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REVIEW ARTICLE

ANALYSIS OF THE MUTINY OF 1857

Analysis of the Mutiny Of 1857

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ITS CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES

"Whatever the motives of those Indians who fought against their own countrymen and in support of the foreigners they were not 'traitors' as Savarkar has dubbed them, but the unconscious instruments of our modern destiny : they were the indirect makers of modern India. Those who were defeated looked backwards; those who were victorious looked to the future."

S. R. Sharma

"That unrest was caused by the clash of old and new on the material, ideological and religious planes. It was the last passionate pretest of the conservative forces in India against the relentless march of the west..... The mutiny was the swan song of the old India."

Percival Spear

"The mutiny was the outcome of the changing conditions of the time; and its causes may be conveniently summed up under four heads- political, economic and social, religious and military."

Dr. R. K. Datta

"The movement of 1857 was not pre-planned; it was not engineered by any political party in India or any foreign power hostile to England. It had its origin in sepoy discontent and derived its strength from the wide-spread disaffection among the civil population."

Dr. S. N. Sen

That is why an examination of the causes of the mutiny should not be confined either to the political uneasiness, or the economic discontent, or the social apprehension, or the sepoy discontent, but to the sum total of their interactions; for, the totality of all these causes led to the mutiny of 1857.

As the years rolled by, the political uneasiness in the country reached a crucial temperature, in particular, the sweeping annexations and the summary application of the 'Doctrine of Lapse' by Lord Dalhousie invited to resentment of both the Muslims and the Hindus. The attempt of Lord Dalhousie to evict the Mughal emperor from the Red Fort and the

annexation of Oudh contrary to an earlier agreement, stunned the Muslim community. The refusal to grant pension to Nana Saheb, the adopted son of last Peshwa, Baji Rao II, refused the wrath of the Hindus. This political dissatisfaction was aggravated by the demobilized soldiers of Oudh and the few other areas. Added to this, the haughty behavior of Coverly Jackson in Oudh exasperated the nobles.

The spread of the British Raj and the increasing liberal tempo in England led to certain measures being passed by British Raj which hurt the sentiments of the people. On top of this social unrest came the western innovations which alienated the orthodox of both the communities. English education was a threat to both Sanskrit and Arabic studies and exposed its votaries, in the eyes of both Hindu pundits and Muslim maulvis, to contamination of Christianity and infidelity. The telegraph was the work of evil one, the railroads with their jostling of the crowds in trains, a threat to caste. The government, these people thought, was secretly supporting Christian's propaganda and was undermining caste as a first stage in the process.

These were the twisted thoughts and the consequent hurt feelings which were running through north India in 1856 and of which the government, full of plans and self-confidence, was unaware or heedless. "These feelings were communicated to the Bengal army, itself a close and largely hereditary corporation with a large Brahmin element, through the soldiers, who unusually remained in their villages, to be visited at intervals of leave."

Percival Spear.

The motivation of the British Raj was beyond reproach, but the affected parties attributed sinister designs to all these steps. William Bentinck's resumption of rent-free lands made enemies of big landlords. The Inam commission of Bombay, after enquiring into the title-deeds of the inam land, confiscated about 20000 lands. The introduction of railways and telegraph were looked with suspicion, particularly the latter being called 'the accursed wire that strangled us' as remarked by mutineers. Added to this, the spread of English education, prohibition of Sati and infanticide, legalization of widow re-marriage

and the activities of the missionaries, were all suspect in the eyes of the people.

