



REBELS' CONCEPTION OF COLONIALISM & THE REVOLT OF 1857

Birendra Kumar

Dr. Lalita Kumari

Assistant Professor

Assistant Professor

Hindu College

Lakshmibai College

University of Delhi

University of Delhi

Delhi: 110007

Ashok Vihar, Delhi: 110052

Excerpts

This paper tends to delve into details of the understanding of not only the sepoy's but also different sections of the society i.e. from ruling magnates to the marginalized communities, ethnic and linguistic groups and minorities, priests and saints like yulabagulu from Coimbatore to Nasaras [Nazarenes] of Zoroastrians to various religious groups, tribes of Khasi and Jaintia Hills like Bishnupuria to Meiteis from the different corners of the country who were left out inadvertently from the historical literature even after more than one hundred fifty years of the rebellion. It is an attempt to bring into lime light the unsung heroes of the rebellion of 1857 and their conception of the British colonialism from yadaboo, Arakan, the coast of Salween river, Barak valley to Sylhet, from Bangladesh to Daman, Diu, Pindicheri [puducheri] to Andaman and Nikobar islands, from Coimbatore to the Jammu and Kashmir, which were conspicuous by their absence in historical literature, particularly when India is celebrating its 75th year of independence [Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsava].

Introduction

How the rebels of different regions, castes and classes understood the nature of the British colonialism? Were they succeeded in construing the true nature of colonialism/imperialism? How the conception of colonialism /imperialism differed from the understanding of the rulers/zamindars/ talukdars/princes and the British Indian officials on the one side and the plebeians/ downtrodden/marginalized communities like Women/Dalits/tribal communities like Sevaras, Kols, Bhils, Bedaras etc. on the other. Was the understanding of the sepoy's about colonialism different from the understanding of the masses of Hindustan?

In this regard Rajat Kanta Ray quotes ' the spirit of the mutiny was embodied in a collective mentality: a blend of fear and outrage gripped the minds of the sepoys of the Bengal Army and communicated itself, as if by an electrical impulse, to the villages and the towns of Hindustan from there they had been recruited. Where that particular mentality , or temperament, did not grip the people --and this was so both in the Punjab and in Bengal at the opposite ends of Hindustan--the mutinies in the cantonments did not ignite rebellions in either towns or country.'¹ Here, as nowhere else, a particular mentality coalesced diverse grievances into a comprehensive challenge to the hated English rule.

1. Rebels conception of colonialism in Central India

Understanding rebel's conception of colonialism in northern India better the writing of 'War &Peace' by Leo Tolstoy² can be quoted when he wrote the meaning of the Napoleonic wars for the different groups of people. He quotes, story of commanders and other military officials are always different from the story of deceased one and these stories are also different from the story of common army who were fighting in the same war. Same story can be replicated in the context of 1857 revolt and the understanding of the rebels. Actually the change of perspectives of the researchers and historians in different time and space kept varying³. So, the description of real understanding of colonialism by the rebels were missing.

Change In the style of interpretation by the researchers / historians also varied which generally stressed on the role of the political elites , but now they have started searching the role of the women, prostitutes, eunuchs, plebeians /down trodden /marginalized classes[Dalits, tribes etc]⁴. Sabyasachi Battacharya stresses that several layers of meaning of 1857 rebellion have come out. It is not possible to explain it in

any single theory/principle/school of historiography.⁵ He also asserts that different regions participated for different reasons in this rebellion but they had a very common enemy---the British, so as the rebels of different regions. The meaning and the impact of the revolt of 1857 can be understood in the saying of Mao when a French journalist asked him about the true impact of the French Revolution of 1789, Mao smiled and replied “it’s too early to say something about it.” In the same vein the true understanding of the rebels mind and the meaning as well as impact can be replicated on the revolt of 1857.

Talmiz Khaldun⁶ quotes in his work ‘The Great Rebellion’ the upper classes were terrified at the growth of a democratic spirit among the soldiers, became suspicious of the results of the revolt, and lost their enthusiasm after the first flush of the rebellion was over. The attitude of the upper classes of the talukdars, zamindars and sahuks started changing during the rebellion. Henry St. George Tucker, in a letter to the Governor General described this situation “ all the large landlords and auction purchasers are paralyzed and dispossessed, their agents being frequently murdered and their property destroyed.”⁷

However, the concept of ‘freedom’ also started taking shape, once the rebels experienced the disappearance of the British authority. The sepoys as well as the common people began “plundering” towns and destroying government records and other deeds of the property.⁸ This can be substantiated by the example of Kunwar Singh, who, himself a landlord, when he forbade his followers by suggesting them not to plunder the property and records. Otherwise, there would be no proof of the rights of the people, and no evidence to determine the amount due from one party to the other.⁹

Notwithstanding, the armed masses were lords of their respective areas, expropriating the rich at will.¹⁰ Mark Thornhill writes that not only every shop was completely plundered but also wrecked. The doors were torn out, the verandahs pulled down, the floor dug up, and also great holes dug in the walls. Whatever was worth carrying off had gone to the villages, the rest lay in the streets .¹¹ T.R. Holmes quotes that all those who had anything to lose cursed the sepoys.¹² Sir Syed Ahmad Khan also remarked, for the most part men who had nothing to lose, the governed not the governing class.¹³ In fact, the upper classes began to fear victory more than the defeat in the rebellion .Victory, they thought, was more likely to bring about their complete extinction. “Most of them were shrewd enough to perceive that it would not answer their purpose to join the rebels”.¹⁴ Holmes points out that after the second week of the siege of Lucknow the rebels did not seem to have received further reinforcement from the talukdars of Oudh.¹⁵ Notwithstanding,

the rebellion transformed into a popular rebellion which was joined by not only the sepoys but also the peasants, zamindars and the armed forces.

