

**Note****11**

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REVOLT OF 1857 AND REFORMS IN THE INDIAN ARMY

The British faced a number of resistance from Indians throughout their occupation of India. There were mutinies, battles fought, but they were cunning and had superior fire arms which gave them victories. You learnt about the wars fought by Indians to drive away the British, in the previous lesson. There were some important mutinies which as a student of history you must know and understand the importance of fighting for one's rights and freedom. The mutinies also brought in reforms among the military. In this lesson, let us see the various mutinies and the first war of independence that took place and also learn about the military reforms.



Objectives

After studying this lesson you will be able to:

- analyse the reasons for mutinies that happened during the rule of the British and
- explain the military reforms.

11.1 Vellore Mutiny by Madras Native Infantry

As a student of Military history one should know or study about why Vellore Mutiny also known as Indian Mutiny took place in the year 1806. This incident is considered to be the first revolt against the British who colonized us. This mutiny by the native Indians was due to a change in dress code ordered by the British, in which the Muslims were ordered to shave their beards and trim the moustaches and the Hindus prohibited from wearing a tilak on their fore head. General Sir John Craddock who was the Commander-in-Chief of the Madras Army ordered the sepoys to wear a round hat which resembled like the one used by the Europeans and gave the impression as if the Indians had converted to Christianity. All these issues triggered the sentiments of Muslims and the Hindus and also the sepoys of the Indian natives were ill treated and punished. In this revolt, the mutineers seized Vellore fort and killed or wounded more than 150 British troops.



Note

11.1.1 First war of Independence.

This event occurred in 1857 not as a result of any single event, but as an culmination of many happenings over time. We know that the Company's army recruited large number of Hindu and Muslim sepoys as native soldiers. There were nearly 300,000 sepoys in the army and the British were about 50,000. There was huge difference. The forces were divided into three presidencies. When compared to Madras Army and Bombay Army, the Bengal Army recruited higher castes like Rajputs and Brahmins. The selection was not based on the physical fitness, willingness, courage and strength instead, it was more on caste basis. What were the factors that led to a revolt?

- First was the policy of recruiting higher caste Brahmins in the army, thus causing misunderstanding and rift within the sepoys.
- Second was the rumour that the British were converting hindus and muslims to Christianity. The British were also working towards abolition of Sati (a practice of the wife killing herself when her husband died).
- Then there were other smaller issues such as delayed promotions to Indian soldiers and exclusion from Foreign Service.
- It has been said that the spark to start the mutiny was over the issue of rifle cartridges (ammunition used in rifles) in which it was rumored that they were made from pig/cow fat. To use the ammunition one had to use teeth to bite and tear away the wrappings. This went against the sentiments of both the hindus and muslims.



Do you Know?

Mangal Pandey was born in a high caste hindu family in Uttar Pradesh (Ballia). He joined the 34th Bengal native infantry as a sepoy at a young age. The legend describes him as a 9ft. tall man! He got hugely enraged by the introduction of the New Enfield rifle. It was rumored that the cartridge was made up of animal fat mainly from Cows and Pigs. To use this rifle the soldiers were to bite off the cartridge.

Enraged by this and to show his anger he decided to take violent action against the Britishers. He fired upon Lt. Baugh the Adjutant of the 34th Bengal native Infantry on 29th march 1857. He encouraged his fellow sepoys to join him. He was later arrested in injured condition and was sentenced to death. He was hanged on 8th April 1857, ten days before the fixed date of execution. The daring and dashing act of Mangal Pandey triggered off series of revolts all over the country.

The Indian govt. issued a stamp to commemorate him in 1984.

**Note**

The revolt started earlier than schedule because a sepoy named Mangal Pandey hit and wounded a British sergeant. He was later arrested and hanged for causing a mutiny. This mutiny led to a number of other such revolts against the East India Company. You must have heard of brave Indians like Jhansi ki Rani, Tantia Tope and other communities of Rajputs and Jats, which revolted. The Company was slow to act but later they managed to stop the rebellion with superior firepower and weapons. These revolts led to the dismissal of the East India Company and establishment of a direct rule by the Queen of England. The army organization also changed.

**Intext Questions****11.1**

1. What is the name of the first Indian Mutiny in 1806?
2. Which Mutiny took place in 1857?
3. Name the Sepoy who hit and wounded a British Soldier?

