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**The Great Revolt of 1857 and Changes in  
Indian Administration after 1858**

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## Table of Contents

### The Great Revolt of 1857 and Changes in Indian Administration after 1858

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Administrative Changes after Revolt of 1857</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Military Changes after Revolt of 1857</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Impact of 1857 Revolt on Relations with the Princely States</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Effects of 1857 Revolt on Administrative Policies of the British</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Government of India Act 1858</b>	<b>8</b>

# The Great Revolt of 1857 Changes in Indian Administration after 1858

## INTRODUCTION

- The Revolt of 1857 had far-reaching consequences.
- This note describes in detail the impact of the Revolt of 1857 and the political, administrative and other changes that took place in the aftermath of the 1857 sepoy mutiny.

## Administrative Changes after Revolt of 1857

- Before 1858, the administration of Indian affairs was in the hands of the Board of Control of the British government and the Directors of the British East India Company. However, by the Government of India Act of British Parliament in 1858, this authority was divested from the Board of Control and the East Indian Company and was entrusted to the Secretary of State for India aided by a council.
- The Secretary of State was a member of the British cabinet and thus, the ultimate power over India remained in the hands of the British Parliament. Under this Act, the British Indian government was to be carried on as before by the Governor-General who was also given the title of Viceroy or Crown's personal representative.

## Military Changes after Revolt of 1857

- The British rulers realized that an army of united Indians was the biggest threat to its rule in India and so the Indian army was carefully reorganized after 1858, to prevent the recurrence of another revolt.
- To guarantee the domination of the Indian army by Europeans, the proportion of Europeans to Indians in the army was raised and fixed at 1:2 in the Bengal army and 2:5 in the Madras and Bombay armies.
- The European troops were kept in key geographical and military positions. The crucial branches of artillery, tanks and armoured corps (in the 20th century) were put exclusively in the control of European soldiers.
- The British rulers continued with the old policy of excluding Indians from the officer corps. Till 1914, no Indian could rise higher than the rank of a Subedar.
- The policy of divide and rule was actively followed and discrimination on basis of caste, religion and region was practised in recruitment to the Army.
- A fictitious division of Indians among 'martial' and 'non-martial' classes was created. Soldiers from Awadh, Bihar, central India, and south India, who had played an active role in the 1857 Revolt were declared to be non-martial. They were no longer taken in the army on a large scale.
- On the other hand, Punjabis, Gurkhas, and Pathans who had assisted in the suppression of the Revolt were declared to be martial and were recruited in large numbers. By 1875, half of the British Indian army was recruited from Punjab.

## Impact of 1857 Revolt on Relations with the Princely States

- Before 1857, the British aggressively pursued the policy of annexation of Princely states on one pretext or the other. The most infamous of these

policies was the Doctrine of Lapse. However, the events of 1857 made the British revise their hostile policy towards the Princely states. Most of the Princely states had remained loyal towards the British during the 1857 Revolt and had actively helped in suppressing it.

- Their role led Lord Canning, the Viceroy, to remark that the Princes had acted as the breakwaters to the storm which would have otherwise swept us in one great wave.
- To reward their loyalty to the British crown, the Doctrine of Lapse was abolished by the Government of India Act 1858 and it was announced that the right of the Princes to adopt heirs would be respected and the integrity of their territories guaranteed against future annexation. In return for this protection, the Princely states had to accept the paramountcy of the British crown.

## Effects of 1857 Revolt on Administrative Policies of the British

### The policy of Divide and Rule

- In the first half of the 19th Century, the British had made half-hearted attempts at social and administrative reforms in India. However, following the Revolt of 1857, even these token measures were discarded altogether. The British consciously adopted the policy of Divide and Rule in order to ensure the continuation of their colonial rule in India.
- The British were unnerved by the strong Hindu-Muslim unity displayed during the mutiny of 1857 and they were determined to break it at any cost. They began to turn the educated classes of Hindus against the Muslims in order to drive a wedge between the two communities. It offered the loaves of government employment to pitch one community against the other.