The third factor that caused a steep rise in the mounting tension was the increasing grievance of the Indian troops. As some of the regulations of the army hurt the social customs and religious sentiments of the people, four mutinies occurred in 1844, 1849, 1850 and 1852. The high caste Brahmins and Rajputs of Avadh, North-Western provinces and Bihar (present Uttar Pradesh and Bihar), who were recruited in the large number of the Bengal army, were very particular in observing their caste rules and regulations. Even while camping they would have their own separate cooking pots and lotas. When, during the Sikh's war, Sir Harry Smith lost his baggage and the three regiments under his command lost their lotas and cooking pots, the sepoys preferred to remain hungry for twenty four hours rather than partake of the meals prepared by men of the other castes. No wonder that the sepoys had a horror of 'Kala Pani' sea voyage, regarded as defilement. Again, the 38th Regiment refused to serve in Burma in 1852. And after the coming of Lord Canning, the General service Establishment Act worsened the situation—recruit the Bengal army like those of Madras were expected to serve wherever required, particularly when the Bengal Army was composed of many Brahmins. At the moment was introduced the Enfield Rifle with special cartridges, which were supposed to be greased with animal fats, particularly with those of the cow and the pig. As the cartridge was to be bitten at its end before being used, both Hindus and Muslims were alarmed. "On this inflammable material the true story of the cartridges fell as a spark on dry tinder." Mysterious chapaties were sent from villages to villages during 1856 alleged to spread hatred for the nefarious design of the British Government.

Then the storm broke out. Mangal Pandey, a sepoy, on 29th March 1857 murdered a European officer at Barrackpore. The revolt primarily centred round five reasons; Delhi, Lucknow, Kanpur, Rohilkhand, Central India and Bundelkhand. In May, 1857, the sepoys at Meerut revolted and marched on to Delhi and occupied it. They installed Bahadur Shah II on the throne. This lead was quickly picked up by the sepoys in the province of Agra, the city of Agra remained with the British. But Delhi was reoccupied in September 1857. This reoccupation was primarily facilitated by the loyalty of the Sikhs and the energetic steps taken by John Lawrence. Bahadur Shah was tried and exiled to Rangoon where he died in 1862, while a British officer treacherously murdered Shah's two sons and a grandson.

At Lucknow, Sir, Henry Lawrence lost his wife, as the residency was besieged by the mutineers. Although a relief force was sent to Lucknow, it was evacuated. It was reoccupied by Sir Colin Campbell in 1858 and the mutiny of outh was quelled.

In Kanpur, the British people suffered much. The mutineers led by Nana Saheb murdered both British civilians and troops, Kanpur was, however, occupied by Campbell in December 1857.

In Rohilkhand, the revolt started in May 1857. The Nawab of Rampur remained loyal to the British. Bareilly was occupied in December 1857.

Finally the mutiny in Central India and Bundelkhand was led by Rani Laxmibai. She was assisted by Tantia Tope. With the capture of Gwalior in June 1858 and with the death of Rani in the field, the trouble came to an end. Incidentally, there were rebellions in Bihar, in some part of Rajputana and the Maratha territory.

Coming to the consequences, the immediate consequence of the mutiny was the assumption of the two Government of India by the British crown. This assumption led to two consequences. First, it meant the end of Mughal rule, and with the disappearance of the Mughal emperor, the muslim community became depressed. Besides, the English believed that the mutiny to be a muslim conspiracy, the muslims became a suspect community in the eyes of English. It was Sir Sayed Ahmad Khan by establishing the upper India Muslim Association helped his co-religionist overcome their demoralizing despondency. The second consequence of it was that the name of queen Victoria became a myth of potent as that of company Bahadur, but one which was more personal and gracious. Queen Victoria as the impress of India "supplied for the masses a materialism to which the Indian mind is peculiarly susceptible."

Third, the mutiny drained the finances of the East India Company. Hence, with the transfer of the authority from the company to the government of England, a number of experts sent to India. It was these experts who introduced annual budgets, Income Tax, revenue tariff of 10 percent on all imports and paper currency. Soon this was followed by the granting of permission to the government of India to borrow money from the money markets for productive purposes. All these efforts ended the deficits of India budgeting in 1864. Thus, the financial history of modern India came in the wake of the mutiny.

Fourth, before the mutiny Dalhousie described the princess as obsolescent survivals of the past age, but the first viceroy, Canning, described them as "break-waters of the storm". It was the company's policy of annexation that triggered off the mutiny and the consequent civil unrest that followed it. Naturally in the post-mutiny era the British Raj took all steps to make the sepoys militarily weak and harmless. They also tried to conciliate the princess by recognizing their right of adopting and guarantying their existing territories. "Subordinate isolation was transformed into subordinate partnership." A further offshoot of

this policy was the formal declaration of suzerainty of the crown of England over the whole of India.

