

# Vellore Sepoy uprising of 1806

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**In news :** Recently, the President of India highlighted the significance of the Vellore Sepoy uprising of 1806 at the 16th annual convocation of the Thiruvalluvar University.

## A brief note on the Vellore Sepoy uprising of 1806

- It was the first instance of a large-scale and violent mutiny by Indian sepoys against the East India Company, predating the Indian Rebellion of 1857 by half a century
- **Location:** It took place in the city of Vellore (Tamil Nadu), lasted one full day, during which mutineers seized the Vellore Fort
- The incident began when the sepoys broke into the fort where the many sons and daughters of Tippu Sultan of Mysore and their families had been lodged since their surrender at Seringapatam (now Shrirangapatana) in 1799 during the fourth Mysore War.
- The outbreak, though encouraged by the Mysore princes, was basically caused by resentment at new British regulations that ordered changes in headgear and shaving style and the prohibition of ornaments and caste marks for the Indian troops.
- **Suppression:** The fort was recovered within hours by a relief force of British soldiers and sepoys under Colonel Robert Gillespie from nearby Arcot.

## Causes of the Mutiny

- The immediate causes of the mutiny revolved mainly around resentment felt towards changes in the sepoy dress code, introduced in November 1805.
- General Sir John Craddock, Commander-in-Chief of the Madras Army, ordered the wearing of a round hat

resembling that associated at the time with both Europeans in general and with Indian converts to Christianity.

- The new headdress included a leather cockade and was intended to replace the existing turban. These measures offended the sensibilities of both Hindu and Muslim sepoys
- Hindus were prohibited from wearing religious marks on their foreheads while on duty, and Muslims were required to shave their beards and trim their moustaches
- In addition to the military grievances listed above, the rebellion was also instigated by the sons of the defeated Tipu Sultan, confined at Vellore since 1799

### **Effects of the Mutiny**

- Britishers severely punished the mutineers
- The senior British officers responsible for the offending dress regulations were recalled to England, including the Commander-in-Chief of Madras Army, John Craddock
- The orders regarding the 'new turbans' (round hats) were also cancelled
- After the incident, the incarcerated royals in Vellore fort were transferred to Calcutta
- The Governor of Madras, William Bentinck, too was recalled
- The controversial interference with the social and religious customs of the sepoys was also abolished

### **Similarities between Vellore Mutiny and 1857 Rebellion**

- There are some parallels between the Vellore Mutiny and that of the Indian Rebellion of 1857, although the latter was on a much larger scale.
- In 1857 the sepoys proclaimed the return of Mughal rule by re-installing Bahadur Shah as Emperor of India; in the same way mutineers of Vellore, nearly 50 years

before, had attempted to restore power to Tipu Sultan's sons.

- Perceived insensitivity to sepoy religious and cultural practices (in the form of leather headdresses and greased cartridges) was a factor in both uprisings