11.3 Reforms in the Indian Army

The failure of the East India Company prompted the Queen to take over governance of India and proclaim it under the 'Crown'. Let us try to understand what reforms took place after the Queen's rule in India. After the 1857 war of Independence the Company rule came to an end and the crown took over India. A grand durbar was held at Allahabad on November 1, 1858. Lord Canning sent forth the royal proclamation that the queen will be the deciding authority in India and this proclamation declared the future policy of the British Rule in India. The document was called "Magna Carta of the People of India". It gave clear guidelines on Principles of Justice and religious tolerance in the Queen's rule. The Doctrine of Lapse (allow company to annex the principality of any Indian ruler who died without natural heirs or one who was manifestly incompetent or not fit to rule) was cancelled and the British stopped the policy of annexation. The document also granted forgiveness to all, except those who had directly taken part in murdering the British people. Peace was proclaimed throughout India on July 8, 1859. The armies of the East India Company came to an end and the forces in India were incorporated as an integral part of the British army. The most important thing happened due to this proclamation was that the Indian Sepoys were enlisted in the regular service in the British Indian Army and they participated in the Wars fought by the British army.

So what were the reforms that took place, which changed the outlook of the British Indian Army? The British Indian army was becoming stronger as time passed by and modern technology was introduced in the form of guns, rifles and ammunition. By the end of the nineteenth century the army had changed from mere guards and temporary recruits of locals, it had become a professional fighting force with proper regiments of

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Military History of the Colonial Era



Note

Revolt of 1857 and Reforms in the Indian Army

infantry, cavalry and artillery. Indian officers were recruited to lead the battle. The native Indian army was now called the British Indian army and the soldiers were professional, honest men with a sense of unity. The organisation of the army was also strengthened. The professionalism of Indian soldiers and officers would be put to test during World Wars I & II. During these wars they showed the world how brave and disciplined they were. Many battles were won in both the wars because of the Indians. The reforms in the army that were carried out were as follows:-

- (a) Organisation of Infantry : Just as companies have managers, supervisors, an army also has a rank structure which essentially gives levels of responsibilities to capable persons. A battalion of infantry had 600 sepoy with Subedar, Jamadar, Havildars and Naiks. The officers were British initially, with 6 officers in a battalion. Later, Indian officers were commissioned and given responsibility to lead the men. They were called the King's Commissioned Officers or KCO in short. The first batch of KCOs included, Commander-in-Chief Tripura Forces and Colonel Rana Jodha Jung Bahadur, Amar Singh, Major General AA Rudra, K A D Naoroji (grandson of Dadabhai Naoroji), Field Marshal K M Cariappa and C B Ponnappa.
- (b) Organisation of Cavalry : Similar reorganization was made in Cavalry too. In 1861 it was decided that each regiment of the Native cavalry in Bengal would consist of 420 sowars (sepoys), divided into six troops with, making a total of 499 of all ranks. They would have Risaldars (same as Subedars in Infantry), Wardi Major, Jamadars, Dafadars (same as Havildars in infantry) and Trumpeters. Each regiment had One British Commandant and 5 British officers. A Native Cavalry regiment was divided into three squadrons. Each Squadron had 152 men and 152 horses. These in later years would be converted to tanks. After the 1857, young British Officers were posted to Native regiments only after they had been thoroughly trained in the British regiment. They were compulsorily required to learn the Indian languages so that they could establish rapport with their men and also ensure that orders and instructions were explained to the sepoys in the local language. The Native soldiers were deliberately armed with inferior weapons to those given to the British privates, due to a fear that Indians could revolt anytime.



What You Have Learnt

- We clearly understood main causes, which led to the first war of independence.
- The after effects brought in many changes in the military organizations.
- The British Indian army was now organized into a professional army on the lines of the British model. They had a proper rank structure and responsibilities.

- Regular military training was started which would prove to be very useful in the wars, which they would be required to fight.



Terminal Questions

1. How did the British settle in India?
2. Write a short note about battle of Wandiwash.
3. What were the reasons for the 1857 mutiny?
4. What document was called the Magna Carta of India?



Answers to In-text Questions

11.1

1. Vellore Mutiny
2. Sepoy Mutiny
3. Mangal Pandey



Note

