



*Journal of Advances and
Scholarly Researches in
Allied Education*

*Vol. XI, Issue No. XXI,
Apr-2016, ISSN 2230-7540*

**AN ANALYSIS UPON TO UNDERSTAND THE
THEMES AND CONSEQUENCES OF INDIAN
REVOLT 1857**

AN
INTERNATIONALLY
INDEXED PEER
REVIEWED &
REFEREED JOURNAL

An Analysis Upon to Understand the Themes and Consequences of Indian Revolt 1857

Kuldeep Singh Bahia^{1*} Dr. Birbal²

¹Research Scholar

²Professor

Abstract – A group of Indian Historians described the Revolt of 1857 as people's revolt and regarded its leaders as national Hero's. Further, some Indian and British Historians have termed the Revolt of 1857 as the 'Mutiny of the Sepoys'. Opinion differs among the Historians as to the nature of the Great Revolt of 1857. The revolt of 1857 is a landmark in the history of India which brought the end of the rule of British East India Company and the beginning of the rule of British Crown in India. The Revolt was initiated by the sepoy of Meerut against the British; later on the joining of civilian in the revolt gave it a new dimension.

The Great Revolt of 1857 (also Indian rebellion of 1857, the Great uprising of 1857, the Great rebellion, Indian Sepoy mutiny) is regarded as India's First War of Independence against the British rule. It was the most remarkable single event in the history of India after the establishment of British rule. It was the result of the century-old British rule in India. In comparison to the previous uprisings of the Indians, the Great Revolt of 1857 was of a greater dimension and it assumed almost an all-India character with participation of people from different sections of the society. This Revolt was initiated by the sepoy of the company. So it has been commonly termed as 'Sepoy Mutiny'. But it was not simply a revolt of the sepoy.

-----X-----

INTRODUCTION

The Revolt of 1857 is an important event in the history of India. It began on 10th may 1857 in Meerut with the mutiny of Indian soldiers or sepoy as the British used to call them.

The unrest against the British rule that had been brewing for a long time now broke out into a revolt. The "mutiny of soldiers" soon spread like wild fire to large part of the country. The revolt was caused by wide spread discontent that the British policies in India had created. The policy of conquest pursued by the British had created unrest among many Indian rulers and chiefs. British had entered into agreements with them under a system of subsidiary alliance. Sind, Punjab and Awadh were annexed by this policy. The vigorous application of the doctrine of lapse by Dalhousie added to the discontent which the annexations had already caused.

The East India Company's rule from 1757 to 1857 had generated a lot of discontent among the different sections of the Indian people against the British. The end of the Mughal rule gave a psychological blow to the Muslims many of whom had enjoyed position and patronage under the Mughal and other provincial Muslim rulers. The commercial policy of the company brought ruin to the artisans and craftsman, while the

divergent land revenue policy adopted by the Company in different regions, especially the permanent settlement in the North and the Ryotwari settlement in the south put the peasants on the road of impoverishment and misery.

The Revolt of 1857 was a major upheaval against the British Rule in which the disgruntled princes, to disconnected sepoy and disillusioned elements participated. However, it is important to note that right from the inception of the East India Company there had been resistance from divergent section in different parts of the sub-continent. This resistance offered by different tribal groups, peasant and religious factions remained localized and ill organized. In certain cases the British could putdown these uprisings easily, in other cases the struggle was prolonged resulting in heavy casualties. These disturbances and uprising, though did not succeed in uprooting the British power from India, became the precursors of the major Revolt of 1857. Before we take up the study of the Revolt of 1857 in detail, it is important to briefly discuss the various resistance movements and upheavals.

A group of Indian Historians described the Revolt of 1857 as people's revolt and regarded its leaders as national Hero's. Further, some Indian and British Historians have termed the Revolt of 1857 as the

“Mutiny of the Sepoys”. Opinion differs among the Historians as to the nature of the Great Revolt of 1857.

