The [sepoys](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sepoy%22%20%5Co%20%22Sepoy), a generic term used for native Indian soldiers of the [Bengal Army](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bengal_Army), had their own list of grievances against the Company Raj, mainly caused by the ethnic gulf between the British officers and their Indian troops. The British had issued new gunpowder cartridges that were widely believed to be greased with cow or pig fat, which insulted both Hindus and Muslims.[[1]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Causes_of_the_Indian_Rebellion_of_1857#cite_note-Victorianweb-1)Other than Indian units of the [British East India Company](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_East_India_Company)'s army, much of the resistance came from the old aristocracy, who were seeing their power steadily eroded under the British.

**Sepoys**

In order to consolidate and control British territory, the East India Company maintained a well-established army of 257,000 [Sepoys](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sepoy%22%20%5Co%20%22Sepoy) (native Indian soldiers, called [Sowars](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sowar%22%20%5Co%20%22Sowar) in cavalry units), commanded by British officers. The presidencies of [Bombay](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bombay), [Madras](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Madras%22%20%5Co%20%22Madras)and [Bengal](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bengal) maintained their own army each with its own [commander-in-chief](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Commander-in-chief). Together, they fielded more troops than the official army of the [British Empire](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_Empire).

During the late eighteenth century and the early part of the nineteenth century, the armies of the East India Company, in particular those of the Bengal Presidency, were victorious and indomitable — the term "high noon of the sepoy army" has been used by a military historian.[[6]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Causes_of_the_Indian_Rebellion_of_1857#cite_note-Philip_Mason.2C_1974-6) The British had an unbroken series of victories in India, against the Marathas, Mysore, north Indian states, and the Gurkhas, later against the Sikhs, and abroad in Egypt, China, Burma and elsewhere. The British had developed a military organisation where fealty of the sepoys to the Company was considered the height of "izzat" or honour, where the British officers replaced the village headman in battalions and units peopled by soldiers closely related or belonging to the same caste, community or hamlet and became benevolent figures of authority to the sepoys.[[6]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Causes_of_the_Indian_Rebellion_of_1857#cite_note-Philip_Mason.2C_1974-6)

Unlike the [Bombay](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bombay_Presidency) and [Madras](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Madras_Presidency) Armies, which were far more diverse, the [Bengal Army](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bengal_Army)recruited its regular soldiers almost exclusively amongst the landowning [Bhumihar Brahmins](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bhumihar%22%20%5Co%20%22Bhumihar) and [Rajputs](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rajput%22%20%5Co%20%22Rajput) of the [Ganges](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ganges) Valley. Though paid marginally less than the Bombay and Madras Presidency troops, there was implicit trust between the soldiery and the establishment — the soldiers felt needed and that the company would care for their welfare. The soldiers performed splendidly on the field of battle in exchange for which they were rewarded with symbolic heraldic rewards such as [battle honours](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_honour) in addition to the extra pay or "batta" (foreign pay) routinely disbursed for operations committed beyond the established borders of Company rule.[[6]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Causes_of_the_Indian_Rebellion_of_1857#cite_note-Philip_Mason.2C_1974-6)

There was a feeling of invincibility, especially amongst the Indian population and the sepoys, about the *iqbal* or continued good fortune of the East India Company. During the mid-nineteenth century, events disturbed these beliefs of the soldiery, all of which contributed to the escalation of events in 1857. The belief of invincibility of the British was lost in the [First Anglo-Afghan War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_Anglo-Afghan_War) where poor political judgement and inept British leadership led to the [massacre](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Massacre_of_Elphinstone%27s_Army) of Elphinstone's army while retreating from Kabul. When the mood of the sepoys turned against their masters, they remembered Kabul and that the British, like everyone else, were not invincible.[[6]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Causes_of_the_Indian_Rebellion_of_1857#cite_note-Philip_Mason.2C_1974-6)

Caste privileges and customs within the Bengal Army were not merely tolerated but encouraged in the early years of the Company's Rule. Partly owing to this, Bengal Sepoys were not subject to the penalty of flogging as were the British soldiers. This meant that when they came to be threatened by modernising regimes in Calcutta from the 1840s onwards, the sepoys had become accustomed to very high ritual status, and were extremely sensitive to suggestions that their caste might be polluted.[[7]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Causes_of_the_Indian_Rebellion_of_1857#cite_note-7) If the caste of high caste sepoys caste was considered to be "polluted", they would have to expend considerable sums of money on ritual purification before being accepted back into society.

There were many indications that all was not well in the armies of the East India Company in the form of mutinies by company troops. As early as 1806, concerns that the sepoys' caste may be polluted had led to the [Vellore Mutiny](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vellore_Mutiny), which was brutally suppressed. In 1824, there was another mutiny by a regiment ordered [overseas](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kala_pani_%28taboo%29) in the [First Anglo-Burmese War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_Anglo-Burmese_War), who were refused transport to carry individual cooking vessels and told to share communal pots. Eleven of the sepoys were executed and hundreds more sentenced to [hard labour](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hard_labour).[[8]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Causes_of_the_Indian_Rebellion_of_1857#cite_note-8) In 1851-2 sepoys who were required to serve in the [Second Anglo-Burmese War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second_Anglo-Burmese_War) also refused to move, but were merely sent to serve elsewhere.

