muslims and Hindus were introduced such as rape was made civilian offence and abolition of Sati custom infuriated the Muslims and the Hindus respectively.

(iii) Greased Rifle soaked in Pork and

Cow's fat.

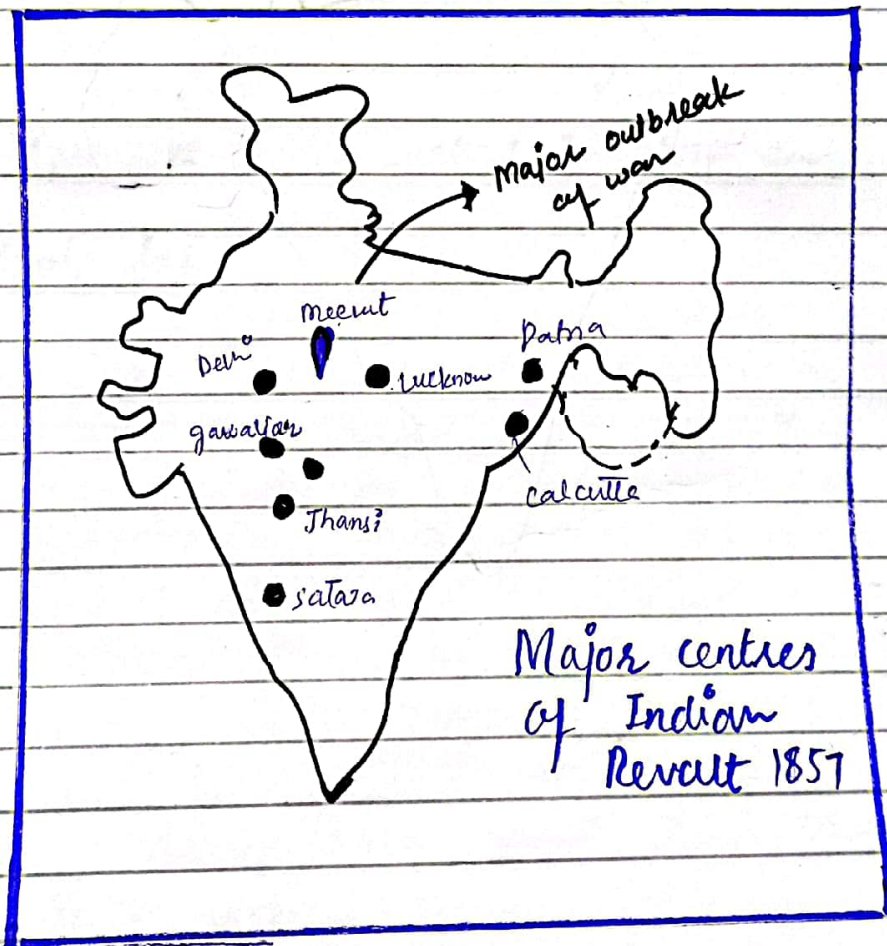
The sudden breakout of war was the result of the greased (rifles) cartridges which hurt the religious sentiments of the Indian Hindu soldiers followed by the rebellion at Meerut cantonment.

This rebellion soon engulfed the whole city and then within a matter of time, large scale of civilians started joining the revolt. John Lawrence and Henry Canning claims that the question of greased shells of rifle was the immediate cause of the mutiny.

INDIAN REVOLT AS WAR OF

INDEPENDENCE:

The Revolt of 1857 was not only the outcome of the rebellion by the soldiers alone. In fact, it was an all out rebellion in which not only soldiers but also public actively took part in response of the [atrocities inflicted upon them by their brutal masters. The minor incident at Meerut in no time engulfed the whole India in the war.



According to Sir Syed Ahmad Khan,

According to Sir Syed Ahmad Khan in his treatise The Causes of The Indian Revolt

A single event can not become a cause of major and general uprising

The same was with the war of 1857 which was the result of accumulating grievances of The Indians.

(I) Remarks of Lord Salisbury and London

Newspaper:

According to Salisbury

" It is impossible to believe that a widespread and massive movement was triggered by mere cartridges "

Similarly London newspaper write that

" If the unrest is limited to the soldiers alone and general public is on the side of company, we are at a loss to understand why Government of India is sending telegrams upon telegrams for the more reinforcement

This reflects that there was a pile up of painful grievances in the hearts of the people which reached its climax followed a minor trigger of mutiny at Meerut cantonment.

(II) Michael Edward - More than

mere mutiny:

Initially, it took the shape of mutiny or rebellion in the atmosphere of terror. As the clouds of such terror and horror dispersed with the passage of time Indians became more vocal, realistic and started using nationalistic terms for it. Ultimately, this event became as a war of Independence.

Edward Michael while quoting some Indian and British historians says that

The truth is that The rebellion was more than a mutiny and a lot less than The war of Independence.

If Indians had taken central control over Britain in the same treachery and cunning manner as The English did and had plundered their wealth. And then Britishers wage on war to get their freedom

back. what would it be called a mutiny or war of Independence.

So, it is justified that revolt of 1857 was a desperate struggle of the Indians to get their freedom back.

Conclusion:

Thus, war of 1857 was actually a war of Independence which was started as a mutiny but soon took the shape of war of freedom or Independence. This war was an expression of the indignation on the part of the Indians to cut off the shackles of oppression and to get out of the yoke of the Britishers. Though, Indians lost the war because of many reasons but sowed the seeds of hatred in their hearts of the Indians permanently for the English. This was the memory of the war, not the war itself that caused major damage to the cause of the Britishers.