Another immediate consequence of the mutiny was a general distrust between the rulers and the ruled. The atrocities committed by both sides during the mutiny were remembered for a long time. In the order keep away from the generally of the people, the British Raj in India deliberately encourage the aristocratic sections of the community. The Royal Title act of 1876 by which queen Victoria was proclaimed the empress of India was explained by Lord Lytton as a beginning of new policy by the virtue of which the crown of England should henceforth be identified with the hopes, the aspirations, the sympathies and the interests of the powerful native aristocracy. It was this policy that gave encouragement to the autocracy and tyranny of the Indian princely rulers and also their alignment with British rulers as against their own people.

The reorganization of the army was also an immediately consequence of the mutiny. Some British historians have expressed the views that one of the causes of great Revolt was disparity in numbers between European and Indian troops (233000 Indian and 45322 British soldiers) they have pointed out that Delhi and Allahabad were held by sepoys and except for some British troops at Danapur, there were no British soldiers between Allahabad and Calcutta. Consequently the proportion of British soldiers was increased and artillery was practically reserved for them. Various groups were organized in the army so as to inhibit any sentiment of national unity that might grow. For that matter they wanted to isolate the sepoys by forbidding them to read the Indian newspapers. The changes that came in the army also led to restrictions on the use of firearms by civilians.

Besides, the British officialdom also changes its attitude after the mutiny. The officials of British bureaucracy became less sympathetic to the people and the crown, all restraints on the British officials in India were removed resulting in the bureaucracy usurping the functions of the government of India. True, the bureaucracy was highly efficient and they also meant to do good to the people and they understood it. But it took a different turn; they showed the contempt for the educated Indians for their rank ignorance of the real wants of the people. They were guided by the set ideals of subordinating the interests of India to those of England. The general behavior of the official community and thereby of the British Raj in India, confirms the comments on the English character that they shut the stable door after the horse escapes. In the post mutiny era the British Raj concentrated mostly on the past errors, and therefore, failed to think of future policy. This obsession with the past made the British raj obviously of the significance of the national movement and other reform movements. The British

Raj started respecting unduly the Indian tradition and discounting Indian regeneration on western lines.

Further, the British Raj's honeymoon with the progressive changes in society (abolition of sati, widow remarriage Act etc.), gave place to the humdrum activities of the post mutiny era like construction of few dams, improving roads and such others. This general attitude made the British raj in India so skeptically cautions that they did not think in terms of the future. This attitude blurred their political vision of India and they failed to appreciate the demands of the educated classes. The demands of the educated classes could not be understood; for, the form of oriental deference, which is second nature of Indian character, effectively hid their real feelings. "The British looked to the old leaders to give a lead in the westernizing process, believing that the rest of Indian would follow. No such lead came and the British looked no further. They could not bring themselves to take seriously the new class, which was dependent on their own instructions, the product of their own education. They were subordinates; it was thought, despised by their own leaders and so not of any account in the country. For this political myopia heavy penalties were later to be exacted."

Finally the end of the company's rule endangered the economy of India. India became a field of exploitation not for a single training concern (the East India Company) but for the entire British people. Prior to the assumption of authorities of the crown, the activities of the company were scrutinized by the home authorities. But when once the British people became masters, the critical attitude was relegated and the whole political power was utilized to the further the interests of all the Englishmen who came to India. The impeachment of governors-general and periodic review of Indian affairs after every twenty years became things of the past. India in the post-mutiny era became a dumping ground for British manufacturers and a inexhaustible field for investment of capital. A large number of Englishmen came to India for this purpose. "although their services as well as their enterprise and examples went a great way towards modernizing India of the western model, the Indian masses were deprived of substantial portion of its benefits and had a purchase the reminder at an almost prohibitive cost which they were unable to bear."

Thus, it may be said that as the use of force failed in 1857, the dynamic section of Indian community turned more and more towards peaceful means. "The last embers of the chaos and confusion bequeathed by the political disintegration of the 18th century were finally extinguished. A new era began in Indian history."

