

# **The War of Independence (1857): Economic and Military Causes**

## **Economic Problems of Farmers and Landlords**

The British introduced harsh revenue systems where peasants had to pay very high taxes. Even when crops failed, the government did not reduce the demand. This forced many farmers into debt, and when they could not pay, their land was taken away. Landlords (zamindars) also lost their rights and wealth under new laws. As a result, both peasants and landlords became angry with the British and were ready to support a revolt.

## **Destruction of Indian Industries**

Before British rule, India was famous for its handicrafts, textiles, and small industries. But British economic policies destroyed them. The British brought cheap factory-made goods from England and sold them in India, while placing heavy taxes on Indian goods exported abroad. This made Indian products expensive and less competitive. Local weavers, artisans, and craftsmen lost their jobs and became poor. Many of these unemployed workers supported the uprising in 1857.

## **Drain of Wealth from India**

India's wealth was continuously taken to Britain. The revenue collected from Indian farmers and traders was not spent on the development of India but sent to England. British officers in India also took high salaries, pensions, and profits back home. In this way, India's resources were drained, and the common people received no benefit. This created widespread poverty and resentment against British rule.

## **Discrimination in the Army**

Indian soldiers, called sepoy, faced serious inequality in the British army. They received lower salaries compared to British soldiers and were never promoted to higher ranks. All senior positions were reserved for the British. Discipline in the army was very strict, and punishments for small mistakes were harsh. Old rights and privileges of sepoy were removed. This made the soldiers feel humiliated and angry, preparing the ground for a military revolt.

## **Religious Issues and Overseas Service**

The British forced Indian soldiers to serve overseas. According to Hindu belief, crossing the sea meant losing caste and religion. Muslims also disliked this practice as it forced them to go against their traditions. This created religious discontent in the army, making the sepoy believe that the British were trying to interfere with their faith.

## **The Enfield Rifle and Cartridge Controversy**

The final spark of the rebellion came with the introduction of the new Enfield rifle in 1857. Soldiers had to bite off the cartridges before loading the rifle, and these were rumored to be greased with cow fat and pig fat. This insulted both Hindus and Muslims—since cows are sacred to Hindus and pigs are forbidden for Muslims. Soldiers refused to use the cartridges, but the British punished them. This incident quickly spread anger throughout the army and directly triggered the outbreak of war.

### **Conclusion**

The War of Independence in 1857 was not just caused by one incident. It was the result of **long-term economic exploitation** and **military discrimination** faced by Indians. Farmers, artisans, landlords, and sepoys all suffered under British rule. The Enfield cartridge issue became the **immediate spark**, but the real reasons were the deep-rooted **economic hardships** and **injustices in the army**.