At the outset we must keep it in mind that if a rebellion when successful is described as a War of liberation. A War of independence when unsuccessful is dubbed as a rebellion. The Indians regard the heroic uprising of 1857 as the Indian first war of Independence, but the British dubbed it as a sepoy Mutiny in which they only found that the sepoys fought for their narrow interest.

It appears that more than two hundred thousand gallant sons of Mother India gave their blood in the rebellion.

Historians observed that the movement was marked by absence of cohesion and unity of purpose among different sections of rebels. There was also absence of rules of civilized warfare on both sides and both sides fought with peculiar savagery. If the mutineers were guilty of terrible enormities the British troops were also on occasions tarnished the fair name of their Country by a severity that was hardly tempered by good sense or moderation.

“Meri Jhansi Nahi Dungi”- “I shall not surrender my Jhansi.” – was the call of Rani Laxmi Bai, a widow queen of Jhansi, gave a spontaneous expression of her patriotic feelings. What was Jhansi? It was a small state in Bundelkhand, a part of present Uttar Pradesh. Annual Revenue of the state was Rupees Twenty Lakhs only. After the Annexation of Jhansi British Empire sanctioned a monthly pension of rupees five thousand to Rani. But Rani was not ready to bend her head before the British for her personal welfare. She could realize that British would gradually grab the entire India in future. She was firm in her decision not to surrender to the enemy whatever mighty they may be. She possessed an iron will and refused to surrender.

We observe that Rani Laxmi Bai lastly got fatal hurt while fighting riding on a horse in „mans” dress with a sword in her hand and ultimately died. Her heroic death was only a sacrifice of life in the aspiration for freedom for motherland.

It reveals from the proclamations issued by the leaders of great Indian Revolts that they wanted earnestly to unite all classes of Indian people specially Hindus and Muslims against the British. Records speak that both the Hindus and Muslims unitedly fought against the British with a view to oust them from India. Attempts were made to satisfy the poor’s by giving higher honor, post and position. There was no sign of communalism. The rebels gave greatest importance for the national safety. Their slogan was “Delhi Cholo”. They declared Bahadur Shah-II, the last Mughal Emperor as their leader.

Many prominent historians found patriotic favour in the Great Revolt of 1857. Rajani Kanti Gupta in his “Sepahi Juddher Itihas” admitted and showed with

details facts that “the sepoys and their associates wanted the end of British rule in India being enlightened with the ideal of Nationalism. Prominent Historian V.D. Savarkar in his book “The Indian War Of Independence” described the great revolt as “...well planned National struggle for Independence”. He termed revolt as “the first war of independence”. Historian Sashi Bhusan Choudhury in his “Civil Rebellion in the Indian Mutinies”, not only titled the revolt as a national war against imperialism but also pointed out that it was a “General Rebellion”. He followed that during the year 1857-58 the Civil people in many parts of India became hostile against the tyranny of the British Empire.

It is obvious that the actual cause of the revolt was the tyranny of the British throughout a century upon the Indians. It would be a foolish task to evaluate the Great Revolt as a “Mutiny” ignoring this vital cause. The British could have realized more or less, the actual cause of mutiny as it appears. We carefully observe that after the end of the Great Revolt the control of Indian Government was assumed finally by the British Crown. East India Company ceased to exist. The army was thoroughly organized and the idea of division and counterpoise dominated British Military Policy in India. British Empire took up certain changes in their administration in India.

THE REBELLION OF 1857

The Rebellion of 1857 (also known as the Indian Mutiny) was a watershed event in the history of British India. It was by far the largest, most widespread, and dangerous threat to British rule in India in the nineteenth century. One of its most obvious repercussions was the elimination of the ruling East India Company and the transfer of control of India to the British Crown. As a military crisis of truly massive proportions, the Rebellion also inspired the structural transformation of both the British and Indian armies. In Britain, the crisis resulted in the amalgamation of the East India Company’s European forces into the line, and the commitment of a permanent, 80,000-man garrison on the subcontinent. In India, the mutiny or disbandment of sixty-nine out of the seventy-four regiments of the Bengal army necessitated its entire reconstruction with men as different in origin as possible from those who had so recently rebelled.