Short note on the failure of the mutiny

1. The mutiny had no legs because nowhere did it enjoy the broad popular sympathy; on the other hand, the Indian princess, in general, supported the British Raj.
2. "The British won out because, in a long view, they had all cards in their hand." Write Percival Spear. Both resources and organization favoured the British Raj. Even in diplomacy the British Raj excelled. The Sikhs supported the British although the very community was defeated a few years ago; the hill tribes of the north-west frontier eagerly enlisted in the British army although the British waged bitter war for years against them. Even Sindhia who had received a shabby treatment from Ellenbough kept quiet during the mutiny. Then although almost by a fraud the Nizam was forced to surrender Berar yet he too remained loyal. Hence, the comment of R.C. Majumdar: "A race which could successfully employ the sepoys against the Sikhs, and the Sikhs against the sepoys, the sepoys against the Pathans and the Gurkhas and the Pathans and the Gurkhas against the sepoys, certainly deserves an empire."
3. Although some of the British generals were inept in the beginning, the perseverance shown by the governors-general, the Lawrence brothers and Campbell, proved decisive.
4. The leaders of the revolt were parochial in outlook and there was no co-ordination in their campaigns. All the leaders of the mutiny were inferiors to the British in military and political talents.
5. The equipments of the British soldiers was superior to that of the mutineers.
6. The British could plan their campaigns well because of the control over the telegraph and the other means of communications.
7. The lack of destruction of the part of mutineers alienated the civil population.
8. Percival Spear advances a too general reasons: "Beyond this, the moral factors were on their side. They believed in their right and mission to rule; the tide of western self-confidence was still flowing strongly. National pride was at its height; death in better meant a hero's crown; they were the martyrs of the secular religion, of the age. But the rebels had no confidence in themselves or their cause. They feared losing something intelligible, but had no ideas of creating anything new. Their only positive aims were the restoration of vanished regimes, which would have clashed if they had been revived. In fear and confusion they rose and fought and died. But their deaths were not all in vain, for their failure convinced the quite formless but very real public opinion of India that the way of the old Raj could no longer be trodden and that in failure terms must be made with the new forces from

the west. Neither Mughal, Maratha nor the company was the real victor of the struggle. It was the pervasive spirit of the west."

An essay on the nature of the mutiny

It is hazardous to pin any label to the event of 1857 as there is no unanimity on the part of historians. However, the consensus of historians is that it falls somewhere between mutiny and national uprising. "It would thus appear that the outbreak of the civil population in 1857 be regarded as a war of independence only if we take that term to mean any sort of fight against the British. But then the fight of the Pindaris against the British and the fight of the Wahabis against the Sikhs in the Punjab should also be regarded as such. Those who demur should try to find out how much the rebels in 1857 were prompt by motives of material interest and religious considerations which animated, respectively, the Pindaris and the Wahabis and how much by the disinterested and patriotic motive of freeing the country from the yoke of foreigners. Apart from individual cases, here and there, no evidence has yet been brought to light which would support the view that the patriotic motive of freeing the country formed the chief incentive to the general out-break of the people." R. C. Majumdar

First, mutiny of troops was not rare event in the annals of British rule in India. In the time of Clive, there was a rebellion, but a less intensity, that broke out in 1809. A new kind of mutiny occurred at Vellore when William Bantick was the governor of Madras. In this mutiny, the native soldiers rebelled against a regulation which required them to wear a novel pattern of turban, and also an order forbidding the putting of sectarian marks on their foreheads. In 1834, a native infantry stationed at Barrackpore refused to proceed to Rangoon by sea on religious grounds. Immediately preceding 1857, there were a handful of mutinies in different parts of the country.

All these were straws indicating which way the wind will blow in the future. The British statesmen Thomas Munro, remarked, "The spirit of independence will spring up in the army long before it is ever thought of among the people." Sir Charles Metcalfe said, "I expect to wake up one fine day and find India lost to the English crown." In the days of Dalhousie Colonel Sleeman warned that the annexation of Oudh would cost the British power more than the value of ten such kingdoms, and would inevitably lead to the mutiny of the sepoys. Thus, the earlier mutinies and the prognosis of the English men indicate that the mutiny in 1857 was expected. And it was not the first war of independence because it was a lineal descendant of the earlier mutinies.

