



# Smart Revision

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

### WAR OF INDEPENDENCE 1857

**Q: Was the lack of unity amongst the Indians the most important cause of the failure of the war of Independence 1857? Explain your answer. [14]**

**ANS:** The attempt to overthrow the British and expel them from India was unsuccessful. The British were to impose severe measures on the Indians for their 'disloyalty'. Although resentment of the British was a single cause to fight for, the Indians were not co-ordinate or united in what they hoped to achieve. There was no general plan and no attempt to work together. In different places different groups fought for different reasons. Although the Mughal Emperor was something of a figurehead, most Indian princes didn't really want to see imperial power restored. Nor was there any real sense of national patriotism. India was too divided for such a feeling.

Perhaps the only real uniting force in the war was Islam. However, any degree of unity amongst the Muslims alarmed the Hindus and Sikhs who were not prepared to fight to restore power to the Muslim Mughal Empire. These reasons may well explain why the British came to see the war of Independence as predominantly a 'Muslim Revolt'. But this was not the most important reason for the failure of war of Independence.

Perhaps the major reason for the failure of the Indians was that the British were too Strong. Britain was one of the most powerful nations in the world at this time and its troops were experienced in warfare and highly trained in modern methods of fighting. They also had a good reputation for discipline on the battle field.

The only hope the Indians had to defeat the British was that there should be a general uprising across most India and for the Indian troops to act together. They were skilled diplomats and they knew that most of the Indian rulers were fighting to restore their own rights, not to establish a united India. So they found it easy to play the various groups off against each other. Although there were a number of serious uprisings against the British, but being uncoordinated it was only a matter of time before the highly efficient British military machine restored order.

**Q: Briefly explain three reasons for the war of Independence 1857? [7]**

**ANS:** There are many reasons for the War of Independence 1857. But the Most important three reasons for the war of war of Independence are following:

- 1) Introduction of greased cartridges.
- 2) Religious and social.
- 3) Military.

**1) Introduction of Greased Cartridges:**

The real cause of war of Independence was the introduction of greased cartridges. These cartridges were covered with animal fat (cow's and pig's fat) and were to be bitten by the teeth before loading in rifles. Both Muslims and Hindu solders refused to use these cartridges. A regiment of solders at Meerut rose up in revolt and killed the British officers and their families. Thus the war of Independence (or revolt) started and spread too many places such as Delhi, Lucknow, Kanpur, Jhansi and Gwalior.

**2) Religious and Social:**

As British political control grew, so did the spread of British culture. We have already seen how the British considered it their duty to spread their 'superior' culture.

Many of the British were more thoughtful than this, but in general the British treated the Indians as an inferior race. Indians and British did not generally mix as social equals and the British societies regarded themselves as small oases of culture in a largely uncivilized world.

Many Indians feared that Islam, Hinduism and Sikhism were under threat from British rule. The British always denied this, but they were not believed. It was probably not the case, but it was true that Christianity missionaries came to India to convert the local population as well as set up schools. In these schools the missionaries taught Christianity and expected locals who worked for them to give up their religion and follow the Christian teachings.

**3) Military:**

There were more deep seated resentment reasons for discontent amongst members of the armed forces. Most of the solders in the East India Company's army were Indian. The *sepoys* and *sowars* (cavalry) were almost exclusively Indian, but the officer class was almost exclusively British.

This caused great resentment. There were also regular rumors that Muslim, Hindu and Sikh soldiers would be forced to convert to Christianity and that they might be

sent to fight abroad, which was unacceptable to the Hindus. The use of Indians troops in Afghanistan had also proved unpopular as Hindu soldiers did not want to leave 'Mother India'.

**Q: What was the "Doctrine of Lapse"? [4]**

ANS: In 1852 Governor-General Dalhousie extended British control even further by applying the Doctrine of Lapse. When a ruler died without a natural heir the British would annex his lands. So Satara, Nagpur and Jhansi soon fell into British hands. Not surprisingly, this was an unpopular policy and caused much resentment, especially when it was used just as an excuse to take land. For example, in 1856 the nawab of Oudh died, and although he had several legal heirs, Dalhousie declared that Nawab had governed his people badly and took Oudh under British control. More than anything, this act showed how Britain was now dominant in India.