The Rebellion, however, was much more than a military crisis. In north-central India—especially around Awadh (Oudh)—mass peasant uprisings accompanied the military rebellions, thus demonstrating the existence of broad-based antipathy to British administrative and economic policies there. In addition, the Rebellion generated unprecedented interest in Britain, where ordinary citizens followed its events with fascinated horror—a phenomenon that has prompted some historians to call it Britain’s first ‘national-popular’ war.

Especially since Indian Independence in 1947, the Rebellion has been a highly contested area of historical inquiry, and controversies over interpretation, significance, and even about what to call the conflict remain unresolved today. Conventionally, British historians depicted the conflict as a purely military mutiny and, often, as a heroic fight against depraved sepoys intent on rape and murder. In the last fifty years, scholars in the postcolonial era have challenged such interpretations, and have emphasized previously silenced themes in the conflict, including the scale of British atrocities and the peasant aspect of the uprisings. This essay engages some of these historical controversies at the same time as it seeks to provide an introductory overview to the origins, chronology, consequences, and themes of the Rebellion.

The Indian Rebellion of 1857 began as a mutiny of sepoys of the East India Company's army on 10 May 1857, in the cantonment of the town of Meerut, and soon escalated into other mutinies and civilian rebellions largely in the upper Gangetic plain and central India, with the major hostilities confined to present-day Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, northern Madhya Pradesh, and the Delhi region. The rebellion posed a considerable threat to East India Company power in that region, and was contained only with the fall of Gwalior on 20 June 1858. The rebellion is also known as India's First War of Independence, the Great Rebellion, the Indian Rebellion, the Indian Mutiny, the Revolt of 1857, the Rebellion of 1857, the Uprising of 1857, the Sepoy Rebellion and the Sepoy Mutiny.

Other regions of Company-controlled India – such as Bengal, the Bombay Presidency, and the Madras Presidency – remained largely calm. In Punjab, the Sikh princes backed the Company by providing soldiers and support. The large princely states of Hyderabad, Mysore, Travancore, and Kashmir, as well as the smaller ones of Rajputana, did not join the rebellion. In some regions, such as Oudh, the rebellion took on the attributes of a patriotic revolt against European presence. Maratha leaders, such as Lakshmibai, the Rani of Jhansi, became folk heroes in the nationalist movement in India half a century later; however, they themselves generated no coherent ideology for a new order. The rebellion led to the dissolution of the East India Company in 1858. It also led the British to reorganize the army, the financial system and the administration in India. The country was thereafter directly governed by the crown as the new British Raj.

The Indian Rebellion of 1857 occurred as the result of an accumulation of factors over time, rather than any single event. The sepoys were local soldiers, the majority Hindu or Muslim, that were recruited into the Company's army. Just before the Rebellion there were over 300,000 sepoys in the army, compared to about 50,000 British. The forces were divided into three presidency armies: Bombay, Madras, and Bengal. The

Bengal Army recruited higher castes, such as Rajputs and Bhumi-har Brahmins, mostly from the Awadh and Bihar regions and even restricted the enlistment of lower castes in 1855. In contrast, the Madras Army and Bombay Army were more localized, caste-neutral armies that did not prefer high-caste men. The domination of higher castes in the Bengal Army has been blamed in part for initial mutinies that led to the rebellion.

In 1772, when Warren Hastings was appointed India's first Governor-General, one of his first undertakings was the rapid expansion of the Company's army. Since the sepoys from Bengal – many of whom had fought against the Company in the Battles of Plassey and Buxar – were now suspect in British eyes, Hastings recruited farther west from the high-caste rural Rajputs and Bhumi-har Brahmins of Awadh and Bihar, a practice that continued for the next 75 years. However, in order to forestall any social friction, the Company also took pains to adapt its military practices to the requirements of their religious rituals.