Nevertheless, the event of the 1857 was not occasioned by any immediate causes like the greased cartridges. We have to dismiss the view of outland that the mutiny was a mere military rising;

and we have also to set aside the remark of Sir John Lawrence that the mutiny had its origin in the army, and its proximate cause was the cartridges affair, and nothing else. Here we may also reject the argument of Sir James Outram that it was the result of a Mohammedan conspiracy which made capital out of Hindu grievances. To say that event of 1857 was caused by a few accidental grievances of Indian soldiers is something like attributing cataclysmic changes in the first century B.C. to the nose of Cleopatra, or the Trojan war to the face of Helen.

Another reason that makes us say that it was not a National movement is the fact that the mutineers had no definite goal before them. True, all classes of people in certain regions were irked by the British rule but they had no clear goal in the sense that the overthrow of the British rule was not conceived in the terms of freedom and liberty. The very fact that people with different motives joined the ranks of the mutineers proves this contention. The Gujars robbed both sides and they favoured neither.

In some villages old feuds were revived and villages fought with each other. The Banjaras in Saharanpur installed their own king; and the Gujars established a good number of chiefs and kings. Among these self-styled kings, one interesting person was Devi Singh, a village rustic in the district of Mathura, who under the false impression that the British rule came to an end, proclaimed himself as the king of 14 villages. Another interesting example is Mahimaji Wadi, dacoit, who joined Tantia Tope's troops in the hope that he would gain wealth. Still another example is Balesare, a Brahmin of the Maharashtra region, who left his village sepoy with the purpose of improving his fortune. Thus the divided aims of the mutineers show that there was no definite goal before them.

The fabric of British power was built over the ashes of warring factions and race enmities. The mutiny was exploited alike to revive the vanished glories of the Mughal empire- the foe of all Hindu principalities – and to re-establish the power of the Maratha Peshwa – the hereditary rebel against Mughal authority. The fact that the political direction of the mutiny first fell into the hands of men who replaced Bahadur Shah on his imperial throne was enough in itself to alienate the sympathies of all Hindu states. "The attempt to summon back the ghost of Mathura supremacy was, as it were, only the political second thought of the mutiny, and came too late for success, and when back of the rebellion was broken and the cause of the insurgents was obviously waning." P.E.Roberts

Apart from this, the outbreak itself was confined to few areas. The mutiny in varying degrees and impelled by divergent causes received popular support in the areas from the western Bihar to the eastern confines of the Punjab at the most. Even within this region a good number of districts and chiefs remain loyal to the

British Raj. The mutiny was very fierce in Oudh; fought for their king and country and they have no idea of freedom and liberty. The English were the aggressors in the eyes of the chiefs of Oudh. But as already remarked some of the chiefs like the rajas of Balrampur and Shahgunj remained loyal.

Thus, even though the mutiny does not show the national character it was based on widespread discontent born out of the changing circumstances of the political, social and economic fields of the country. It is the fact that made the barriers of caste and community meaningless, partly, in the mutiny. If the Sikhs fought against the British on the ridge at Delhi, there were some Sikhs within the city who fought for British Raj. If the tribesmen of the frontier were recruited to fight the Purbias, the Afghans predominated the rebel forces at Dhar and Mandasore. Nana and his faithful Azimullah Khan; Bahadur Khan, his bold son; and the Rani of Jhansi; her trusted Afghan guards. In the early stage the British, thinking that the trouble was caused by the high caste Hindus, recruited men from the lower castes and tribes. But Parsis swelled the rebel ranks in Oudh and the Bhills joined them in large number in Rajputana and central India. And the Santhals decided to fight the British Raj because they felt that the British Raj protected the money-lender. Thus, different sections of people joining the rank of the mutineers give a lie to the British contention of the day that the mutiny was a Muslim conspiracy which made capital out of Hindu grievance. As a penultimate point in favour of the argument that the mutiny was a more than a military uprising. We have to take stock of the contention of Dr.S.N.Sen. indeed it is true that the expecting Oudh the Shahbad district the mutineers did not enjoy any popular sympathy; but we cannot dispute the fact that the mutiny took all political colour when the sepoys of Meerut put themselves under the king of Delhi. "This event confirms the view that the rebels wanted to get rid of the alien government and restore the old order of which the king of Delhi was the rightful representative." And therefore, "what began a fight for religion ended as a war of independence." What all Dr. Sen intends to say is what although national sentiment was not represented, the mutineers in and around Delhi and Meerut were of the view that the alien rule should end.