When common people started joining the rebellion, General Outram observed that as late as September 17, 1857, ‘a large and influential class in Oudh ...among the most powerful and most of the middle classes of the chiefs and zamindars who generally desired establishment of our rule.’¹⁶ Lt. - General McLeod Innes believes that participation of most of them in the mutiny had been more nominal than the real.¹⁷ While some of them preserved ‘armed neutrality’, others sent to the rebel camp only such contingents as were demanded and personally remained passive.¹⁸ Others kept informed the British authorities about the whereabouts of the mutineers. Raja of Dev, Aurangabad, Bihar was such a man [Ghan Shyam Singh did the same thing to the British which scuttled the rebels’ efforts.

Talukdars, however, witnessed contrasting attitude, when they rose in armed rebellion after the proclamation of Viceroy Lord Canning to confiscate all land of the provinces except those who had been loyal to the British government during the rebellion.¹⁹ This might be owing to the suppression of the rebellion at different places like Delhi, Allahabad, Lucknow, Kanpur, Banaras etc., it would have eliminated the fear from the mind of the Talukdars that the traditional economic and social structure would be affected. Hence, they became the supporters of the British. Some of the important personalities i.e. George Campbell, Sir Henry Lawrence influenced and threatened about the repercussions of the implementation of the proclamation. General Outram suggested Lord Canning to deal with the Talukdars like ‘‘honorable enemies’’. By accepting the advice of General Outram, Lord Canning promised the Talukdars a fair deal and he experienced the instant result of this deal when the Vakil of the Begum of Oudh visited the camp of the British Commander-in- Chief and enquired about the terms and conditions of the deal, when rebellion was still continuing in Oudh on 22 October, 1858. This was not only the case of the Oudh but also all the Rajas and Talukdars had already dispatched their emissaries on the similar ‘‘errands’’.²⁰

Talukdars and princes emerged as the biggest supporters of the British rule. They not only recovered their all the estates but also extravagant privileges, which they accepted without any pretensions that it would as long as they enjoyed the Government pleasure.²¹ After the rebellion two third of the land was passed into the possession of big landlords. This was the price of their betrayal of the revolt. They received more

than that of their demand before the rebellion. Thus, the chief landlords and respectable villagers “joyfully welcomed” the occupation of Oudh by the British army.²²

However, condition of villagers of Banda were entirely different from other parts of the district. As the news of vulnerability of the British spread, the villagers rose in armed rebellion in all the directions. Auction-purchasers and decree-holders were ousted without exception, a feature replicated elsewhere as well. The Collector and Magistrate of Hamirpur G.H. Freeling observed “ I need scarcely say that the general feature in the rebellion here has been the universal ousting of all bankers, Buniyas, Marwaria, etc. from landed property in the district, by whatever means they acquired it, whether at auction, by private sale or otherwise... it is strange that in no instance do the class so favoured by our rule, the bankers and other traders, appear to have been able to keep their own in the struggle.”²³

Same types of incidents were also reported from other parts of this district [Hamirpur]. The zamindars of Bedokhur Pergunnah Soomerpur[in Hamirpur] attacked all the bankers and plundered them and in every instance this Siena was the leader, and in one case they were not content with plunder but men headed by this prisoner rushed on an old man Girdhareeram and hacked him into pieces.²⁴ The insurrectionary movement was thus utilized to correct all past wrongs.

In Central India rumors played very important role in preparing the understanding of the rebels, who had started thinking in terms of the overthrow of the British rule , at least their vulnerability i.e. end of the British rule nearing. So was the popular sentiment of the villager of central India [that the British rule was vulnerable and its end was nearing]. P.G. Scot, an officer of the 12th Regiment of Bengal Native Infantry at Nowgong [Rohilkhand] writes in his account on the role of the Chapatties in the central India.²⁵ This situation of rumor and belief have been described by Ranjit Guha well. ²⁶ Ranjit Guha describes that rumors and beliefs acted both as the force of mobilization and as transmission of resistance and rebellion against the authorities.²⁷

Notwithstanding the king of Gwalior and Holkar rulers of Indore supported the British but their 20000 strong army participated in the great rebellion. Different districts of Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh like Mahoo, Sagar, Aligarh, Etawah, Bulandshahar, Muradabad, Allahabad, Varanasi, and Bareilly witnessed heavy fighting with the British in which both the sepoy and the common masses, peasants and

artisans participated and construed the true nature [alienness - oppressive rule of the British Empire]. That's why R.C. Majumdar term it a popular rebellion.²⁸

Amar Farouqui opines that Baiza Bai of Malwa²⁹ region [Gwalior] was fighting against the British on behalf of the sepoys. Farouqui says that whether Baiza Bai incited the rebellion or not, it is a question of research, however, her presence reflected the message of rebellion for the common people and how legitimate her rule was. She was the de jure ruler of the Sindhia state but was dethroned by the Company and its confidantes.

2. Rebels conception of Colonialism in Eastern India

Rebel's conception of colonialism in eastern India varied in two important regions Bengal and Bihar. Zamindars and Talukdars of Bengal, while, supported the British and acted against the mutineers, peasantry and the zamindars of Bihar supported the mutineers. Peer Ali, Sheikh Ghashita, Wahid Ali, Ghulam Ali, Asgar Ali, Nand Lal, Kunwar Singh, Amar Singh etc. played very important role in the beginning of the rebellion in Bihar. However, a few of the zamindars of Bihar like Maharaja Bhup Singh, Wilayat Ali Khan, Sheikh Raza Husain, Altaf Husain, Ray Hari Kishan, Babu Chunnilal etc. Supported the British. As far as the condition of the peasantry of Bihar is concerned, they also acted against the zamindars and their agents while at Dinapur [present Danapur, Patna - headquarter of a divisional military cantonment and the only English regiment between Calcutta and Lucknow; three regiments consisting of about 2500 sepoys rebelled.

