

British Rule in India

Throughout the 1400's and 1500's, Europeans often traveled to India to trade for precious Indian spices. This interest in India increased during the 1600's, when a British trading Company known as the "East India Company" set up trading posts throughout India. At first, India's Muslim leaders were able to keep the European traders under control. However, by 1707 the Muslim empire was collapsing, leaving India in a state of chaos. The East India Company quickly took advantage of the situation. From that time until the mid 1800's, the **East India Company** would be the dominant power in India.



Find England and India on the map above and label them. Then draw a line showing the route sailors would have used to travel from one country to the other.

"IT IS OUR AWARENESS THAT EUROPEANS ARE SUPERIOR THAT WHICH WON FOR US INDIA. HOWEVER WELL EDUCATED AND CLEVER A NATIVE MAY BE, AND HOWEVER BRAVE HE MAY HAVE PROVED HIMSELF, I BELIEVE THAT NO RANK WE CAN GIVE HIM WOULD ALLOW HIM TO BE CONSIDERED AN EQUAL OF A BRITISH OFFICER..."

- LORD KITCHENER

Based on the above quote, describe the attitude of the British toward the Indian people.

Sepoys

The British East India Company gradually controlled more and more territory in India. The British government was supposed to regulate the activities of the East India Company, but rarely interfered in the company's affairs. The company even had its own army which was led by British officers, but were entirely staffed by Indian soldiers known as **sepoys**.



The use of sepoy in the company army led to many cultural misunderstandings between the British and Indians. One such misunderstanding occurred in 1857 and had major consequences. It began with the use of a new kind of bullet for a rifle called the Enfield. These bullets were sealed in Beef and Pork fat. Cows (beef) are an extremely sacred animal to Hindus, and pigs (pork) are considered to be a dirty animal by Muslims; the two groups who made up the Indian population. Upon realizing what the grease in the bullets was made of, the Indians were horrified. Many Indians also believed that the British were secretly trying to convert them to Christianity.

Watch the clip and describe how the Sepoy soldiers had to load the Enfield rifle.

Imagine that you are a soldier in the Indian army. What would you do?

The Sepoy Mutiny (*mutiny- when soldiers disobey their commanders*)

Fierce fighting took place between the British and Indians. The Indian uprising became known as **the Sepoy Mutiny**, and soon spread across much of Northern India. Fighting went on for over a year and led to many casualties on both sides. Though the Indians greatly outnumbered the British, the Hindu and Muslim Indians could not successfully work together due to their religious and cultural differences. The British were able to finally stop the Sepoy's after the British **government** sent in reinforcements. By 1858, the British East India Company was taken apart and India was put directly under the rule of the British government who would rule over India until 1947.



MANGAL PANDEY, The Man Behind Revolt

By: Nishitha Mohandas

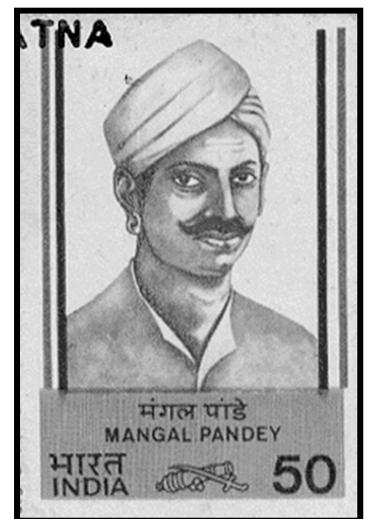
We read, see and analyze history in different angles. So is the case of India's First War of Independence or The Revolt of 1857. For Indians it is the First War of Indian Independence but for British it is a Sepoy Mutiny. However, the First War of Independence happened because of a brave son of India, Mangal Pandey. It was this man who woke-up the Indian masses from sleep to fight for the nation, which was ailing under the British.

The rebellion was, literally, triggered by a gun, the Pattern 1853 Enfield rifled musket. To load the new rifle, soldiers had to bite the cartridge, open and pour the gunpowder into the rifle's muzzle, then stuff the cartridge case, which was coated with some kind of grease to make it waterproof, into the musket as wadding, before loading it with a ball.

A rumor spread that the cartridges were greased with lard (pork fat) which was regarded as unclean by Muslims, or tallow (beef fat), regarded as sacred to Hindus. At that time it was believed that a high-caste **Hindu** who ate cows' flesh would lose caste, with dreadful consequences both in the present life and the next. Slowly discontent was rising which ultimately led to the revolt.

On March 29, 1857 Mangal Pandey began rebelling against his commanders. The British ordered the other Sepoys to stop him but they refused. Pandey tried to encourage his fellow Sepoys to begin an all out rebellion but he was unsuccessful in convincing them. As the British approached Pandey, he single-handedly began firing at the British troops. When it was clear that he would be captured, he turned the gun against himself and used his foot to try to pull the trigger to commit suicide. Mangal only wounded himself and was subsequently captured. He was court-martialed on April 6 and was hanged at on April 8, 1857. As a collective punishment for his act, all of the other soldiers who served with him were also dismissed.

Pandey's story of sacrifice and courage rapidly spread throughout India. On May 10, 1857, only one month after his execution, India had erupted into all out rebellion. The First War of Indian Independence had begun. *Or should we call it the Sepoy Mutiny?*



Should Mangal Pandey be considered a hero? Why?

"For Indians it is the First War of Indian Independence but for British it is a Sepoy Mutiny." In your opinion, which is the correct name for this event? Why?