One more argument to prove that it was something more than a mutiny. It always the equality of a dynamic civilization to recoil or to react whenever it is subjected to constant challenges. The challenges that India most since the time of the dismemberment of the Mauryan empire and till the establishment of the arcimperialism of the Guptas, were at the edge of golden age or the creative age of the Guptas. The second illustration is that of China, a country which was virtually partitioned off by the western powers from the middle of the nineteenth century onwards.

How did she react? Its first reaction was in the year 1900. The boxer rebellion fizzled out as its organization was fragile. But did China lie low for all time to come? No. with renewed vigour and with new ideas, the nationalist revolution under Sun Yat Sen occurred in the year 1911. This movement was at once democratic and socialistic. What did China do here? She attempted to assimilate the best in the western civilization. The third illustration is that of Japan. Here too, the cruelty of the western civilization. But not its mercy was felt by yellow race. Its reaction was the meiji revolution of 1868. This reaction was not based on the principal of assimilation but on the principal of aping. The Japanese went to the extent of thinking in terms of infusing western blood into their veins to gain equality with the western powers. This knowledge of the student clearly shows that every civilization react to the challenges in its own way, the way depending on the inherent characteristics of the civilization concerned.

Apart from this argument to show that the mutiny was not simply a revolt of the sepoys; we should also take into account to historical consideration in viewing the event of 1857, as much more than mutiny. The first among is the historical truth that nowhere in world history any revolt received universal support. When the 13 American colonies rebelled against England, a strong party within American, the loyalist, who supported the English cause. In the civil war of England, both parties were equally supported by the people. The second historical truth is that the nature of an event in any history is largely determined by how its posterity viewed it. In England the disgruntled barons extracted some concessions from the king in 1215, known as the Magna Carta. There is nothing to prove that the Magna Carta meant no taxation without representation; but this was the twist that was given by the lawyers in the 17th century England. Thus, the Magna Carta has come to be known as the corner stone of the English liberties. In the same manner, in India too, the mutiny acquired a halo in the succeeding generation. The extremists in the Indian national congress wishfully looked back at the rebels of 1857; and in the later period the congress movement regarded leaders like Rani of Jhansi as National heroes. The long-term effect of the mutiny goes to prove that it was more than a sepoy mutiny "it has been said the Julius Caesar, dead was more powerful than when he was alive. The same thing may be said about the mutiny of 1857. Whatever might have been its original character, it soon became a symbol of challenge to the mighty British power in India. Its remain a shining example before nascent nationalism in India, and its struggle from freedom from the British yoke, and was invested with the full glory of the first national war of independence against the British. Nana Saheb, the Rani of Jhansi, Bahadur Shah and Kunwar Singh became national heroes and champions of National freedom, and stories of their heroic struggle animated the fighters for freedom more than half the century later. Popular songs and ballads kept their memory alive and made it a powerful force to reckon with."

Thus, we find that the mutiny was not simple a link in the chain of sepoy mutinies nor was it a full-fledged war of liberation or nationalist movement. Had the mutineers succeeded they would have revived the old order of petty chiefs, stereotyped social customs and feudalism. The defeat of the mutineers was a blessing in disguise because it left the door open to the rising intelligentsia who pinned their hopes on British liberalism and on England as a country of Hampdens, Miltons and Burkes. Therefore, we can conclude that the mutiny was a great divide in the history of India.

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