

Revolt of 1857 (First War of Independence)

Introduction

The Revolt of 1857 was the first large-scale armed uprising against British rule in India.

- Began: **10 May 1857**, Meerut
- Symbolic leader: **Bahadur Shah Zafar**
- Nature: Sepoy mutiny → Civil rebellion

It marked a **watershed in British policy towards India**.

Causes of the Revolt of 1857

A. Political Causes

Doctrine of Lapse

- Introduced by **Lord Dalhousie**
- Annexed states without a natural heir
- Affected: Satara, Jhansi, Nagpur

Annexation of Awadh (1856)

- On grounds of misgovernance
- Alienated taluqdars, sepoys & peasants

Humiliation of the Mughal Emperor

- Successors barred from Red Fort
- Title to be abolished

Exclusion of Indians from high posts

- Civil & military discrimination

B. Economic Causes

- **Drain of Wealth**
- Destruction of handicrafts
- Heavy land revenue (Permanent, Ryotwari, Mahalwari)
- Indigo & Opium exploitation
- Peasant indebtedness
- Zamindari displacement

C. Social & Religious Causes

- Racial arrogance
- Missionary activities
- Fear of forced conversion
- Abolition of Sati, Widow Remarriage Act seen as interference
- Loss of privileges of pandits & maulvis

D. Military Causes

- Low pay & poor treatment
- No promotions to higher ranks
- General Service Enlistment Act (1856)
- Discontent among the Bengal Army

E. Immediate Cause

- Introduction of the **Enfield Rifle**
- Cartridges allegedly greased with cow & pig fat
- Religious sentiments hurt

Timeline of Events

Date	Event
29 Mar 1857	Mangal Pandey incident (Barrackpore)
9 May 1857	85 sepoy imprisoned (Meerut)
10 May 1857	Revolt begins at Meerut
May 1857	Delhi captured, Bahadur Shah declared Emperor
June 1857	Kanpur revolt under Nana Saheb
June–July 1857	Lucknow uprising
Sept 1857	British recapture Delhi
1858	Revolt suppressed

Major Leaders & Centres

Delhi

- **Bahadur Shah Zafar**
- Bakht Khan

Jhansi

- **Rani Lakshmibai**
- Fought Hugh Rose

- Allied with **Tatya Tope**

Kanpur

- **Nana Saheb**
- Declared himself Peshwa

Lucknow

- **Begum Hazrat Mahal**
- Supported by Maulvi Ahmadullah

Bihar

- **Kunwar Singh**

Causes of Failure

- Lack of unified ideology
- No central leadership
- Limited geographical spread
- Punjab & South India stayed loyal
- Many princes supported the British
- Educated Indians did not support the revolt
- British military superiority
- Poor communication

Consequences of Revolt

A. Political

Government of India Act, 1858

- End of the East India Company rule
- Power transferred to the British Crown
- The Secretary of State for India was created

B. Policy Towards Princes

- The Doctrine of Lapse was abolished
- Adoption rights restored

C. Military Reorganisation

- Increase in European troops
- Divide regiments on caste & community lines

D. Divide and Rule Policy

- Deliberate Hindu–Muslim divisions

E. Psychological Impact

- End of Mughal rule
- Rise of organised nationalism

Features of the Revolt

- Mainly North & Central India
- Sepoy and Peasant participation
- Hindu-Muslim unity
- Anti-colonial in nature
- Lacked modern nationalist ideology

Aspire with Ram IAS