Modern History · GS - I

The 1857 uprising was the culmination of the recurrent, big and small local rebellions that had occurred in the preceding hundred years of British rule. Elucidate.

EXAM YEAR	PAPER	SUBJECT
2019	GS - I	Modern History

MARKS	WORD LIMIT
10	~150 words

Answer Hint

Early resistance to colonial rule; peasant rebellions; tribal uprisings; military discontent; economic exploitation; annexation policies; religious and social anxieties; Revolt of 1857; cumulative anti-colonial consciousness

Model Answer

Introduction

The Revolt of 1857 was a major anti-colonial uprising, but it did not emerge suddenly. It represented the culmination of nearly a century of resistance by rulers, peasants, tribal communities, artisans and soldiers against expanding British authority.

Earlier Rebellions and Resistance

- **Political resistance:** The Poligar rebellions in southern India and the resistance of rulers such as Pazhassi Raja challenged British territorial expansion.
- **Peasant uprisings:** The Sanyasi-Fakir resistance in Bengal and the Rangpur rebellion of 1783 reflected opposition to revenue extraction and agrarian oppression.

- **Tribal movements:** The Kol uprising and other tribal resistance movements arose from land alienation, exploitation by outsiders and interference with traditional practices.
- **Military revolts:** The Vellore Mutiny of 1806 demonstrated discontent among Indian soldiers over military regulations and perceived interference with religious customs.
- **Regional resistance:** The Paika rebellion of 1817 in Odisha and the Santhal rebellion of 1855–56 exposed the consequences of colonial revenue policies, dispossession and administrative oppression.

Connection with the Revolt of 1857

These earlier movements revealed recurring grievances: loss of political autonomy, excessive taxation, disruption of traditional livelihoods, racial discrimination and cultural anxieties. The annexation of Awadh, the Doctrine of Lapse and discontent within the Bengal Army intensified these tensions.

The immediate controversy over rifle cartridges triggered the uprising, but its wider spread reflected accumulated grievances across different sections of society.

Conclusion

The Revolt of 1857 was not simply a military mutiny; it emerged from a long history of local resistance to colonial domination. Although these earlier rebellions lacked unified national leadership, collectively they prepared the ground for the widespread uprising of 1857.

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