

CHAPTER III

THE REVOLT OF 1857: EXTENT AND DIMENSION

One of the primary and severe outbursts of resentment against the British rule came in the form of the Indian revolt of 1857. This revolt followed the battles of Plassey and Buxar and the main cause was resentment against setting up of British rule in Bengal. The revolt was basically started by the soldiers who worked for the East India Company and later was spread across the country by peasants, artisans and soldiers who sacrificed their lives for the sake of others. Different religions of India came together and fought united for one cause. There were many different reasons for the outbreak of the revolt of 1857. British exploitation continued with imposing by their faith forcefully on Indians. There was a significant threat to British rule in India, when a number of Indian masses of the British India rose in revolt in 1857 against such common exploitation. This revolt struck a sympathetic chord among many people who had their own reasons to be dissatisfied with the British rule. The Revolt of 1857 is a significant event in the modern Indian history. The British took serious note of it, and considerably changed their policies in the wake of the revolt. Some of the members of the ruling colonial elite chose to ignore the popular character of the revolt and labeled it merely as a “Sepoy Mutiny”. Nationalist elite, which took shape in the last two decades of the nineteenth century to lead a successful anti-colonial political campaign, glorified it as the ‘first war of Indian independence’. Memories of the Revolt had lain deep in the awareness of both colonial rulers and the Indian subject.¹

Company rule in India refers to the rule or dominion of the British East India Company on the Indian subcontinent. This is variously taken to have commenced in 1757, after the battle of Plassey, when the Nawab of Bengal surrendered his dominions to the company ² in 1765, when the company granted the diwani or the right to collect revenue, in Bengal and Bihar ³ or in 1772, when the company established a capital in Calcutta and appointed its first governor-general, Warren Hastings, and became directly involved in governance. The rule lasted until 1858, when, after the Indian rebellion of 1857 and consequent to the Government of India Act. 1858, the British Government assumed the task of directly administering India in the new British Raj. The Britishers came and ruled India for nearly 200 years. After the battle of Plassey in 1757, the British achieved political power in India, and their paramountcy was established during the tenure of Lord Dalhousie, who became the Governor- General in 1848. He annexed Punjab, Peshwar and the Pathan tribes in North West of India. And by 1856, the British conquest and its authority were firmly established. And while the British power gained its heights during the middle of the 19th century, the discontent of the local rulers, the peasantry, the intellectuals, common masses and also of the soldiers who became unemployed due to the disbanding of the armies of various states that were annexed by the British became widespread. This soon broke out into a revolt which assumed the dimensions of the 1857 revolt.⁴ The Revolt of 1857, which began with a revolt of the military soldiers at Meerut, soon became widespread and posed a grave challenge to the British rule. Even though the British succeeded in crushing it within a year, it was certainly popular revolt in which the Indian rulers, the masses and the militia participated so enthusiastically that it came to be regarded as the First war of Independence.

The rapid expansion of the British dominion in India, attained as it was by changes in the administrative system and modes of existence to which the people had been accustomed through long ages, disturbed the placid currents of Indian life and produced commotions in different part of the country. Mention may be made, in this connection, of the Bareilly rising of A.D. 1816, the Cole outbreak of 1831 – 1832, and other minor risings in Chota Nagpur and Palamu; the Muslim movements like the Ferazee disturbances at Barasat (Bengal) in 1831 under the leadership of Syed Ahmad and his disciple, Meer Niser Ali or Titu Meer, and later in 1847 at Faridpur (Bengal) under the guidance of Deedoo Meer, the Moplah outbreaks in 1849, 1851, 1852, and 1855, and the Santal insurrection of 1855 – 1857. These risings testify to the general ferment in the British Empire in India, the last and the most severe being the Revolt of 1857 – 1859, which shook its mighty fabric to its very foundations.

1857 Revolt consisted both of rebellion by the sepoy or soldiers and reaction from sections of the general Indian population. Peasants were an important segment of Indian society. Uprising among the sepoy and peasants was even more directly related in that sepoy were in their origins, peasants with close ties with their kin people in the villages. Many of the sepoy came from Awadh, a region currently incorporated in the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh, a region that also saw massive peasant uprisings. Awadh, one of the main centers of the revolt, was annexed by Lord Dalhousie, Governor General of India, in 1856. The British removed talukdars, traditional landowners of the region, promising a better deal for the peasants. But in reality, condition of the peasants only got worse. Heavy over assessment of land revenue impoverished them. While talukdars appropriated the surplus peasants produced, they were limited and constrained by the