## **Hostility towards Educated Indians**

- The British introduced modern western education in India in the first half of the 19th Century. Universities of Calcutta, Bombay and Madras were set up in 1857 following Woods' Despatch on Education of 1854. The British colonialists also appreciated the fact that the middle class educated Indians, by and large, did not participate in the 1857 sepoy mutiny.
- However, in the second half of the 19th Century, the middle class educated Indians who had gained access to modern scientific education began to analyse the imperialistic character of British rule and put forward demands for the participation of Indians in the administration. The British now became hostile towards the slowly rising educated class of Indians and the officials took active steps to curtail higher education in India.

## **Discouragement towards Social Reforms**

- The British realized that one of the main causes of the 1857 Revolt was their active encouragement to social reforms like Abolition of Sati, Widow Remarriage etc. They now adopted a policy of encouraging the orthodox elements in the society and discouraged the social reformers. They actively encouraged social evils like casteism and communalism for their political ends.

## **Neglect of Social Services**

- Social services like Education, health, and sanitation remained at an extremely backward level in India unlike in Europe where there was rapid advancement made in this field in the 19th Century with the onset of the Industrial Revolution.

- Most of the revenue of the government was spent on the upkeep of the army, military conquests and administrative services while the social services were grossly neglected.
- Thus from the above, it can be seen that the effects of the Revolt of 1857 were wholly negative on the policies pursued by the British in India.

## Government of India Act 1858

### Background

- The Revolt of 1857 served as a jolt to the British government.
- There was widespread resentment against the company in Britain as the policies of the company were blamed for the revolt.
- Queen Victoria, who was the monarch of Britain, also became the sovereign of British territories in India, with the title “Empress of India” as a result of this Act.

### Features of Government of India Act 1858

#### 1. Provisions of the Government of India Act 1858

- East India Company was liquidated.
- Indian territories of Britain were to be governed in the name of the British Queen.
- The Court of Directors and the Board of Control were scrapped.
- The powers of the Company’s Court of Directors were vested with the Secretary of State for India.
- This Secretary of State was to be a British MP and a member of the Prime Minister’s cabinet. He was to be assisted by a council of 15 members.



- He was also the channel of communication between the British government in Britain and the Indian administration. He also had the power to send secret despatches to India without consulting his council.
- Via the Secretary of State, the British parliament could ask questions regarding Indian affairs.
- The representative of the British government in India was the Governor-General and Viceroy (both the same person to avoid conflict).
- The Viceroy and the governors of the various presidencies were appointed by the Crown.
- The Viceroy was to be assisted by an Executive Council.
- This act made India a direct British colony.
- This act abolished the dual government of the Pitt's India Act.
- This act also ended the doctrine of lapse.
- The Indian Civil Services was to be instituted for the administration of the country. There was provision for Indians also to be admitted to the service.
- It was decided that the remaining Indian princes and chiefs (more than 560 in number) would have their independent status provided they accept British suzerainty.

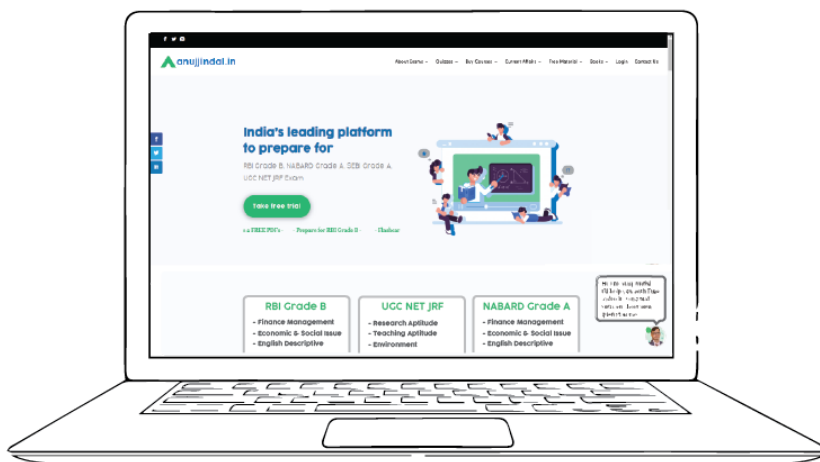
## 2. Facts – Government of India Act 1858

- First Secretary of State for India: Lord Stanley
- Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli was opposed to the crown directly ruling India, but his fellow MP's did not agree with his views and the bill passed the House of Commons easily.
- First Governor-General and Viceroy of India: Lord Canning

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