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HISTORY OF INDIA (c1750s-1857)

REVOLT OF 1857

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THE REVOLT OF 1857 CAN BE STUDIED UNDER THREE MAIN HEADINGS:

- CAUSES
- RESULTS
- SIGNIFICANCE



AN IMAGE DEPICTING THE REVOLT OF 1857
SOURCE: THOUGHTCO

POLITICAL OR ADMINISTRATIVE CAUSES

- THERE WERE SEVERAL CAUSES OF THE REVOLT OF 1857. ONE OF THEM WAS THE POLITICAL OR ADMINISTRATIVE CAUSE. THE HIGH-HANDED OPPRESSION OF THE BRITISH RULERS ON THEIR INDIAN SUBJECTS ALIENATED THEM FROM THE NATIVE RULERS AS WELL AS THE COMMON PEOPLE.
- IN SEVERAL REGIONS SUCH AS PUNJAB, AYODHYA, JHANSI, SIND, GWALIOR, THE BRITISH EXERCISED THEIR MIGHT AND ANNEXED THESE TERRITORIES ON VERY FLIMSY GROUNDS SUCH AS MISRULE, NO HEIR OR IF THE HEIR WAS AN ADOPTED ONE.
- ACCORDING TO THE DOCTRINE OF LAPSE, PURSUED EXTENSIVELY BY LORD DALHOUSIE, ADOPTED SONS WOULD NOT BE CONSIDERED AS LEGAL HEIRS AND THE COMPANY WOULD ANNEX THE STATES. JHANSI, AWADH AND SATARA WERE ANNEXED UNDER THIS DOCTRINE AND THIS IRKED THE INDIAN RULERS.

- THE PEOPLE SO LONG COMFORTABLE WITH THEIR NATIVE RULERS WERE DISGUSTED BY THIS ACT OF THE BRITISHERS AS THEN THEY HAD TO BE UNDER FOREIGN RULE AND MUCH OF THE PRIVILEGES THAT THEY WERE USED TO ENJOYING WERE ALSO CURTAILED.
- MOREOVER, THE INTERFERENCE OF THE BRITISH GOVERNOR-GENERALS SUCH AS LORD WELLESLEY AND LORD DALHOUSIE IN THE DAILY AFFAIRS OF ADMINISTRATION OF THE INDIAN RAJAS WAS ALSO DISLIKED BY MANY.
- QUALIFIED EDUCATED INDIANS WERE NOT APPOINTED TO HIGH POSTS IN THE GOVERNMENT SERVICE WHICH WAS THE SOLE PRESERVE OF THE BRITISH. SIMILARLY ADVANCEMENTS IN CAREER, SALARIES WERE ALSO DENIED TO COMPETENT INDIANS WHO WERE DISGRUNTLED WITH THE ADMINISTRATIVE POLICIES OF THE BRITISH

ECONOMIC CAUSES

- THE BRITISH HAD FROM THE BEGINNING TAKEN RESORT TO OPPRESSIVE MEANS OF EXTORTION OF THE PEASANTS AS WELL AS THE ZAMINDARS TO MAXIMISE REVENUE COLLECTION. THE TALUKDARS OR LANDED PEOPLE ALSO FELT THE BRUNT OF THE BRITISH ECONOMIC POLICIES AS THEY HAD TO LOSE OUT ON THEIR PRIVILEGES AND LAND RESOURCES ON WHICH THE BRITISH HAD SET THEIR EYES UPON.
- THIS WAS BURDENSOME FOR THE PEOPLE IN GENERAL AS THE POLICY OF ECONOMIC EXPLOITATION AFFECTED THEM.
- BESIDES THE POLICY OF DRAIN OF WEALTH AND DE-INDUSTRIALIZATION ALSO AFFECTED INDIA'S ECONOMY. AFTER THE BATTLE OF PLASSEY IN 1757, THE INDIAN ECONOMY WAS SUBJUGATED TO A COLONIAL ECONOMY TO SERVE THE NEEDS OF THE BRITISH EMPIRE
- INDIA'S EXPORTS WERE DESTROYED BY IMPOSING HIGH DUTIES. THE COTTON TEXTILE INDUSTRY WAS BADLY HIT AS THE PRODUCERS OF RAW COTTON WERE COERCED TO SUPPLY COTTON FOR THE BOURGEONING BRITISH TEXTILE INDUSTRY AT VERY LOW PRICES.