Consequently, these soldiers dined in separate facilities; in addition, overseas service, considered polluting to their caste, was not required of them, and the army soon came officially to recognise Hindu festivals. This encouragement of high caste ritual status, however, left the government vulnerable to protest, even mutiny, whenever the sepoys detected infringement of their prerogatives.

CAUSES OF THE REVOLT OF 1857

How did the Revolt break out ? What were its causes? The main reason for this was the ruthless exploitation of the Indian people by the British. The British rule which was formally established over the Indian people by the British. The British rule which was formally established after the Battle of Plassey in, 1757 in Bengal, strove to fill the coffers of the East India Company at the expense of the Indians. The East India Company was governed by greedy merchants and traders who could go to any extent to enrich themselves. The Company was formed in 1600, and was given a Royal Charter by Queen Elizabeth which conferred on it the exclusive privilege to trade with the East. Its main aim was to assume the trade monopoly in India. It was not an ordinary merchant company formed for trade but had its train of soldiers who fought battles with the Portuguese and the French trading companies in the 17th and 18th centuries in order to establish its trade monopoly. After these rival powers had been defeated it also tried to humble the Indian traders who offered competition. When the Battle of Plassey was won in 1757, the British successfully imposed their trade monopoly over the area under their control, eliminated competition from the Indian traders and forced the artisans to sell their products to them. The artisans were now paid so low

that they could hardly survive. The legend has it that the weavers of Dhaka cut their thumbs to protest against such low payments by the East India Company for their superb work on muslin renowned for its fine texture.

Exploitation of the peasantry - Although the trade monopoly enriched the East India Company considerably, its main source of income was now derived from the land. After entrenching itself in Bengal, it spread its power in India through wars and treaties. To extract as much money as possible it devised new systems of land settlements- Permanent, Ryotwari and Mahalwari each more oppressive than the other. The Permanent Settlement which was effective in Bengal Presidency and in large parts of north India did not recognise the hereditary rights of the peasants on land, which they had earlier enjoyed. The loyal Zamindars and revenue-collectors were now given the proprietary rights on land. The cultivators were reduced to the status of simple tenants. But even the newly created landlords were not given absolute rights. Their situation was also deliberately left very precarious. They had to pay to the Company 10/11th of the entire rent derived from the cultivators and if they failed to do so. Their property was sold to others.

Alienation of the Middle and Upper Strata of Indians - It was not merely the peasantry that got alienated from the British rule, the middle and upper strata Indians also felt oppressed. During the period of the Mughals or even in the administration of the local princes and chieftains, the Indians served at all the places both lower and higher. The disappearance of these Indian states and their replacement by the British administration deprived the Indians of higher posts which were now taken mainly by the British. Further more than cultural personnel like poets dramatists writers, musician's etc. Who were earlier employed by the native states were now thrown out. The religious men like Pandits and Mauves also lost all their former power and prestige.

The Alien Rule - Another important reason of the unpopularity of the British was the alien nature of their rule. They never mixed with the Indian people and treated even the upper class Indians with contempt. They had not come to settle in India but only to take money home. So the Indians could never develop any affinity towards them.

Impact on the Sepoys - The revolt of 1857 originated with the mutiny of the Sepoys. These Sepoys were drawn mainly from the peasant population of North and North-West India. As we have seen, the rapacious policies followed by the East India Company were impoverishing and ruining the peasantry. This must have affected the Sepoys also. In fact, most of them had joined the military services in order to supplement their fast declining agricultural income. But as the Years passed, they realised that their capacity for doing so declined. They were paid a monthly salary of 7 to 9 Rupees out of which they had to pay for their

food, uniform and transport of their private baggage. The cost of maintaining an Indian Sepoy was only one –third of his British counterpart in India. Moreover, the Indian Sepoy was treated roughly by the British counterpart in India. Moreover, the Indian Sepoy was treated roughly by the British officers. They were frequently abused and humiliated. The Indian Sepoy, despite his valour and great fighting capacity, could never rise above the rank of a Subedar while a fresh recruit from England was often appointed his superior overnight.

