

## India's Sepoy Mutiny

In India, Britain had not been on a path of divide and conquer. India had been and would remain divided by its own doing. It had hundreds of independent states, with the British ruling less than half of its total area and the British East India Company in charge. It was a rule motivated by commerce. From India, Britain's manufacturers were receiving raw cotton, and the British were exporting to India manufactured goods - one tenth of Britain's exports going to India. As the government for the British in India, the British East India Company was paying the expense of troops to defend their interests, saving the budget conscious British government this expense. Some of India's princely rulers were puppets of the East India Company, and if such a prince failed to cooperate with the company, the company might dispose of him and annex his territory, ousting him from power using the Indian troops (*Sepoys*) that it employed. Ninety-six percent of the company's army of 300,000 men in India were native to India.

Among common Indians the introduction of rail lines and telegraphy had spread a fear of being overwhelmed by the British, and they feared that the British intended to Christianize them. Rebellion against rule by foreigners came 1857 from those the British East India Company had hired as troops - the Sepoys. The British had introduced a new rifle which used rifle cartridges the end of which had to be bitten off before use, and the cartridges were rumored to be greased with oil made from animal fat - the fat of sacred cows being taboo to Hindus and the fat of pigs being repulsive to Muslims. In May 1857 a soldier shot his commander for forcing the Indian troops to use the new rifles. Violence against the British spread among the Sepoys, and it spread as leading landowners encouraged revolt among civilians, the landlords hoping to regain losses from land reform that the British had imposed on them. The revolt spread to Kanpur, on the Ganges River 250 miles southeast of Delhi, and it spread to Lucknow, 45 miles northwest of Delhi. A leading participant in the rebellion was the former Mughal emperor, Bahadur Shah II, and rebels looked to him as the power that would drive the British from India. It was what Indians would view as their first war of independence and the British would call the Sepoy Mutiny.

The rebellion included attacks on various European civilians and on British women and children. The British press exaggerated, describing the rebels as tossing British babies into the air and bayoneting them for sport. By September, Queen Victoria was writing about the horrors committed on women and children making "one's blood run cold." She wrote that,

Altogether, the whole is so much more distressing than [the war in] the Crimea - where there was *glory* and honourable warfare, and where the poor women and children were safe. [note]

India remained too divided for success against the British. It was divided in language, with Hindi spoken by only a third of the population, and Bengali by one-sixth. The powerful Indian state of Hyderabad was not interested in supporting the rebel leader, Bahadur Shah II. Other Indian states followed Hyderabad's example, and the Sikh warriors hired by the British also failed to join the rebellion.

The British public viewed their military officers serving in India as gentleman-warriors defending dignity, God's purposes and Britain's civilizing mission. There was talk of "the resolute vigor of the Anglo Saxon race." The British viewed those Indians who supported the uprising as ungrateful and treacherous.

During the rebellion the British government took control of India from the East India Company, Britain's possessions in India henceforth to be governed by a government-appointed viceroy and the British government's colonial office. And a more friendly policy toward the Indians was considered. Queen Victoria was concerned, and she exercised the crown's interest in foreign affairs and its right to give advice and to be consulted on government policy. In a proclamation she promised to preserve the rule of Indian princes in return for loyalty to the British crown. Indians under British rule were to be British subjects, and they were promised their own governance over local affairs. Queen Victoria wrote about attracting Indians with British generosity, about the privileges which the Indians will receive in being placed on an equality with the subjects of the British Crown, and the prosperity following in the train of civilization. [note]

The rebellion made a stand in central India, under the leadership of Tanya Tope. He was captured and executed in April 1859,

and in July the British described the rebellion as all but defeated. The British claimed that only a few thousand rebels were still in the field, men "belonging to the most guilty regiments and those which murdered their officers."

The civil war was a turning point for British rule in India. The Mughal emperor, Bahadur Shah II, was exiled to Burma and the Mughal Empire formally liquidated. The British replaced the British East India Company with direct rule under the British Crown. And Britain's Queen Victoria promised the Indian people equal treatment under British law. In the wake of the Sepoy rebellion, however, remained widespread mistrust of British rule.

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