

Various Resistance Movements Against British Prior to 1857



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The Revolt of 1857 was a major upheaval against the British Rule in which the disgruntled princes, to disconnected sepoys and disillusioned elements participated. However, it is important to note that right from the inception of the East India Company there had been resistance from divergent section in different parts of the sub continent. This resistance offered by different tribal groups, peasant and religious factions remained localized and ill organized. In certain cases the British could put down these uprisings easily, in other cases the struggle was prolonged resulting in heavy casualties. These disturbances and uprising, though did not succeed in uprooting the British power from India, became the precursors of the major Revolt of 1857. Before we take up the study of the Revolt of 1857 in detail, it is important to briefly discuss the various resistance movements and upheavals.

Bhil Uprisings

The 'Bhils' were primitive tribes living in the Western Ghats with their strongholds in Khandesh. They controlled the mountain passes between the north and the Deccan. Economic distress, famine and misgovernment led to the uprising against the British in 1817-18. The British succeeded in suppressing the Bhil rising partly by military action and partly by conciliatory policy adopted by Elphinston. However, a more serious Bhil rising in 1819 led to the ravaging of vast neighboring regions. The British used brutal force to subjugate the Bhils. Taking the advantages of the British reverses in the Burmese war in 1825, the Bhils rose in rebellion again and challenged the British authority in 1831, and later in 1846.

Ramosi uprising

The Ramosi uprisings were the outcome of the policy of annexation and deposition of popular rulers. The Ramosis once served in the inferior ranks of police in Maratha administration. After the final defeat of the Peshwa in 1818 and the annexation of the Maratha territories by the British, the Ramosis lost their means of livelihood. In 1822, Chittur Singh of Satara gathered Ramosis against the heavy assessment by the British and plundered the neighboring regions of Satara. The Ramosis around Poona revolted in 1826 under the leadership of Umaji Naik and his supporter Bapu Trimbakji Sawant. For three years the Ramosis continued to harass the British. The British Government followed a pacifist policy condoning the crimes of the Ramosis, granting them land and recruiting them as hill police.

Revolt in Sawantwadi

The events in Kolhapur had their impact on Sawantwadi. The people of Sawantwadi had already revolted against the British in 1830, and 1836. In 1838, the British deposed the ruler of Sawantwadi for his failure to maintain law and order in the state, and appointed a European Political superintendent to administer the state. The discontented rulers fled to Goa and planned revolt against the British. The British authorities introduced several laws and brought the state under control.



Revolt of the Raja of Vizianagaram

The British policy of land revenue led to a number of insurrections. In July 1794, the Raja of Vizianagaram, openly rose in revolt against the British. The reason was that British reduced the area of his zamindari and increased the revenue payable to the British. In an encounter with the British forces, The Raja was killed along with 300 of his armed men. Following this incident, the British followed a conciliatory policy towards the son and successor of the deceased Raja, Narayan Rao.

Revolt of the Poligars

Poligars on the eastern coast of India were the local military chiefs and barons within their jurisdiction. Their position was adversely affected by the Company's agreement with the Nawab of Arcot in 1781, according to which, the Nawab acquired the right of management and control of the entire revenue of the Tinneveli and Carnatic provinces on behalf of the Company. He was allowed to retain one-sixth of the total revenue. The Poligars, who had been revenue farmers for generations organized themselves to fight against the encroachment on their right. After several armed confrontation, the company, revoked the agreement of 1781 with the Nawab of Moot and restored the old system of revenue and the traditional rights of the Poligars.

The Wahabi Movement

The Muslims lost their political power with the replacement of the Mughals by the East India Company. The spread of Christianity and the Western culture were viewed as a threat to Islam. They resisted English education and remained aloof from Western influences. The Wahabi movement in Arabia was introduced in India by *Syed Ahmed of Rae Bareilly* in Uttar Pradesh. The Wahabi movement aimed at the purification of Islam and to return to the simplicity of religion.

In India the Wahibis did not restrict to the religious reforms only. They aimed at the replacement of the British rule by the rule of the true believers. Thus, the Wahabi movement took the nature of the political revolt.

Sepoy Mutinies

The first mutiny of Indian sepoy occurred in 1764, when a whole battalion from Hector Munro's Forces opposing Mir Kasim at Patna joined the *army* of the Nawab. However, they were overpowered and punished. This was chiefly due to lack of an understanding among the British officers regarding the social and religious customs of the sepoy under their charge. In order to bring about improvement and discipline in the army, the British officers ordered the sepoy to shave their beard, to remove the caste marks from their forehead. This enforced practice created all kinds of apprehension and suspicion among the sepoy. This factor led the sepoy to stage a mutiny in the fort of Vellore early in May 1806. A British contingent from Acort, brought the mutiny under control. In 1844, the 34th Regiment at Ferozpur refused to March into Sindh, The 7th Bengal cavalry and the 64th Regiment Followed the example of the 34th Regiment. The mutinous troops were marched back and their ringleaders were punished.