

Name: _____

Date: _____

The Sepoy Rebellion (1857-1859)

Sepoys were Indian soldiers hired to serve in the British East India Company's armies. Yes, it is quite strange to think of a Company having its own army and it is even stranger to consider a Company ruling a nation. However, the British East India Company did govern the subcontinent. In any event, the Sepoys rebelled in 1857. The primary cause of the rebellion was religious. In 1857, the Sepoys were issued new ammunition for their rifles. The new cartridges had to be greased. A rumour spread that the cartridges had a mixture of beef and pork fat. Of course, Hindus are prohibited from touching beef products. The cow is a sacred animal in Hinduism and Hindus cannot kill cows, eat beef, or touch beef products. As the dominant religion in India, many Sepoys were Hindus. Islam is also a popular religion, particularly in northern India. Muslims considered the pig an unclean animal. Muslims are prohibited from eating pork products. Many Sepoys were also Muslims. In response to this direct disregard for their religious beliefs, the Sepoys rebelled. They killed British officers and headed to Delhi to establish a new government. Regular army forces from Britain arrived in 1858 and cruelly put down the revolt. By 1859, the Sepoy Mutiny had ended. However, after the failure of the Company to prevent and crush the rebellion, the British government took over administration of the subcontinent. The British East India Company no longer ruled India. India became a British colony ruled by the government in Great Britain. On a side note about the original cause of the rebellion, whatever the actual reason was, cow and pig fats were not used in the earlier cartridges and East India Company was not running out of cash so the option to use cow and pig grease would not be necessary. There are other incidences too that added to the spread of this rumor, such as that Indians, many times in the light of nationalism, intentionally or unintentionally inferred that the ultimate aim of British-rule was to divert everyone to Christianity by destroying their own religions and faith. The East India Company did get dissolved after battle of 1857 after ruling India for 100 years.



Questions:

1. Who were the Sepoys?
2. Why did the Sepoys rebel in 1857?
3. What was the outcome of the Sepoy Mutiny?
4. What lessons can be learned from the Sepoy Mutiny?

Elisa Greathed:

An Account of the Opening of the Indian Mutiny at Meerut, 1857

Sunday, the 10th of May, dawned in peace and happiness. The early morning service, at the...Church, saw many assembled together, some never to meet on earth again. The day passed in quiet happiness; no thought of danger disturbed the serenity of that happy home. Alas! how differently closed the Sabbath which dawned so tranquilly. We were on the point of going to the evening service, when... Shots and volumes of smoke told of what was going on...The increasing tumult, thickening smoke, and fires all around...On all sides we could hear them smashing and plundering...We owed much to the fidelity of our servants: had but one proved treacherous, our lives must have been sacrificed...After some time...Just as the fire threatened our destruction, we heard the voice of one of our servants calling to us to come down...Our faithful servant, Golab Khan, seeing our perilous situation amidst the increasing flames, and that every moment was precious, with his characteristic presence of mind and quickness, had suddenly thought of a plan by which to draw away the mob, who, after having satisfied themselves with all the plunder they could get, were every moment becoming more eager in their search for us. He boldly went up to them, won their confidence by declaring himself of their faith, and willing to give us up into their hands. He assured them it was useless to continue their search in the house; but if they would all follow him, he would lead them to a haystack, where we had been concealed...The plan succeeded; and so convinced were they that what he had told them was the truth, that not a man remained behind. In this interval we got safely down...but we had only just time to escape into the garden when the mutinous crowd returned, madder than ever at the deception that had been practised on them.

Questions:

1. What happened on the 10th of May?
2. Who protected the narrator and her family?
3. How did he protect the narrator and her family?
4. Why had the Sepoys rebelled (from previous information)?
5. Why do you think the rebellion surprised the British?