- THE BRITAIN MADE TEXTILES WERE SOLD IN INDIA, THUS INDIA WAS MADE A MARKET FOR LANCASHIRE FACTORY-MADE BRITISH TEXTILES. INDIAN WEAVERS WERE HARD HIT AS A RESULT.
- PEOPLE WERE FORCED TO BUY BRITISH MADE GOODS AT VERY HIGH PRICES AT THE COST OF INDIGENOUS PRODUCTS. THIS CONTRIBUTED TO THE DE-INDUSTRIALIZATION OF THE INDIAN ECONOMY.
- AS A COROLLARY TO THIS WAS THE 'DRAIN OF WEALTH' FROM INDIA TO GREAT BRITAIN. NOT ONLY DID THE BRITISH TAKE THE WAR INDEMNITIES, SPOLIS, FROM THE DEFEATED INDIAN RULERS, THEY ALSO LOOTED A MAJOR SHARE OF THE WEALTH OF THE INDIAN RAJAS.

- THEY ALSO INDULGED IN A LOT OF OFFICIAL AND UNOFFICIAL ILLEGAL PRIVATE TRADE. THE ENGLISH EAST INDIA COMPANY SERVANTS WHO COME TO INDIA WITH THE SOLE OBJECTIVE OF TRADE IN THEIR OFFICIAL CAPACITY, TAKING ADVANTAGE OF THE WEAKNESS OF THE INDIAN POLITICAL SYSTEM, BECAME GREEDY AND AMASSED HUGE FORTUNES IN INDIA AND IN THEIR HOME COUNTRY ENGLAND.
- BESIDES, THEY ESTABLISHED MONOPOLIES IN SEVERAL ITEMS OF TRADE LIKE BETELNUT, TOBACCO, GUNPOWDER AND PREVENTED INDIAN TRADERS FROM ENTERING INTO A FAIR COMPETITION WITH EUROPEAN TRADERS BY IMPOSING DISCRIMINATORY DUTIES. THEY THEMSELVES MADE RAMPANT USE OF THE 'DASTAK' OR DUTY FREE TRADE RIGHTS.

SOCIAL AND RELIGIOUS CAUSES

- THE NEW SYSTEM OF WESTERN EDUCATION, THE POWER TO QUESTION AND ENQUIRE WAS NOT LIKED BY MOST INDIANS. THEY FELT THAT THESE CHALLENGED THEIR CUSTOMS AND BELIEFS. MANY DETESTED THE SOCIAL REFORMS THAT WERE INTRODUCED AT THAT TIME LIKE THE ABOLITION OF SATI, FEMALE INFANTICIDE, CHILD MARRIAGE AND OTHER RETROGRESSIVE SOCIAL EVILS THAT THE BRITISH TRIED TO ABOLISH. THEY DETESTED THE INTERFERENCE IN WHAT THEY ASSUMED WAS THEIR PERSONAL LIVES.
- SIMILARLY THE PROSELYTIZING ACTIVITIES OF THE CHRISTIAN MISSIONARIES ALSO ADDED TO THEIR DESPISE OF BRITISH RULE. THE COMMON PEOPLE FELT THAT THE BRITISH WERE INTENT ON CONVERTING THEM INTO CHRISTIANS BY INTRODUCING THE SOCIAL REFORMS AND LURING THE LOWER CASTES INTO CHRISTIANITY.

MILITARY CAUSES

- THE INDIAN SOLDIERS WHO FOUGHT FOR THE BRITISH IN DISTANT LANDS WERE EQUALLY DISENCHANTED WITH THEM.
- NOT ONLY WAS THE FEAR OF CROSSING KALAPANI AND BEING OSTRACIZED BY THEIR SOCIETY A PERSISTENT CAUSE FOR THE SEPOYS GAINST THE BRITISH, ADDED TO THIS WAS THE LOW PAY AND CAREER PROSPECTS OF THE INDIAN SEPOYS IN COMPARISON TO THEIR EUROPEAN COUNTERPARTS
- NOT ONLY WAS THERE NO PROSPECT OF PROMOTION, THE SEPOYS BELIEVED THAT THEIR RELIGIOUS SENTIMENTS WERE ALSO TAMPERED WITH.

- THE SMOULDERING DISCONTENT EXPLODED INTO A GREAT UPRISING OVER THE USE OF THE GREASED CARTRIDGES ON THE ENFIELD RIFLES. THE MUSLIMS WERE LED TO BELIEVE THAT IT WAS THE PIG'S FLESH WHICH THEY HAD TO TEAR WITH THEIR MOUTHS, WHILE THE HINDUS BELIEVED THAT IT WAS THE FLESH OF THE COW WHICH HAD TO BE TORN UP BY THEM.
- AS TO TEAR PIG WAS SACRILIGIOUS TO THE MUSLIMS AND THE COW TO THE HINDUS, THIS INCIDENT BECAME THE IMMEDIATE CAUSE THAT LED TO THE REVOLT AMONG SECTION OF THE SOLDIERS IN THE BARRACKS OF BARRACKPORE.
- SOON THE MUTINY SPREAD LIKE WILD FIRE IN DIFFERENT PARTS OF THE COUNTRY AS NOT ONLY THE SOLDIERS, PEOPLE CUTTING ACROSS ALL STRATA OF SOCIETY FELT THE BRUNT OF BRITISH OPPRESSION AND THE NEED TO FREE THEMSELVES FROM BRITISH RULE AND RESTORE THE MUGHALS UNITED THEM FOR A GREATER CAUSE PARTICULARLY IN NORTHERN INDIA.