relations of Mutual interdependence between the Raja and the peasant and the traditional worldview of social norms and obligations. British conquest assaulted this traditional worldview, and removal of the king had an emotional impact on the people of north East India. The storm centers of the revolt were Delhi, Kanpur, Lucknow, Bareilly and Jhansi. Bakhat Khan was the rebel leader in Delhi and he took the fight to Lucknow. In Kanpur, Nana Sahib, adopted son of Baji Rao II, the Peshwa of the Maratha Kingdom, led the Revolt. The British had earlier refused to recognize Nana Sahib as the legitimate successor of the Peshwas. Tantia Tope, one of the loyal followers of Nana Sahib, is remembered for his valiant fight against the East India Company. Revolt at Lucknow was led by the Begum of Awadh who proclaimed her young son Nawab. Young Rani Lakshmibai of Jhansi joined the Revolt when the British refused to acknowledge her right to adopt an heir to the deceased local king. Kunwar Singh, a ruined and discontented Zamindar near Arrah in the state of Bihar, was the chief organizer of the Revolt in the area. The Revolt carried on as late as 1859 in some instances before it was finally crushed. A number of these heroes and heroines of the Revolt have been immortalized through the united way or oneness of their valiant battles in modern and contemporary India.

The process of the British conquest of India and the consolidation of British rule was accompanied by serious discontent and resentment among the masses. Even the Indian soldiers serving in the British Indian army were affected. For nearly 100 years popular discontent took the form of armed resistance led by the deposed chieftains or their descendants and relations, Zamindars and poligars, and exsoldiers, officials and other retainers of the Indian states. Broad section of the artisans and peasants joined the revolt

of 1857; the reason is that of their own grievances and hardships, often forming the backbone of the revolt of 1857. During first half of the nineteenth century intensification of the land revenue demand, exploitation of the artisans by the East Indian Company and its servants, and the uprooting of old Zamindars created an explosive condition. Popular or mass revolt occurred in almost every district and province. The demobilised soldiers and displaced peasants of India who were exploited by English East India Company participated in the famous revolt of 1857. Expansion of British power in India led to the popular revolt of 1857.

This revolt running like a thread through the history of the first hundred years of East India Company rule in India. This panel was based on the traditional links and loyalties between the peasants and the Zamindars, moneylenders and the petty chieftains. They were holy local and isolated or separated in feature. They were backward-looking and lacked any modern feeling of nationalism or a modern understanding of the nature and character of imperialism or the building of a new society on the basis of new social relationship. Their leadership was inevitably traditional and company unaware of the changing world around them. They did not pose a real challenge to British power even though the British had sometimes to deploy large armies to suppress them. Their great contribution lay in the establishment of valuable local traditions of struggle against foreign rule. The culmination of the traditional opposition to British rule came with the revolt of 1857 in which millions of peasants, artisans, soldiers and masses participated. The Revolt of 1857 was to stake British rule to its roots.⁵ The Revolt began with a mutiny of the sepoys or the Indian soldiers of the East India Company's army but soon engulfed wide regions and people. It was a product of the accumulated grievances of the people

against the foreign government. The peasants were discontented with the official land revenue policy and the consequent loss of their lands and the lower courts. The annexation of Awadh by the British in 1856 was widely resented and especially in Awadh. This action angered the company's soldiers, most of whom came from Awadh. Moreover they had now to pay higher taxes on the lands their families held in Awadh. The British also confiscated the estates of a majority of the taluqdars or zamindars. These dispossessed taluqdars became dangerous opponents of British rule. The annexationist policy followed by the British viceroy, Lord Dalhousie, also created panic among many rulers of the native states. These rulers now realised that total submission and humiliating declarations of loyalty to the foreign power could not guarantee their existence. The policy of annexation was, for example, directly responsible for making Nana Sahib, the Rani of Jhansi, and Bahadur Shah staunch enemies of the British. The sepoy of East India Company were discontented with their low pay, and hard life and the contemptuous treatment meted out to them by their British officers. Besides a sepoy had little prospect of promotion; no Indian could rise higher than a subedar drawing sixty or seventy rupees a month. Thus, by 1857, conditions were ready for mass upheaval. It is beyond doubt, "writes R.C. Dutt, "that political reasons helped a mere mutiny of soldiers to spread among large classes of the people in Northern and Central India, and converted it into a political insurrection".⁶

The real nature of the rebellion, and to estimate its effects on subsequent Indian history – social, economic and political – it is essential that we investigate into the real causes, follow its course through blood and terror⁷ and study the role played by various classes or sectors.