The Immediate Cause - The atmosphere was so surcharged that even a small issue could lead to revolt. The episode of greased cartridges, however, was a big enough issue to start the rebellion on its own. Dry tinder-box was there and only a spark was needed to set it ablaze. Cartridges of the new Enfield rifle which had recently been introduced in the army had a greased paper cover whose end had to be bitten off before the cartridge was loaded into rifle. The grease was in some instances made of beef and pig fat. This completely enraged the Hindu and Muslim sepoys and made them believe that the government was deliberately trying to destroy their religion. It was the immediate cause of the revolt.

CAUSES OF THE FAILURE OF THE REVOLT

The sudden and unexpected rising of the sepoys forced the British officials, to leave Delhi Oudh, Rohilkhand and other places which almost passed under the control of the sepoys. However, the British began to recover them within some months. There were several factors responsible for the British success. Thus, it is important to analyze the causes of the failure of the Revolt of 1857.

1. The Revolt of 1857 was localized and poorly organized. Due to lack of communication facilities, the sepoys of the widely dispersed cantonments could not act simultaneously in a concerted manner. The revolt did not spread to wider regions of the country. The armies of the Bombay and Madras presidencies remained loyal to the British. There was hardly any disturbance to the south of the Narmada, Sindh, the Punjab, the Northwestern Frontier province and Nepal remained unaffected.
2. The need of the time was a leader with military capability and political skill who could fuse the scattered elements into a consolidated force of great momentum with a definite policy and plan of action. Such a leader was hard to emerge. Bahadur Shah II was an old and exhausted man lacked organizing ability. Nana Sahib, though possessed some ability, lacked military leadership. Other leaders such as Rani Lakshimi Bai, Kunwar Singh, and the Begum of Oudh were local leaders and lacked all-India standing. This led to the failure of the Revolt of 1857.

3. The sepoys could not get the support of the population. The revolt did not attract common people who remained passive and indifferent to the Revolt. In many places the revolt was confined to the sepoys only. There was lack of intimate link between the sepoys and common people. Even among the sepoys, many remained loyal to the British.
4. The sepoys lacked common ideal before them. The sepoys at Delhi decided to recover the glory of the Mughal. At Gwalior and Kanpur, Nana Sahib was proclaimed a Peshwa. Rani Lakhmi Bai fought for her Jhansi. The orthodox section among the Hindus and the Muslims were concerned with their religions. There was no unity among the Hindus and the Muslims.
5. The ruling princes did not support the sepoys. On the other hand they actively assisted the British in suppressing the revolt. Sir Dinkar Rae, the minister of Gwalior, Sir Salar Jang, the minister of Hyderabad, Sang Bahadur of Nepal, and Dost Muhammad, the ruler of Afghanistan were indifferent to the Revolt and actively helped the British against the sepoys.
6. Luckily for the British by 1856 the Crimean and the Chinese wars had come to an end. This enabled the British to send additional troops to India to put down the revolt. The sepoys had few guns and muskets. They fought chiefly with swords and spears. On the other hand the British soldiers were equipped with latest weapons and used the telegraph and railways to their advantages. They could send message about the revolt much in advance so that precautionary measures could be taken at the other end.

REVOLT OF 1857 AND MUSLIMS

The East India Company assumed the direct control of Delhi, Panipat, Sonapat, Samalkha, Gaur, Palam, Nuh, Hathin, Bhoda, Sohna, Rewari, Indri, Palwal, Nagina and Ferozepur Jhirka and appointed a resident on behalf of the Governor General. The remaining territory was allowed to remain with the local chiefs under the overall British Sovereignty.