RESULTS AND SIGNIFICANCE

- THUS CONSIDERING FROM ALL ASPECTS AND DESPITE THE FACT THAT SOUTH INDIA, EASTERN INDIA, THE EDUCATED INTELLIGENTSIA, SOME PRINCELY STATES CHOSE TO STAY AWAY FROM JOINING THE REBELS, THE TRUTH IS THAT THE UPRISING OF 1857 WAS NOT LIMITED TO A CERTAIN SECTION OF THE SEPOYS ONLY. PEOPLE AFFECTED BY THE DOMINATION OF THE BRITISHERS, CUTTING ACROSS ALL STRATA OF SOCIETY JOINED THE REBELS FOR A GREATER CAUSE TO DRIVE AWAY THE BRITISH FROM INDIA. THIS WAS THE FIRST EVER ATTEMPT TO DO SO.
- HENCE THE EFFORTS OF RANI LAXMIBAI OF JHANSI, TANTIYA TOPE, NANA SAHIB, MANGAL PANDEY AND A HOST OF OTHER REBEL LEADERS REMAINS A LAUDABLE CHAPTER IN THE ANNALS OF INDIAN HISTORY. THOUGH IT WAS CRUSHED MERCILESSLY, IT DEFINITELY CAN BE REGARDED AS THE FIRST WAR OF INDIA'S INDEPENDENCE AGAINST BRITISH RULE.

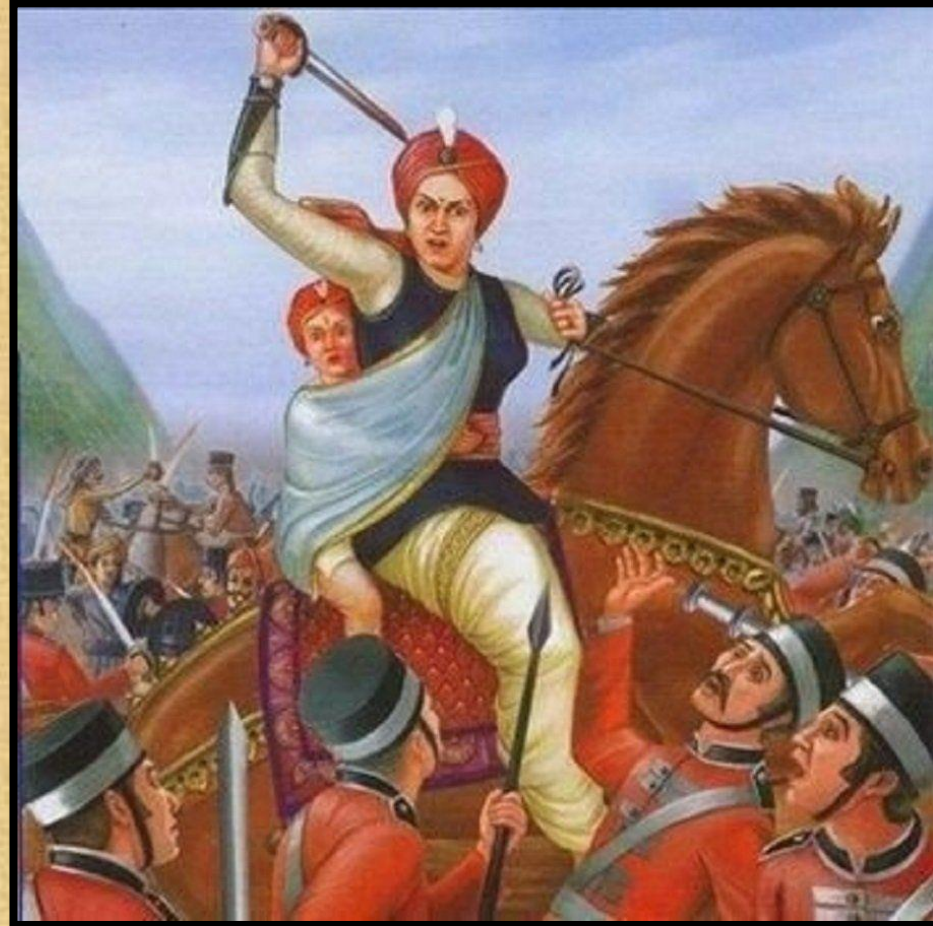


IMAGE OF THE WARRIOR QUEEN: RANI OF JHANSI
SOURCE: TMES NOW