Situation in Zila Behar which headquartered Gaya, was different from the other parts of Behar [Bihar of the Bengal province]. While the sepoys kept waiting to let reach the mutineers of Dinapur to enter Gaya, and break the central jail which contained around 800 sepoys, the general population also felt agitated against the rumored mixing of bone-dust and blood of swine and oxen in the flour which was being sold in the open market. The attitude of the zamindars of Zila Behar was also not favorable. Here the rebels waited till the military started the insurrection and they later joined it. It resulted in the killing of Europeans in Giriya/ Giddhiya [present Rajgir of Nawada district of Bihar where seven Europeans were killed and their dead bodies were thrown in the open field as a food for the vultures. Hence, this place was came to be known as Giddhiya which is translated into English as 'vulture'. This genocide horrified the Europeans.

Situation in not only Barakpur but also Baharampur where 19th Light Native Infantry was posted, Calcutta, Chitgaon, Murshidabad [-where the abode of the Nawab of Bengal was there, who could have supported the rebels] was equally tense and most disturbing [the Panicky Sunday] for the British authorities particularly Major-General Hearshey- the Commanding officer of Barrakpore. So, he followed the policy of 'Divide and Rule' to scuttle the rebellion. When he felt the situation was being out of control, disbanded the seven Regiments of 34th Native Infantry posted at Barrakpore.

In the country side the shrewd traders and the avaricious moneylenders, who had grown fat under the British land and legal systems, helped the British government as long they could do so; they helped the mutineers only when evasion was impossible. They thought that the victory of the rebels would mean the restoration of the old village economy in which they had no place.³⁰ They, therefore, longed for the restoration of "law and order", and for the resumption of the "ordinary routine of trade". This was only possible under the British rule. Kaye opines that the trading classes lost more than they gained by these convulsions.³¹

However, the merchants and bankers in the coastal and unaffected areas actively supported the British. They were expecting expropriation of their own property in the liberated areas. They were certain that the success of the rebellion, whether under the banner of feudal barons or of the rebellious soldiery and the pauperized peasantry, would mean their own extinction economically. The natives and the Bannias never lost their confidence in the power of the Company's Government. They always used to express ---'Sahib, these rebels will bite the dust'. They considered the 'Company is Almighty'. Hence, they shut their ears against rumors about the fall of the British rule in India and started vying with each other in the loyalty of their addresses and offers of service.³²

Zorastrians [Parsis classes] of British India believed more on the British than the Indians. Their interest and business were more protected under the British law and the equitable justice than the previous regimes. Being a trading and affluent classes of India, they were targeted by the mutineers equally just like Europeans.³³

Oxbridge educated Indians and native officials did not participate in the rebellion. While the former remained "invariably loyal" to the British, the latter "stood gallantly" at their posts throughout the crisis.³⁴ Their disapproval was based on self- interest. They knew that if the "Badshah Hakumat" were

re-established they would be thrown out. Being ignorant of Persian, innocent of eastern customs and of a non-aristocratic origin, they would not find any place in the social and political set up.

3. Rebels conception of Colonialism in Southern India

As the research on the participation of rebels in the rebellion of 1857 and understanding of the colonialism is going on a comprehensive scale in different parts of the world, new information is coming every time. It is also the same in the case of south and western India which were initially described oblivion of it. Halaguli uprising of 1857 at Bijapur district in Karnataka, led by Venkatapa of Surpur [Bijapur] is the solitary instance of self-immolation to safeguard their sacred right by the Bedas who were known for their valor since earliest times. Their chief profession was hunting and service in the army, so, considered their right 'to carry arms'. But as a result of the outbreak of the rebellion in May 1857, British Government passed an act - Disarmament Act No. XXVIII on 11th Sept. 1857 as a disarming measure that were enforced in the British Districts and Native States under political superintendence. It banned manufacturing, importation and possession of arms and ammunitions illegal. This law was enforced by the chief administrator K. Krishna Rao of Mudhol, Bijapur and reported by G. B. Seton Kerr. [Proceedings of Indian History Congress, 60th Session, 1999].

Not only soldiers but also fakirs and saints of south India understood the true nature of colonialism and participated in the rebellion of 1857 as is revealed by N. Rajendran's³⁵ research. He analyses that it was the British intention to describe the mutiny as insignificant one and confined to the certain pockets of northern India i.e. Meerut, Delhi as well as Oudh and rest of the subcontinent remained oblivion of the rebellion. However, reality was different. Whole of the Indian subcontinent was affected by it, although intensity and magnitude of violence varied in different regions.

In south India, genesis of the 1857 rebellion is directly linked with the outbreak of the Vellore revolt of 1806 which was also caused by hurting the religious sentiments of the sepoys where they seized the Vellore fort and declared the king, Fateh Haider [son of Tipu Sultan] as their leader.

As far as intensity and magnitude of the rebellion in south India is concerned, both the historians of the colonial school and nationalist school describe south India as one of the most unaffected areas of the revolt of 1857. A historian of the Cambridge school Washbrook describes that stray dogs like rebels could not

have dared to walk on the streets of Madras. S.N. Sen.³⁶ also mentions that Madras remained oblivion of the revolt. However, Archives of Egmore,³⁷ Madras, reveals some different story of the south.

Madras Government Judicial Department Report J.O. No. 1081-A, 3rd Sept. 1857 unravels the concepts and fear of the rebellion in Madras region that most of the roads of Madras were seized by the police contingent. Judicial Department reports of Madras Government unravels discontented regions of south India like Coimbatore, Chinglepetta,, Madras, Northern Arcot, Chittur districts etc. were equally disturbed, politically volatile and tumultuous and not oblivion of the rebellion. Yulbagulu, a local saint of Coimbatore industrial area started propagating the idea that the British rule must be annihilated, all the Europeans must be exterminated and Peshwa Nana Saheb must be coroneted to the throne of India in 1857. Consequently he was arrested and sent to Coimbatore jail. In Chingalpetta, secret meetings of rebels were held. Rebels like Arun Giri, Sultan Baskha and Krishna hatched conspiracies against the Company which was a part of big conspiracy against the British as was reported by the Magistrate of Saudapetta, Andhra Pradesh. Malabar region of Madras presidency also revolted in tandem with the rebellion of 1857. To suppress it, a number of Acts and Circulars were passed addressing soldiers, government officials and general public. For example, Act No. XXV of 1857 mentioned that those whosoever participated in the rebellion, their property would be confiscated.