The primary reason of the revolt was the imperialist exploitation of the Indian masses. It would be well, therefore, to go back to the days of the founding of the East India Company. The stories of the fabulous profits being made by the Portuguese, the Dutch and the French Companies trading with India tempted British merchant adventures to form a trading company for a similar purpose. In 1600, the East India Company obtained a charter from Queen Elizabeth I to trade with India and the Spice Islands. Trade with India in those years consisted of buying handicrafts and other valuable and artistic products from the country. As the Indian craftsmen were generally ignorant of the value of their goods in the international market, the wily and unscrupulous merchant – adventurers bought their goods for a mere trifle, and made huge profits.⁸ In 1765, the East India Company acquired the Diwanee of Bengal. By then, it had ousted all other European competitors from the Indian market. The acquisition of the Diwanee and the virtual monopoly of the trade with India further increased the profits of the company and its servants, while adding heavily to the misery and privation of the people of India.⁹ Holmes remarks that “the native administrators oppressed the peasants and embezzled the revenue. The servants of the company found it profitable to connive at the abuses.”¹⁰ The inevitable result of the accumulation in England of the wealth of plunder was that it became, along with similar other accumulations, the basis of capitalist enterprise in that country. Marx observes that “chartered companies were powerful instruments in promoting concentration of wealth the treasures obtained outside Europe by direct looting, enslavement and murder, flowed to the motherland (metropolitan country) in streams and were there turned into capital.”¹¹ Had watt lived fifty years earlier, he and his invention must have perished together, for lack of sufficient capital to set them

working.¹² In the Indian context during colonial period the East Indian Company's policy of territorial aggrandizement and annexation, the chief source of demand for Indian foods – the native courts - were disappearing from the Indian scene. The process of decay began by the establishment of foreign rule and helped by the force of foreign goods. The Industrial Revolution in England completely transformed the character of her relations with India. The Expansion of British manufacture overwhelmed and ultimately destroyed the primitive Indian industry and converted the country into a source for raw material. India became a major market for British goods. The condition of the uprooted artisans and craftsmen became miserable. The population of Dacca-renowned throughout the world for the fine quality of muslin that they produced – decreased from 150,000 to 20,000 between 1827 and 1837.¹³ The transformation in trade relations had severe repercussions on the Indian social structure. The uprooted artisans fell back upon agricultural. There was no possibility of the growth of a modern industrial system within the orbit of imperial relations.¹⁴ During the Hindu Muslim rule the “King's Share” was a proportion of the year's produce and was surrendered as a tribute of tax by the peasant joint-owners of a self-governing village community to the ruler or his nominee. The soil in India belonged to the tribe or its subdivision – the village community, the clan or the brotherhood settled in the village – and never was considered as the property of the king ... Either in feudal or imperial scheme there never was any notion of the ownership of the soil vesting in anybody except the peasantry.¹⁵ During the company's rule it was assured that the state was the supreme landlord. In place of the traditional share of the government in the produce paid by the village communities as a whole, there was introduced a system of fixed payment in cash assessed on land which had no reference to

good or bad harvest or to how much of the land was cultivated. In most cases the assessment was individual, either levied directly on the cultivator or on landlords appointed by the government. The individual's land being directly assessed, the village communities were recognized as proprietors of land the results were not very different, the reason is that the responsibility was collective only in name. There was a strong trend towards individual assessment, and in practice, co-proprietors were treated as individual proprietors who could sell or mortgage their land.¹⁶ Under the operation of the company's law, however, the village was usually in debt from the Zamindar downwards and of all creditors the Bania was the most pitiless.¹⁷ The company's law not only gave protection to him, it also gave him land as security for his claims.

The hopes that had been painted by Lord Cornwallis were too rosy. The Court of Directors gave its consent to the proposal of permanent settlement without much ado, and the revenue settlement of Bengal was declared permanent in 1793. According to Sir Richard Temple, the permanent settlement was a measure which was affected to naturalize the landed institutions of England among the natives of Bengal."¹⁸ But by this measure, as Lord Metcalfe observed, the ancient rights of the ryot "were virtually destroyed by the little of property conferred by us on those who had no pretension to it."¹⁹ Even under the permanent settlement estates were liable to be sold in default of payment under the provisions of Act I of 1845."²⁰ Holmes writes in the history of Indian Mutiny that the result of Cornwallis' action was that 'the inferior tenants derived from it no benefit whatever. The Zamindars again and again failed to pay their rent charges; and their estates were sold for the benefit of the government."²¹ The collector of Midnapore wrote in 1802, that a few years of the system of sale and attachment' had reduced most of

