

[Read about the next major battle in the Indian struggle for Independence - The Non-Cooperation Movement 1920-22](#)

[What was the major independence struggle after the Non-Cooperation movement? What led to the Salt Satyagraha of 1930?](#)



The British first arrived in India in the early 17th century. In 1612, the British East India Company established its first permanent factory in Bengal. At that time the Mughal empire was at its peak. Over the next 100 years, the Mughal Empire started to decline with the rise of the Maratha Empire led by [Shivaji Maharaj](#). The Maratha Empire waged war for 27 years with the [Mughals](#) from 1681 to 1707. The death of Emperor Aurangzeb in 1707 brought the Marathas into prominence in the sub-continent's political landscape.

Meanwhile, the East India Company was gaining prominence in South Asia. After the Company's victory at the Battle of Plassey in 1757 and Battle of Buxar in 1764, the Company gradually began to expand its presence and clout. By mid-19th century, after defeating the Marathas in the 2nd and 3rd Anglo-Maratha wars (1805-1818), the East India Company became a major political and military power in the subcontinent.

The growing British military recruited soldiers (sepoys or sipahis) from the local communities. The commanding officer of a battalion became a form of substitute for the village chief. The sipahis had to pledge allegiance (oath of fealty) to the East India Company and included faithfulness to the salt that one has eaten. The forces were divided into three presidency armies - the Bombay, the Madras, and the Bengal. The Bengal Army recruited soldiers from the so called higher castes; the Madras and Bombay Armies were more localized and caste-neutral. This domination of higher castes in the Bengal Army is considered as one of the early sparks that eventually led to the 1857 mutiny.

Many reasons contributed to the cause. One theory suggests that after the annexation of Oudh by the East India Company in 1856, many sepoys were deprived of benefits usually afforded to landed gentry. Another theory attributes the discontent among sepoys to the presence of missionaries. Local sepoys were convinced that the Company was masterminding mass conversions of Hindus and Muslims to Christianity. A third reasoning indicates that the changes to the terms of professional service of the sepoys may have created significant resentment. As the jurisdiction of East India Company expanded, the soldiers were not only expected to serve in less familiar regions such as Burma, but also had to make do without the "foreign service" remuneration that had previously been their due. Another financial grievance stemmed from the general service act, which denied retired sepoys a pension. While it only applied to new recruits, it was suspected that it would also apply to those already in service. Additionally, the Bengal army was paid less than the Madras and Bombay armies, which compounded the fears over pensions.

This build up of resentment through several events over time resulted in the eventual outbreak on May 10, 1857 at Meerut. The sipahis rebelled against the contemporary British establishment. The fire spread rapidly and soon several mutinies and civilian rebellions erupted in the Gangetic plain and central India. Other regions such as Bengal province, the Bombay Presidency, and the Madras Presidency remained relatively calm. The princely states of Hyderabad, Mysore, Travancore, Kashmir, and Rajputana did not join the rebellion. In some regions, such as Oudh, the rebellion took on the attributes of a patriotic revolt against European presence. Rebel leaders such as [Jhansi Rani Lakshmi Bai](#), Tatyá Tope became heroes. The rebellion led to the dissolution of the East India Company in 1858, and forced the British to reorganize the army, the financial system, and the administration in India. Thereafter, India was directly governed by the British Crown, ushering in the era of British Raj.

While the rebellion of 1857 was primarily a sipahi mutiny against the practices of the East India Company, it sparked Nationalist sentiments in the hearts of Indians across the sub-continent. It was a patriotic awakening, even if at the deepest sub-conscious levels for most people. Hence, later on, it came to be regarded as India's First War of Independence.



On 12th March 1930, Mahatma Gandhi started his March for 12 1930, with the aim of protesting against the British salt tax.