Above descriptions delineates that south Indian provinces were equally disturbed, understood the true nature of the British Empire, so, participated in the rebellion. There were not oblivious of the rebellion.

4. Rebels conception of Colonialism in Northern India

Meerut was the second place where sepoy's mutiny took place on 24th April as a consequent of the Barrakpore rebellion of Mangal Pandey on 29th March two months earlier than the scheduled date of 31st May 1857. J.C. Wilson,³⁸ Judge of Moradabad wrote that it was the women of this region whole incited the sepoys of Meerut who were beguiling in the market by commenting 'shame on you people, your fellow brethren are languishing in the jails and disbanded from the army on the question of refusal of using Brown bow musket rifles by biting off the cartridge which was alleged to be made of cow/pig fat. You did not have any right to live alive''. This comment aggravated the sepoys who broke the jail of Meerut on 10th May 1857 and set 85 jailed sepoys free from the jail.

Third Native Cavalry and 800 other inmates of the Meerut jail free and marched to Delhi where they declared old Mughal Badshah Bahadur Shah II as their leader and wrote letters to kings and princes of different native states. This jail break incident was led by Dhan Singh Gurjar / Dhunna Singh, a kotwal, who involved his community men and made them understand the true oppressive nature of the British colonialism in the fight against the British who fought fiercely against them. Mac Nabb, Lieutenant Colonel, described that 'the felon Shackles were being methodically and of necessity slowly hammered on the ankles of the wretched criminals as mentioned in 'The Great Fear of 1857: Rumours, Conspiracies and the Making of the Indian Uprising' by Kim A. Wagner. Colonel Finnis and Captain Macdonald were killed by the rebels in Meerut and villagers from 16 Gurjar villages along with native army joined with the rebellion.

The rebellion, writes W. H. Russell, ³⁹ the Times Correspondent in his 'My Indian Mutiny Diary' from Kanpur [Cawnpore], indicated the people's realization that the mutinies in the cantonments had brought forth a keenly desired but wholly unexpected reversal in relations of power. The natives of Hindustan had experienced the English regime as a race rule in which power and privilege lay with the sahibs, their women, and their children. He also writes in his private diary of 14th February 1858 'that the force is the base of our rule. I have no doubt; for I see nothing but force employed in our relations with the governed.' All of a sudden and without the slightest warning, the people's outrage at racing subordination imposed by superior physical force, and the associated fear of emasculation and abasement arising out of the necessity of having to submit to it, found cataclysmic release. The breaking forth of the pent-up emotions of the coerced people of Hindustan was fuelled by the sudden sense of the reversal of the relations of power-- a sense that the world had turned upside down, and that their turn had now come to exercise force upon those who had hitherto coerced them. It is no accident that on the eve of the outbreak, proclamations appeared in Lucknow in Hindu, Urdu and Persian, calling upon the Hindus and Musalmans to exterminate all Europeans: These proclamations, there is reason to believe, are written by the people in the city-- the scum of the populace who like the Scottish robber, would like to see the world turned upside down."

The Times Correspondent also writes in his diary, consequently , white men, women and children perished in Cawnpore and from the English point of view, the peculiar aggravation of the massacre was the 'deed that was done by a subject race--by the black men who dared to shed the blood of their masters.'

He, further, quotes: - 'Here we had not only a servile war and a sort of jacquerie combined, but we had a war of religion, a war of race and a war of revenge, of hope, of some national promptings to shake off the yoke of a stranger and to establish the full power of the native chiefs, and the full sway of the native religions.' In this regard Rajat Kanta Ray⁴⁰ writes that the proclamations issued in Lucknow on the eve of the outbreak had denounced all who remained passive as 'born of pigs of Europeans, born of cows, despised by the Gods, hated and spat at by all true sons of Mahabeer jee and of Mohammad. What is of interest here is that the combination of the black subjects against the white rulers is ideologically conceived, not in terms of a nation asserting its independence of colonial rule, but in terms of the Hindus and Muslims jointly asserting the sway of their respective religious creeds against the hated Christian 'Nasara' [Nazarenes].⁴¹

Viceroy Lord Canning instantly took several measures to control the rebellion like suppression, garrisoning from all the directions and not let the news of rebellion to dissipate. Subsequently the kings of Kashmir, Patiala, Nabha, Jind instantly reposed the faith in the British administration. Consequently the British succeeded in recapturing the rebellion in within 5 days [14th Sep to 19th Sep]. Elphinston, Governor General of Bombay presidency wrote that the genocide [of the innocent people of Delhi] committed by the British in retaliation was much more than the one committed by Nadir Shah in 1739. Bahadur Shah Jafar was captured with the help of his relative Ilahi Baksh, two sons and two of his grandchildren of the Mughal Badshah were shot dead by Lieutenant General Hodson in front of his eyes and he was deported to Rangoon where he died in 1862.⁴²

People of Punjab and Haryana participated in large numbers and adopted a nature of the popular rebellion. Almost 300 sepoy of Delhi walked down to Gurgaon in rebellion resulting in the fleeing of the Collector of this district. A peasant Sadaruddin led the rebellion in Mewat region which was participated by Rao Tularao and his nephew Rao Gopaldeo of Ahirwal, Haryana. People from Palwal, Faridabad, Bahadurgarh, Farukhanagar participated in the rebellion in large number. On 16th Nov. 1857, more than 70 British people were killed and 45 injured by the rebels in a battle at Narnaul in which British Commanders like Geerard and Captain Wallace were killed and Crease, Kennedy and Pierce were injured. Peasants of Hisar, Hansi, Sirsa, Panipat and Rohatak participated in the rebellion. Even the sepoy of 60th and 5th Native Infantry also participated in the rebellion but was crushed.