**Q: What were the main events of War of Independence 1857? [4 -7 -14]**

ANS: The most important events of war of Independence are following:

- In January 1857 the British announced that they were introducing a new rifle with a paper cartridge covered in grease to keep powder dry. Before the cartridge to be loaded, the end had to be bitten off. However, it was rumored that the grease on the cartridge was made from the fat of both cows and pigs. The sepoys were so angered by this that they refused to use the new cartridges.
- In March a *sepoy* named Mangal Pandey defied his British officers and was executed. But the real trouble began two months later.
- In May *sepoys* Meerut refused to touch the new cartridges. They were court martialled and put in prison, but their fellow soldiers broke into the prison and freed them. Meerut was sacked and British officers and other Europeans were put to death. Then the soldiers marched towards Delhi and capture it. The Mughal Emperor Bahadur Shah II became the unifying symbol for the uprising, winning the support of both Muslims and Hindus.
- The war spread quickly and the British lost control of Mathura, Kanpur, Jhansi and Allahabad as well as Delhi. Lucknow was also taken and British rule ceased to exist throughout what is called now Uttar Pradesh.
- However, the British proved to be too powerful to be defeated by an uncoordinated uprising across many areas. In September 1857 Delhi was regained. Bahadur Shah II surrendered peacefully, but his sons Mirza Mughal, Mirza Sultan and Mirza Abu Bakr were brutally murdered. Their heads were then presented to

the Emperor as a lesson. Lucknow was also regained by the British in September 1857.

- After the fall of Lucknow, the main centre of opposition was Jhansi. She was assisted by Taty Topee, an Indian general of great ability. But in June 1858 the British killed Lakshmibai (dressed as a man) in battle. Although Taty Topee escaped, he was later captured and executed.

Following the defeat of Lakshmibai, the British eliminated pockets of opposition and the war was officially declared at an end in August 1858.

**Q: What were the causes of war of independence 1857? [14]**

ANS: The causes of war of independence are as follows:

**1) POLITICAL:**

As the British extended their control, the local leaders saw their authority decline. Lord Dalhousie's use of the 'Doctrine of lapse was particularly unpopular. The seizure of Oudh in 1856 convinced many Indian leaders that the British were simply greedy land grabbers.

The mistreatment of the Mughal Emperor was another cause of unrest. By 1857 the emperor had little power left, but was an important symbolic figure. Dalhousie's decision to move the royal family from the Red Ford of Delhi to the more obscure Qutub Sahib was seen as a sign of disrespect.

At a lower level in society there was also resentment at the lack of opportunities for native Indians in the civil service. Added to this, English had replaced Persian as the official language of the administration and as the language in which education would be given.

**2) RELIGIOUS AND SOCIAL:**

As British political control grew, so did the spread of British culture. We have already seen how the British considered it their duty to spread their 'superior' culture. Many of the British were more thoughtful than this, but in general the British treated the Indians as an inferior race. Indians and British did not generally mix as social equals and the British societies regarded themselves as small oases of culture in a largely uncivilized world.

Many Indians feared that Islam, Hinduism and Sikhism were under threat from British rule. The British always denied this, but they were not believed. It was probably not the case, but it was true that Christianity missionaries came to India to convert the local population as well as set up schools. In these schools the missionaries taught Christianity and expected locals who worked for them to give up their religion and follow the Christian teachings.

### 3) ECONOMIC

We have already seen how the British merchants made substantial profits from their trading in goods such as textiles. The British also followed a practice of imposing high taxation to ensure that they exploited India's wealth to the full. Peasants and small landowners, in particular found it difficult to pay the increasing taxes and resentment grew. It was also true that some tax collectors were corrupt and kept some of the tax money for themselves. At the same time as they were imposing high taxes on India, the British were also keeping the salary of sepoy (infantry) low, causing more resentment.

### 4) MILITARY:

There were more deep seated resentment reasons for discontent amongst members of the armed forces. Most of the soldiers in the East India Company's army were Indian. The *sepoys* and *sowars* (cavalry) were almost exclusively Indian, but the officer class was almost exclusively British.

