



Mains Practice Question

Q. The revolt of 1857 was a cumulative effect of character and policies of Colonial rule in India. Examine. (250 words)

09 Mar, 2019 GS Paper 1 History

Approach

- In very brief write about the nature of the revolt.
- Examine character and policies of Colonial rule whose cumulative effect led to the revolt.
- In conclusion write significance of the revolt.

Introduction

- The revolt of 1857 started on 10th May when the Company's Indian soldiers at Meerut rebelled. Called the Sepoy Mutiny by the British, it is now recognized as the First War of Independence against the British rulers.
- This rebellion was a major anti-colonial movement against the aggressive imperialist policies of the British. In fact, it was an economic, political and social struggle against the British rule.

Body

Oppressive character and policies of Colonial rule in India:

- **Political policies:** The nature of colonial expansion through annexation became a major source of discontent among the Indian rulers.
 - Their policy of annexation called Doctrine of Lapse led to a number of independent kingdoms being annexed to the British Empire. These were states that were enjoying British protection but their rulers had died without leaving a natural heir to the throne. In this manner Lord Dalhousie annexed the Maratha States of Satara, Nagpur, Jhansi and several other minor kingdoms.
 - This interference by the East India Company was disliked by many Indian rulers.
 - The policy of annexation also affected soldiers, crafts people and even the nobles.
 - Even the traditional scholarly and priestly classes lost the patronage which they were getting from these rulers.
- **Economic policies:** It caused the disruption of the traditional Indian economy and its subordination to the British economy.
 - Indian economy now suffered under the British policies. Since they worked against the interests of Indian trade and industry, Indian handicrafts completely collapsed.
 - The British sold cheap, machine made clothes in India which destroyed the Indian cottage industry. It also left millions of craftsmen unemployed.
 - The Britishers also imposed heavy duties on Indian made goods. Now they could reap huge profits as there was no competition for their goods. Thus, the British drained India of her wealth and her natural resources.
 - The colonial policy of intensifying land revenue demand led to a large number of peasants losing their land. Permanent Settlement of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa did not recognise the hereditary rights of the peasants on land and if they failed to pay 10/11 th of the entire

produce, their property could be sold off.

- Social and Religious interference:
- Social reforms against sati, female infanticide, widow re-marriage and education of woman, made many people unhappy. The missionary work instilled apprehensions in masses.
- The religious sentiments of the sepoys were hurt in 1806 in the Madras presidency. The Hindus were asked to remove their caste marks from their foreheads and the Muslims were asked to trim their beards
- **Discontent in the Army:**
 - Indian soldiers were not given posts above that of subedars. Some sepoys wanted special bhatta/allowance if sent on oversea duty. Sometimes they were paid, but most of the time they were not.
 - They were paid salaries less than their English counterparts. As a result, the morale of the Indian sepoy was very low.
- **Administrative character:** Rampant corruption in the Company's administration, especially among the police, petty officials and lower law courts, was a major cause of the discontent.
- **British foreign policy:** The revolt succeeded with certain outside events in which the British suffered serious losses-the First Afghan War (1838-42), Punjab Wars (1845-49), and the Crimean wars (1854-56). The British were seen to be not so strong and it was felt that they could be defeated.
- **Immediate policies:** The government decided to replace the old-fashioned musket, 'Brown Bags' by the 'Enfield rifle. The loading process of the Enfield rifle involved bringing the cartridge to the mouth and biting off the top. There was a rumour among the Sepoys in January 1857 that the greased cartridge contained the fat of cow and pig. This sparked off the revolt of sepoys on 29th March 1857.

Conclusion

- The Revolt of 1857 was the first sign that the Indians wanted to end British rule and were ready to stand united for this cause. Even though they failed to achieve their objective they succeeded in sowing the seeds of nationalism among the Indians.