In north western part of India like Punjab, Ferozpur, Peshawar, Hoti Mardan, Jalundhar, Ferozpur, Ajnala, sepoy of Native Infantry also participated in the rebellion which is conspicuous by its absence in the mainstream historical literature. Punjab Administrative Report of 1856-57 and 1857-58⁴³ reveals that 386 rebels were hanged till death, 1998 people were killed and thousands were incarcerated. Even the first battalion of 206 people were sent to Cellular Jail of Andaman & Nicobar from Punjab itself.

In Jammu & Kashmir a very piquant situation arose. Notwithstanding the king of Jammu & Kashmir had reposed his faith in the British, the Governor General was very apprehensive about the support of the sepoy that whether they would support them or not as was reported by Akhbar-ul-Zaffar on 8th July 1857. It cited a story that the Maharaja in a letter to Bahadur Shah Zafar had [promised to support their cause and that he along with his troops were expected in Delhi anytime. It can be contextualized that the British apprehension of using Kashmir army is the experience that they had gained from Hyderabad contingent who had categorically refused to march beyond Deccan and unambiguously declared that they would not fight against their king-- meaning the king of Delhi [the Mughal Badshah]. It can, thus, be argued that the British authorities were apprehensive that a Hyderabad contingent like situation might arise in Jammu & Kashmir.

5. Rebels conception of Colonialism in Western India

Western India was also affected by the rebellion. The Research work of V. D. Divekar [South India in 1857: War of Independence], on the basis of his research which is based on the archival sources from the National Archives of New Delhi and London and Judicial Commission Reports, proves that even western, and southern India were also affected by the rebellion. People and sepoy rebelled at more than 20 places in Maharashtra alone. Rangajee Bappujee Gupte who visited England as a barrister of Raja Pratap Singh- the king of Satara to contest his case and returned disappointed after a long span of 14 years, became the torch-bearer of the rebellion of 1857 in western India. He started recruiting the common people in the army at Satara, Kolhapur, Belgaon and Dharwad against the wishes of the British. Mutiny was started at Satara and Pandharpur on 10th June and 13th July 1857, respectively resulting in the arrest and deportation of a number of people on the charges of coup against the British. A rebel Mansingh Rajpoot was executed in this regard on 20th June, 1857 who addressed the Indians before he was hanged- 'dominance of the

British had contained, sons of Hindu and Muslims arise against them, do not try to be the mute spectator on this bivouac of Indian history’.

Peshwa Nana Saheb led the rebellion at Poona. Sepoys Mutiny of the Native Infantry took place in Kolhapur on 12, 13, 23 June and 2nd August 1857. Rebellions also started in Kolhapur, Bombay, Nasik, Ratnagiri and Bijapur between August and October 1857. Two masterminds of this rebellion Mangal and Saiyad Husain were shot by the canon.

Some of the colonies of the Portuguese and the French like Goa, Daman & Diu and Pondicherry respectively also were affected by the mutiny. Deepujee Ranajee started the rebellion in Goa but was very soon arrested. French Governor of Pondicherry sought military help from the British Governor of Madras Harris to suppress the rebellion and to safeguard the interests of the Europeans.

6. Rulers / kings/princes conception of Colonialism

As soon as the rebellion was suppressed in Delhi in only 5 days of September 1857, several kings and princes of different provinces started reposing their faith in the British government and assisted them in the suppression of the mutiny in other parts of India. Barring a few kings/ Nawabs or princes who were fighting to safeguard their own estates or kingdoms, most of them accepted the suzerainty of the British.

7. Tribal/Peasants/Civilians conception of colonialism

From the 18th century onwards the tribal people had understood the true exploitative and oppressive traits of the British rule who encroached jungle rights of these indigenous people who termed them as ‘Dikus’ which included Mahajans, Jamindars and other exploiters among Indians. Tribes like Kols, Bhumij, Santhal, Bhils, Khonds, Chenchus, Chuars etc. participated in the resistance against the British and the revolt of 1857 was the culmination of the tribal uprisings. However, the most important tribal outbreak in 1857 was the Chero- Bogtah combination of Palamau who were joined by the Kharwars Bhogtas also. Two of the Bhogtah leaders were Nilamber and Pitamber who declared themselves as independent rulers, however, they were suppressed and killed by the British.[ref. Badri Narain- The tribals and 1857 uprising]. Tribals and forest dwellers of Maharashtra like Bhils, Kolis and Gonds, Bedaras of Karnataka, Koyas and Savaras of Andhra Pradesh also participated in the rebellion.

Not only the ruling classes of different parts of India but also the ethnic and linguistic minorities of north eastern part of India particularly Assam, Chachar, Bangladesh Manipur, the Bishnupuria Manipuris who have been given a separate nomenclature 'Mayangs' by a British linguist G.A Grierson, understood the oppressive, exploitative and alienness of the British and actively participated in the rebellion of 1857. [Linguistic Survey of India, Vol. V, by G.A. Grierson]. The role of Bishnupuria Manipuris in the rebellion of 1857 have been well described in several letters written by officers of British India like Superintendent of Sylhet and collector of Sylhet, M.G. Allen -the Commander of Arakan Battalion between 22 October and 4th December 1857 respectively, addressed to the British authorities. When the sepoy of Meerut stated the rebellion on 10th May, 1857, two soldiers Nutan Singha and Pulor Singha left their job and started mobilizing Bishnupuria Manipuris for a greater participation in the revolt. They were in constant touch with the BNI 33 Company sepoy of Chittagaon and planning a major attack which was sabotaged by the British and some of the Bishnupurias like Gillou Singha, Tulsidas Singha, Shyam Singha, Kailash Chandra Singha, Bhagabati Mishra, Tabina Singha etc. to name a few and 50 other rebels were arrested, banished or executed. The British forces also marched to Pratapgarh, Karimganj, Latu, Malegar hillocks of Assam, Chachar and Bhanubil [presently in Bangladesh] regions decimating 37 Bishnupurias and other rebels of the north-eastern India. [Ref. Bishnupuria Manipuris in Freedom and other Movements by Braja Gopal Singa].