This caused great resentment. There were also regular rumors that Muslim, Hindu and Sikh soldiers would be forced to convert to Christianity and that they might be sent to fight abroad, which was unacceptable to the Hindus. The use of Indians troops in Afghanistan had also proved unpopular as Hindu soldiers did not want to leave 'Mother India'.

### **Q: Why did the British take tough measures against the Muslim community after the war of Independence? [7]**

ANS: The British considered that the Muslims community was largely to blame for the war and it was to be many years before they once more began to trust Muslims. In the army the British began to recruit men mostly from groups such as Sikhs, Pathans and Gurkhas, who they thought were 'trustworthy'.

The Muslims objected to the British education and to the use of English, both of which they considered to be un-Islamic. But the British withdrew funding from Muslim schools and Muslim education fell into decline.

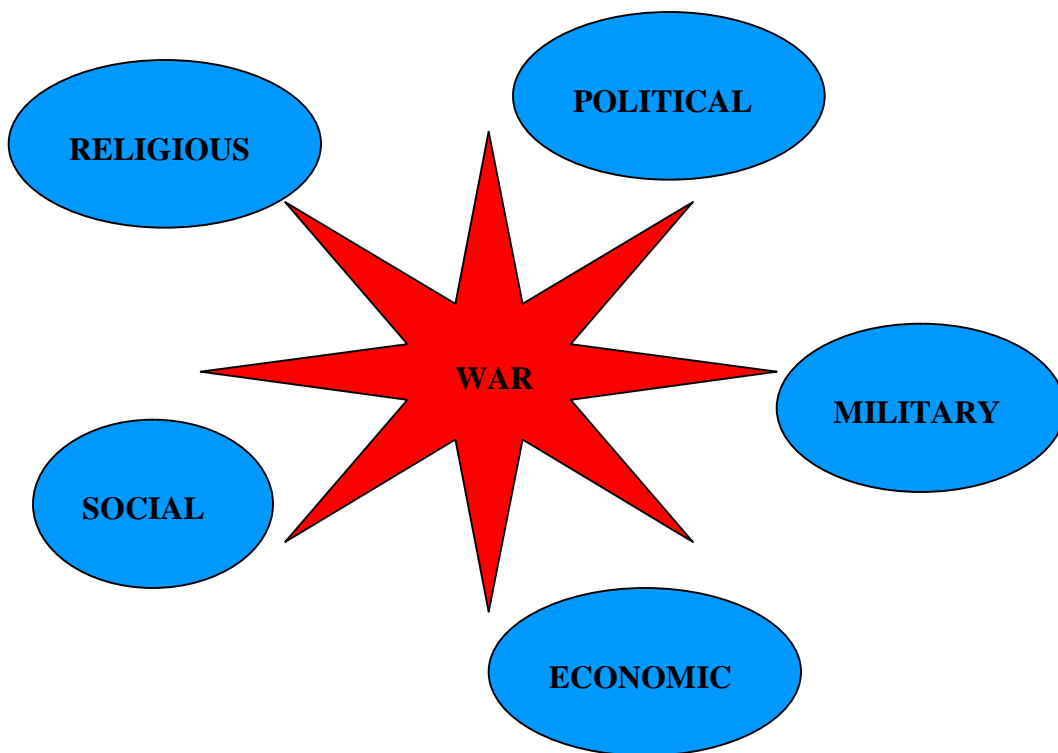
It may well have been part of the British plan to keep the Muslims illiterate and thus prevent them from gaining public office.

In contrast the Hindus soon found favour with the British by adapting themselves to the new rule. They readily accepted British education and many of them quickly learned to speak English. Although only minor posts were offered to Indians, almost all of these went to Hindus educated in 'English type' of schools.

As the Hindus were in majority in India and they were supporting the British, so the British no longer needed the support of Muslims who were in minority. The

majority was supporting them. Also the Hindus claimed that Muslims had persuaded them to wage war against British. They put all the responsibility for the war on the Muslims.

The British believed this claim immediately as they knew that before their arrival Muslims were rulers. So they believed that it was natural that Muslims will wage a war against British to try to take over the rule of India again. Hence British took such tough measures against Muslims to make sure that they will not rise and rebellion again against the British.



## **REASONS FOR THE WAR OF INDEPENDENCE**