

India's First War Of Independence

India between 1858 and 1947 had been under British occupation. The occupation has been often called the "Raj" meaning "rule"; hence the widely accepted phrase the "British Raj" covering the whole of the Indian subcontinent. The British first came as traders in the form of "East India Company" under the banner of the British Monarch Queen Elizabeth I of England. These merchants came to the sands of Gujarat where they defeated the Portuguese hence befriending Jahangir, the son the Akbar the great, the Muslim ruler of India. The company eventually gained autonomy from British Monarch and started minting its own money and maintaining its own army.

It was in 1757 when Lord Clive defeated the king of Bengal "Siraj Ud Daulah" that gave the British the will and the courage to acquire the whole of India. Slowly they gained a wide territory from the north of the Punjab to the south taking Mysore from "Tipu Sultan". Several local kings were made their subordinates and protectorates and paid a monthly tax to the company to maintain their territory. The "policy of annexation" of several princely states caused resentment among the princes. The policy was that if a kingdom did not have a male heir, the territory would automatically come under British control.

India's freedom struggle started in 1857 famously described as the "revolt of 1857" or the "sepoy mutiny" by the British. Sepoy is synonymous to the current private in the U.S. army. The word sipoy is derived from Persian meaning a "sipahi", still used in the Indian, Pakistani and the Bangladeshi armies. The Indians however, like to remember it as the first war of independence.

The cow being holy to the Hindus while the pig considered dirty by the Muslims, rumours spread between the ranks that the British had introduced an "Enfield rifle" that used cartridges smothered with cow and pig fat. Indian soldiers refused to use the cartridges that were alleged to be greased with the fat of cow and the pig. Mangal Pandey from Regiment of the "Bengal Native Infantry" of the "East India Company" refused to oblige and killed an English officer for insulting his religion. He was captured and hanged. This enraged other sepoys and they rebelled. They freed the sepoys that had refused to cooperate and fled. The news spread across other barracks. This single event on March 29, 1857 at Barrackpore, India took shape as India's struggle for independence. The first war of Indian independence was born.