Ethnic and linguistic groups of Khasi and Jaintiya hills of Meghalaya were equally suffering from the British intrusions and oppression since the treaty of Yandaboo in 1826. As per the treaty the British would occupy Assam, Rakhine[Arakan], the Taninthayi [Tenasserin] coast- south of the Salween river besides supremacy in Cachar and the Jaintia Hills. The British planted tea gardens in most of these region and British planters as well as forces were stationed after the treaty of Yadaboo. The road leading to the Brahmaputra valley to Cachar and other regions of the Barak valley are hilly, terrainous, daunting and no direct routes were there to connect these two regions. However, the British had already established their supremacy in the Barak valley. As soon as the treaty was signed the British found it difficult to have a direct communication with these two terrainous valleys. Hence, they sought permissions from U. Tirot Sing, the Raja of Nongkhlaw, a principality in the Khasi Hills, to build roads connecting these two regions. The Khasis under the leadership U. Tirat Singh of this region understood the ulterior motives of the British

and declared war on them which continued from 1829 to 1833. Notwithstanding this rebellion was suppressed but the tribes of Khasi and Jaintia Hills kept fighting against the British till 1862 under the leadership of Pnar Khasi and U. Kiang Nangbah. More than 50000 Khasis were mobilized from different villages by Nangbah and other leaders against the British which created havoc among the colonial officials. The Khasis occupied several places by defeating the British. In the mobilization of the Khasi tribes of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills, their tradition of 'omen' placed indispensable role. Pnar Khasi tradition enumerates that 'he [U. Kiang Nangbah] claimed himself an enlightened son of the heaven and a prophet of the new age. The old generation of the Khasis never waged war without ascertaining the win ability in the battle through a system of divination. When they examined the system of divination and got the support, Nangbah mobilized the tribesmen and prepared them for the war and seized many positions. However, the Khasi tribes were suppressed under the leadership of Colonel Richardson and the Act of XVI of 1857 was enforced in the Jaintia Hills. Consequently, the Khasis of Meghalaya kept fighting against the British but were suppressed in Dec. 1862. [Ref. The History and the Culture of the Khasi people by Hamlet Bareh.]

8. Women/Dalits/marginalized community's conception of Colonialism

The role Dalit and tribal virangnas and courtesans are missing from the mainstream historical discourse while they understood the true nature of the British colonialism and expressed their true patriotism.

Lata Singh [ref. marginalized women and 1857] unravels the concept of 'other women' who represented common women, considered to be coarse, vulgar, loud, morally degraded and sexually promiscuous. She takes references from Tripurari Sharma's play 'Azizun Nisha: San Sattavan ka Kissa' and quotes that Azizun dressed up like a man and her palace had become an important meeting points for the rebels in Kanpur. Talwar-Oldenburg [1984, p. 145-80][Reference- Talwar Oldenburg, Veena: Lifestyle as Resistance; the case of the courtesans of Lucknow'' in Douglas Haynes & Gun Prakash[ed.] Contesting power, Resistance and Everyday social Relations in South Asia, 1852-1928,OUP, New Delhi, page-31]] cites that properties of not only elites of Lucknow but also courtesans [Tawaifs] -being listed in the ledger of civic tax -payers of Lucknow in 1857-77, were confiscated as a result of being conspirators of the rebellion. Lata Singh enlists other Tawaifs like Husaini Begum, UmraoJan who understood the true

nature of the British colonialism and hatched conspiracies of Satichoura Ghat near Kanpur killing more than 300 Europeans including child and women on 27th June 1857.

What is pertinent to understand here is the fact that not only women from the upper echelon of the society but also the marginalized women like Tawaifs, Dalits, tribals also understood the British and participated in the rebellion and their participation was a conscious call, not a personal one unlikely the other political elites of the rebellion.

Not only the queens and princesses of several provinces but also the women from the marginalized communities like Dalit, tribal, poor peasants, artisans supported the rebels and fought with the British. Tripurari Sharma enlists a number of Dalit Viranganas in his work 'Sana Sattavan ki Viranganayen'- an alternate account of revolt of 1857, where narrative of popular Dalit history has been written, which is based on myths, memories and retelling of the past. It also depicts Dalit version of the revolt. Dalit historians are attempting to look upon the mutiny as part of their struggle for freedom. Dalit historians like Bihari Lal Harit and others emphasize that actually dalit rebels and virangnas were the really heroes/heroines who were fighting for free India from the colonial yoke and not the upper caste Hindus and erstwhile provincial rulers who were fighting to retrieve their provinces. It is also pertinent to delineate that the armies whether of the British or the provincial rulers largely consisted of dalit recruits/heroes some constructed, some exaggerated, some discovered have become real heroes fighting for a free India. These historians argue that dalits rebels had nothing to lose in the fight against the British as their conditions were miserable. Historians like Charu Gupta, Badri Narain, Bihari Lal Harit and others give a big list of dalit/ lower caste rebels who like Jhalkaribai- a kori, Uda Devi -a passi, Avantibai-Lodhi, Mahabiri Devi- a bhangi, Asha Devi-a Gurjari, Rahimi Gurjari, Bhagwani Devi, Bhagwati Devi, Habiba Gurjari, Indra Kaur, Kushal Devi, Naam Kaur, Raaj Kaur, Ranviri Valmiki, Sehaja Valmiki, Shobha Devi, Matadeen Bhangi, etc. who hatched conspiracies or incited the soldiers or fought fiercely against the British in the rebellion of 1857. W. Gordon Alexander's account mentions about an 'amazon tigress'-a dalit virangana, Uda Devi who was married to Makka Passi, an associate of Begum Hazrat Mahal, when Campbell attacked Sikanderbagh, Lucknow, fought fiercely against him. In the same wane Jhalkaribai who headed Durga Dal - the contingent of Rani, fought fiercely in the guise of Rani Lakshmbai from all the gates like Dantiya gate, Bhandari gate and Unnao gate when Jhansi was besieged by the Campbell in