For many years the Jamuna had formed the northern frontier of British India, and the Sutlej the southern boundary for the Sikh empire. The vast tract of land which lay between, was then comparatively neutral ground, the southern and eastern parts of it chiefly were held by small colonies of Sikhs from the Majha country, the centre occupied by indigenous clans called in distinction "Malwa Sikhs" amongst whom the states of Patiala, Jind, Nabha and Kaithal, all branches

of the "Phulkian Misl" were pre-eminent, to the westward lay spurious races of Mohammedans, Hindu, Ranghurs, Doghurs and others, while to the north along the left bank of the Sutlej were small colonies of Mohammedans under Pathan chiefs, to the extreme east again were scores of petty lording of landowners, chiefly Rajputs, honoured by the title of Rajah or Rana. Such were the chief component parts of this country, generally known as the cis-Sutlej states. By the year 1809, there came a change in the British Policy, and especially for the northern part of Haryana i.e. the tract from Delhi to the Sutlej river. These areas in those times, were parceled among the chief of various grades from the influential Rajas and Patiala, Nabha, Kaithal and Jind and down to the petty Sardars who had succeeded in securing the possession of a few villages. Ranjit Singh was also in pursuit of the extending his sway beyond the Sutlej towards the Jamuna River, and he demanded Tributes from the cis-Sutlej chieftains.

Thus, fearing raids of Ranjit Singh they combined themselves and begged the British for their protection against Ranjit Singh. Towards the close of 1808, Ranjit Singh crossed the Sutlej River. Then the British thought of the Sikh chieftains and took concrete steps. They instructed their representative at Lahore to declare the region between the Sutlej and the Jamuna rivers as their protected region. This resulted in the treaty of Amritsar of 1809, which was signed on 25th April 1809, thus the entire cis-Sutlej chief came under the British Sovereignty.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion it can be said that the oral sources shown the involvement of common mass in the revolt of 1857 in India, while the official sources denied the spread of the revolt in India. Memory of the revolt of 1857 is still alive as a hero and inspiration among the people through folklores. But it is not enough to recall these heroes of 1857; some other effective steps should be taken to make popular these heroes in present time so that people of India can understand the spirit of nationalism of the colonial period.

After the revolt of 1857 British authorities, with the assumption of power directly, vanished all the vestiges of Mughal power and deported the last Mughal emperor to Burma (Myanmar). Thus extinguished all the ambitions of the Muslim community for the recovery of their lost power, prestige and dominion. Unfortunately the Muslim community became special target of British hatred after the revolt.

REFERENCES

- Bandhyopadhyaya Sekhar (2010). From Plassey To Partition. New Delhi: Orient Blackswan pvt ltd. p. 232.
- Bipan Chandra (1987). Indians struggle for Independence, Viking, and New Delhi.
- David Omissi (1994). The Sepoy and the Raj: the Indian Army, 1860-1940 (London: Macmillan, 1994), 9; T. A. Heathcote, the Military in British India, pp. 114-124.
- Dr Eugene D'souza (2004). Modern India, Manan Pakistan, Mumbai.
- Graham Dawson (1994). Soldier Heroes: British Adventure, Empire, and the Imagining of Masculinities (London: Routledge), p. 81.
- Hansraj (2002). Advanced History of India, Surjeet Publications, Delhi.
- S. C. Mittal (1976). Adhunik Bharat Ka Arthik Itihas (Jhullunder, 1976), PP 10-11.
- Sarma Benudhar (1958). Rebellion of 1857 vis a vis Assam. Guwahati: The Author. p 32.
- T. A. Heathcote (1975). The Military in British India: The Development of British Land Forces in South Asia, 1600-1947 (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), 103; Bernard Porter, The Lion's Share: A Short History of British Imperialism (London: Longman, 1975), 28.

Corresponding Author

Kuldeep Singh Bahia*

Research Scholar

E-Mail – bahiakuldeep@yahoo.com