The pay of the sepoy was relatively low and after [Awadh](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Awadh%22%20%5Co%20%22Awadh) and the [Punjab](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Punjab_region) were annexed, the soldiers no longer received extra pay (*batta* or *bhatta*) for service there, because they were no longer considered "foreign missions". Since the batta made the difference between service being munificent or harsh, troops repeatedly opposed inconsiderate unilateral changes in pay and batta ordered by the Military Audit department. In the past, the refusal to proceed on service until pay issues were resolved was considered a legitimate form of displaying grievance by Indian troops serving with Indian rulers and as such was considered a legitimate tactic by the sepoys also, being repeated every time such issues arose. The British considered such refusal at times as treachery of the highest order and crushed these refusals brutally, at other times the Company directly or indirectly conceded the legitimacy of the sepoy's demands, as when troops of the Bengal and Madras armies refused to serve in Sindh without batta after its conquest.[[6]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Causes_of_the_Indian_Rebellion_of_1857#cite_note-Philip_Mason.2C_1974-6)

Bengal Army sepoys considered the transfer of the numeral 66th from a regular battalion of Bengal Native Infantry, disbanded over refusal to serve without batta, to the 66th Regiment of Gurkhas (seen here in native costume) as a breach of faith by the East India Company.

The varying stances of the British government, the reduction of allowances and harsh punishments contributed to a feeling of the troops that the Company no longer cared for them. Certain actions of the government, such as increased recruitment of Sikhs and Gurkhas, peoples considered by the Bengal sepoys to be inferior in caste to them, increased the distrust of the sepoys who thought that this was a sign of their services not being needed any more. The transfer of the number 66th which was taken away from a regular Bengal sepoy battalion of the line disbanded over refusal to serve without batta, and given to a Gurkha battalion, was considered by the sepoys as a breach of faith by the Company.[[6]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Causes_of_the_Indian_Rebellion_of_1857#cite_note-Philip_Mason.2C_1974-6)

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, British officers were intimately involved with the troops, speaking Indian languages fluently, participating in the culture of the times even to the extent of having native spouses. Later, the attitudes of British officers changed with increased intolerance, lack of involvement and unconcern of the welfare of troops becoming manifest more and more. Sympathetic rulers, such as Lord William Bentinck were replaced by arrogant aristocrats such as Lord Dalhousie who despised the troops and the populace. As time passed, the powers of the commanding officers reduced and the government became more unfeeling or distant from the concerns of the sepoys.[[6]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Causes_of_the_Indian_Rebellion_of_1857#cite_note-Philip_Mason.2C_1974-6)

Finally, officers of an evangelical persuasion in the Company's Army (such as [Herbert Edwardes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Herbert_Edwardes) and Colonel S.G. Wheler of the[34th Bengal Infantry](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=34th_Bengal_Infantry&action=edit&redlink=1)) had taken to preaching to their Sepoys in the hope of converting them to Christianity.[[9]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Causes_of_the_Indian_Rebellion_of_1857#cite_note-9) The controversy over the new Enfield Rifle, in the eyes of many Sepoys, added substance to the alarming rumours circulating about their imminent forced conversion to Christianity.

In 1857, the Bengal Army contained 10 regiments of Indian cavalry and 74 of infantry. All the cavalry units and 45 of the infantry units rebelled at some point; and all but 5 of the infantry units which did not rebel (or were disarmed before they could do so) had to be disbanded. Once the first rebellions took place, it was clear to most British commanders that the grievances which led to them were felt throughout the Bengal army and no Indian unit could wholly be trusted, although many officers continued to vouch for their men's loyalty, even in the face of captured correspondence indicating their intention to rebel.[[10]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Causes_of_the_Indian_Rebellion_of_1857#cite_note-10) Whether a unit mutinied or not mainly depended on opportunity.

The Bengal Army also administered, sometimes loosely, 29 regiments of irregular horse and 42 of irregular infantry. Some of these units belonged to states allied to the British or recently absorbed into British-administered territory, and of these, two large contingents from the states of Awadh and [Gwalior](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gwalior) readily joined the growing rebellion. Other irregular units were raised in frontier areas from communities such as [Assamese](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Assam) or [Pakhtuns](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pakhtun%22%20%5Co%20%22Pakhtun) to maintain order locally. Few of these participated in the rebellion, and one contingent in particular (the recently raised [Punjab Irregular Force](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Punjab_Irregular_Force)) actively participated on the British side.[[11]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Causes_of_the_Indian_Rebellion_of_1857#cite_note-Amin-11)

The Bengal Army also contained three "European" regiments of infantry, and many artillery units manned by white personnel. Due to the need for technical specialists, the artillery units generally had a higher proportion of British personnel. Although the armies of many Rajas or states which rebelled contained large numbers of guns, the British superiority in artillery was to be decisive in a number of engagements.

There were also a number of units from the British Army (referred to in India as "Queen's troops") stationed in India, but in 1857 several of these had been withdrawn to take part in the [Crimean War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crimean_War) or the [Anglo-Persian War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anglo-Persian_War) of 1856. The moment at which the sepoys' grievances led them openly to defy British authority also happened to be the most favourable opportunity to do so.