June 1857. Another virangana Avantibai, a Lodhi caste from Madhya Pradesh, born on 16th Aug., 1831, was married to Vikramaditya Singh of, the ruler of Ramgarh state in present day Sikar district of Rajasthan.[Ref. NCERT, Social Science textbook , Class VIII, page 58-59, 'When People Rebel] The dreaded law of the Doctrine of Lapse was enforced on Ramgarh state after the death of the king the queen Avantibai was denied the adoption rights and the British tried to seize her state in 1851 which resulted in bitter relationships between the queen and the British. The outbreak of the revolt of 1857 gave an end to this bitter relationship and the queen Avantibai resorted the armed rebellion by joining the disgruntled sepoys. Her understanding about the British was excursion of the British not only from the Ramgarh state but also from the Indian soil. Hence, she raised a strong contingent of 4000 warriors from the neighboring states and fought guerilla war fiercely against the British at Kheri near Mandala in Ramgarh but finally killed herself on 20th March, 1858, when she was surrounded by the British near Devaharigarh and asked to surrender. Mahabiri Devi, another virangana, quotes Crispin Bates in his edited book 'Mutiny at the Margins-New Perspectives on the Indian Uprising of 1857', led twenty two women in their twenties 'they emerged as physically commanding and armed, infused with power, strength, bravery, activism and sacrifice, locked in violent conflict with the British' - were able to kill many British soldiers until all were martyred.

Whilst some of the untouchables like Matadeen Bhangi who did not fight against the British but incited the rebels like Mangal Pandey when he ridiculed the orthodoxies of Hinduism by citing the so -called religious orthodoxies of Hinduism does not desecrate when you bite off the cartridge of the Enfield Rifles which was made of cow and pigs fats. Consequently Mangal Pandey started the rebellion on 29th March 1857 by killing his British superiors of 34th Native Infantry posted at Meerut.

Gangu Mehtar/ Ganga Baba/ Gangu Din, another unsung dalit hero who killed at least 150 British soldiers alone in the rebellion of 1857 in Cawnpore [Present Kanpur] under the leadership of Peshwa Nana Saheb, was not mentioned in the mainstream historical literature. We find the reference of this unsung hero from the marginalized community in 'The First War of Independence' of Vinayak Damodar Savarkar. He was a Subadar of the army of Nana Saheb who seized Kanpur for Nana Saheb for a few days before the final seize of it by the British in 1857.

Women from not only north India but also other parts of India particularly south India fought fiercely against the British. Kuyili and Rani Velu Nacchiyar from Shivangai district, Tamilnadu were such brave hearts who are conspicuous by their absence in the mainstream historical literature. It was only mentioned by William Forbes Mitchell in his treatise 'Reminiscences of the Great Mutiny'. It was Kuyili who acted as a first human bomb, stood in front of the British armory and set herself ablaze resulting in the explosion of the armory. The supreme sacrifice committed by Kuyili led Rani Velu Nacchiyar defeat the British and regain her kingdom.

9. Concluding Remark

Researcher's craft delineates better understanding of not only the sepoys who identified their selves with the general populace but also with all sections of the society including the territorial magnates, marginalized communities like peasants, artisans, plebeians, downtrodden, tribes and ethnic communities, prostitutes, eunuchs, religious mendicants and priests, civil society members which makes it a national revolt, who perceived better about the true nature of British Colonialism than the British Indian officers. They had developed their true sense of patriotism than the meaning of present day nationalism. In this regard, it must be remembered here is that 'patriotism is a far older phenomenon than the modern day nationalism'. The resistance of the Greek city states to the Persian invasion, the crusades of Joan of Arc against the aliens rule from across the English Channel, and the uprising of the people of Delhi against the Iranian troopers of Nadir Shah, all exhibits patriotism in various antique forms. Patriotism signifies that spontaneous desire for independence from the alien rule which in all human societies, must long preceded the modern concept of national unity embodied in the sovereign national state. The patriotism of those who mutinied in 1857 expressed itself in the specific form of a combined religious crusade.⁴³ Likewise they started talking in terms of 'Hindus and Musalmans of Hindustan' which was vehemently opposed by even the contemporary members of British India Association who terms the mutiny as it belonged to a certain section of the society. Interestingly Rabindranath Tagore, who was close to that century also used the same expression--' all the Hindus and Musalmans of Hindustan felt a rush of hot blood-- in a mutiny story written in 1898, though by then the term 'Indian nation' had been familiarized by the Indian National Congress.⁴⁴

Conceptually, the mutiny was peculiarly a difficult phenomenon to define: a war of the races that was not a race war because the subject race conceived it as a war of religion; a religious war that cannot be called truly and purely a war of religion because what was being opposed was not the creed of the master race but their political domination; as such, then, neither a war of race nor a war of religion, but a patriotic war of the Hindu-Muslim brotherhood, or the inchoate social nationality of Hindustan; yet not a national war either. It was all these things and therefore, none of them: the product of mentality⁴⁵ rooted in the past, yet forced to reckon with the dynamic world of the nineteenth century. The truth after all is that while the rebels spoke of a war or restoration, their actual proceedings groped falteringly towards finding an effective alternative to the technologically advanced regime of the British. They sought to meet the challenge of the most superior race by developing a new sense of identity: the idea of a political community couched in terms of two combined religions. The circumstances were not congenial to the mutineers, just like their contemporaries Taipings as they were facing the most powerful imperial power. Hence, they envisaged their brave new world with the shattered past. For them, it was not a national war but a war of the Hindustanis [Hindus and Musalmans of Hindustan] to protect their 'Dharma' and 'Deen'⁴⁶ to save the country. So, the mutineers coined the idea of 'Hindus and Musalmans of Hindustan'⁴⁷. To understand rebels conception of colonialism Sabyasachi Bhattacharya quotes Hiren Mukherjee in his work 'Rethinking 1857' 'the mutiny, more than any other event of the 19th century, shook our people's mind and hearts, and its real story can be told only by ourselves. Foreign years, however friendly. Can hardly be attuned to the melody emitted by our people's heart-strings, melody that is sometimes unheard and sweeter and deeper on the account. The mutiny calls not for research only of the 'desk's dead wood variety: it asks for study and understanding, as unclouded by partisanship [and no more] as is possible to us.'⁴⁸

Moreover, the difference in the understanding of colonialism proved detrimental to the success of any of the mutinies /uprisings/ rebellions which preceded or succeeded the revolt of 1857. So, this rebellion and the understanding of the participants has to be understood in that context or time and space only when the most exploited and suppressed masses of India were trying to overthrow the colonial yoke. Notwithstanding, the lessons taken from the failures by the nationalist leadership and the different group of people ultimately culminated in the beginning of decolonization and attainment of India's independence on 15th August, 1947.

Keywords

- A] Jacqueris: [French] Communal uprising or revolt
- B] Yulbagulu: local fakir or saint of Coimbatore
- C] Nazarenes [Nasara]: A member of a sect of early Jewish converts to Christianity who retained the Mosaic rituals
- D] Mayang: It is a term used by the Meiteis in Manipur to refer to non- Manipuri Indians especially the speakers of Hindustani language and Bengali people. But historically the term has been used to denote the Bishnupuria Manipuris and Bengalis in Manipur
- E] Tawaif: a professional courtesan serving the nobility in the Mughal court.
- F] Virangana: a valorous woman who is strong and righteous
- G] Dharma and Deen: dharma means duty. It implies what one consciously must do. Deen means way. It encompasses habits, depositions and mentality that one must have.

Bibliography

- [1] Rajat Kanta Ray: 'The Mentality of Mutiny' in his work *The Felt Community, Commonalty and Mentality before the emergence of Indian Nationalism*, New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 2003
2. Leo Tolstoy: *War & Peace*
 3. D.D. Kousambi: *The road to Kanpur*
 4. Sabyasachi Battacharya: *-Rethinking 1857*
 5. Talmiz Khaldun: *the great rebellion 1857: a symposium* [Ed. By P.C. Joshi]
 6. Kaye, op. cit., Vol. II, Page233-234
 7. Thornhill, op. cit, page 324
 8. Arya Kirti by Rajani Gupta of Bengal, quoted by V.D. Savarkar, op, cit., page 435
 9. Metcalfe, op. cit. passim; Holmes, op. cit, page 352
 10. Thornhill, op. cit. page108

11. T. R. Holmes: op. cit., page 353
12. Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, op. cit., page 5
13. Joyce, op. cit., page 81
14. T. R. Holmes, op. cit., page 143
15. Ibid
16. Innes, op., cit., page 42
17. Kaye, op. cit., vol. II, page 265
18. Innes, Lucknow and Oudh in Mutiny, pp. 291-93
19. T.R. Holmes, op., cit. page 533
20. Sir Strachey, op. cit. 381-82
21. T.R. Holmes, op. cit. page 434; Kaye op. cit. vol. II, page 391, Charles Raikes, Notes on the Revolt in the N. W. Provinces of India, [1858], page 156ff.
22. Narrative of events connected with the Mutiny at Hamirpur by George H. Freeling, Collector and Magistrate, para 19, page 493, mentioned in The 1857 Rebellion by Biswamoy Pati [ed.] by Tapti Roy, Article The politics of a popular uprising, Bundelkhand in 1857, page 235
- 23 Translation of a letter from C. Chester, Commissioner of Allahabad to Sreemunt Narain Rao and Sreemunt Madhav Rao, 30 July 1857. Banda Collectorate Records, Box 2, SI.no. 30, file no. 31, Dept. XVIII Uttar Pradesh Regional Archives, Allahabad [henceforth, U.P.R.A.A.].
24. P. G. Scot- Personal Narrative, Page 1
25. Ranjit Guha-Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India, page 245
26. Tayler, Veritas Victrix, page 87
27. Ritambhara Devi-Indian Mutiny-1857 in Bihar, page 53
28. R. C. Majumdar: The Sepoy mutiny and the Revolt of 1857

29. Amar Farouqui: Anti - colonial upsurge in Malwa region and 1857, an article in Anbhai Sancha, Hindi, 1857-Bagawat ka -ek-Daur, page no. 32-138
30. Ashok Mehta, op. cit. page 64; Holmes. Op. cit. page 458
31. Kaye, op. cit., vol. II, Page 391; Thornhill, op. cit., page 107
32. Holmes, op. cit., page 170
33. Thomas Lowe, op. cit., page 339
34. Holmes, op. cit., page 143
35. N. Rajendran: Anti - colonial upsurge in Tamilnadu; from popular uprising to Sepoy's mutiny, Anbhai Sancha, page 58 to 62
36. S.N. Sen.: 1857
37. Government of Tamilnadu Archives and Historical Research, Egmore, Madras
38. S.C. Mittal: Modern India, 12th class, NCERT. Page 76-93
39. William Howard Russell: My Indian Mutiny Diary, Michael Edwards [ed.][London],1957, pp26-27
40. Rajat Kanta Ray: The Felt Community, Commonalty and Mentality before the Emergence of Indian Nationalism, New Delhi, OUP, 2003
41. Evidence of Hakim Ahsan Ullah, The trial of Mohammad Bahadur Shah, H.L.O. Garret [ed.], Govt. of Punjab, 1932, pp 267-268
42. Ibid, 76-93, B. L. Grover- Modern India
43. Punjab Administrative Report 1856-57, `1857-58
44. Susobhan Sarkar 'Views on 1857', in Susobhan Sarkar, 'On the Bengal Renaissance', Calcutta, 1979, page 119
45. Rabindranath Tagor,'Durasha'-1898, in Rabindra Rachnavali [1961], Vol. VII,P339, The point here is not about the unity and harmony between the two communities--there was much tension between them in 1857--but the groping expression of national identity through a religious formula.

46. Rajat Kanta Ray: the mentality of the mutiy

47. Feroz Shah's proclamation of 17th February 1858, FSUP, Vol. I, pp. 460-61

48. Sabyasachi Bahattacharya: Rethinking 1857