the great Zamindars in Bengal to distress and beggary and produced a greater change in the landed property of Bengal than has, perhaps, ever happened in the same space of time in any age or country by the mere effect of internal regulations.”²² Another consequence of the permanent settlement in Bengal was the subdivision of rights in land. The Zamindars leased out their interests to the middlemen, and the middlemen leased out in turn, creating a long chain of rent received and rent payers who intervened between the state and the actual cultivator. In 1819 the absolute subjection of cultivators to the mercy of the Zamindars “was regretfully admitted, and yet no steps were undertaken to protect the ryot.”²³ The wealth which the company derived from the exploitation of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa tempted it to expand its territory. The company’s armies fought twenty wars between the Battle of Plassey and the great Rebellion; in one hundred years, Mysore, Maharashtra, Karnatak, Tanjore, Bundelkhand, Rohilkhand, Hariana, the Punjab (including pre-partition North Western Frontier Province) and Oudh were added the company’s domain. All the former Native states, from Kashmir down to Cochin, became the company’s “protectorate”. What most affected the company’s soldiers was the annexation of Oudh – “the fatherland of the bulk (three - fourths) of the company’s army”²⁴ – by Lord Dalhousie in 1855. Oudh had, in fact, been managed by the company under a system of double – government since the middle of the 18th century.²⁵ The Mussalmans, not only of Oudh, but of all upper India, were embittered and angered by the suppression of one of the few Muhammedan reigning houses which had been left in power,” wrote Lt. General McLeod Innes in his excellent book, *The Sepoy Revolt*.²⁶ Under the weak rule of the Nawab wazier of Oudh, Talukder class had exercised authority almost independently on him,²⁷ extorted land revenue at the point of the bayonet,²⁸ and

kept the country in a state of instability rendering life, property and industry in secure.²⁹ According to Sir W. H. Sleeman, "whenever they quarrel with each other, or with the local authorities of the (native) government, from whatever cause, they take to indiscriminate plunder and Murder-over all lands not held by men of the same class – no road, town, village, or hamlet is secure from their merciless attacks – robbery and murder become their diversions, their sports, they no more hesitate of taking the lives of men, women, and children, who never offended them, than those of deer or wild hags."³⁰ But even where no talukdars intervened, hundreds of villages had been ruined and desolated by the exactions of the greedy and rapacious officials – amils.³¹ The sufficient evidence of the wretchedness was "miserable and starved cattle, unable to drag the wretched implements of husbandry in use, squailed and deserted villages, ruined wells, and a naked and starved peasantry."³² In this way, observed kaye, "a revolution was gradually brought about by means of English application (of law), which acting coincidentally with the other agencies, swelled the number of the dissatisfied, dangerous classes, who traced their downfall to the operations of the British rule, and sullenly bided their time for the recovery of what they had lost, in some new revolutionary epoch."³³ Sir Syed Ahmed Khan who cannot be accused of ever having been anti-british in his sentiments, remarks in his brochure, "The cause of the Indian Revolt, that" the system of revenue settlement, introduced by the English Government is undoubtedly creditable. But the rate of land revenue is heavy when compared with former settlements The assessments imposed by the English government have been fixed without any regard to the various contingencies. Land lying fallow pays in the same proportions as cultivated land..... The cultivations are obliged to borrow money in order to pay land revenue. The interest on

these loans is exorbitant.”³⁴ A large number of estates every year were auctioned under the decrees of the courts, in lieu of debts which sometimes ran to no more than a couple of rupees. They were bought by new men from the lower provinces. The former proprietors, who still belonged to the soil, were reduced to the position of small farmers and under – tenants on their ancestral lands. Sir Syed Ahmad Khan describes the effect of the numerous sales of landed property in the first days of British rule by saying that Indian society was turning upside down.³⁵ The disbandment of the former king’s army, which had swollen to 70,000 men, according to Resident Lowe’s calculations,³⁶ had thrown a horde of desperados upon Oudh. “To discharge a sepoy was to create a bandit,” remarked Lt. General Innes.³⁷ There was not a family in Oudh which did not have one member at least serving in the army. The region was thus overrun by the disbanded soldiers who had found no place in the new Oudh Irregular force and the military police.³⁸ The disbandment resulted in forced unemployment in almost every Oudh peasant’s home. The extinction of native states aggravated the situation. The Duke of Wellington had probably this in mind when he remarked that to annex a state was to degrade and beggar the natives, making them all enemies.”³⁹ Sir Thomas Munro also pointed out that this policy “debased the whole people.”⁴⁰

The Europeans, who filled these posts did not, and were not expected to maintain large retinues, as the Indians in the former governments has done, and would probably do it if they were given the posts. Thus the poorer sections of the Indian people would in any case have been unable to obtain those posts, whatever the government ruling over them. The consequence of this was that they were prepared to join in any upheaval on the chance of improving their lot.⁴¹ In 1850, the production of silver fell short of the world

demand for it, and this aggravated the situation further – first, because Indian currency had been placed on an exclusively silver basis by an act of 1835, and secondly, because India was still passing through the transition from barter to money economy.⁴² At this critical moment in the expansion of their influence and power, the British suffered reverses in the First Afghan war (1838 - 42), the Crimean war (1854 - 56) and in the two wars against the Sikhs (1845 - 49). This nearly shattered the general belief “in their invincibility,” despite the fact that they won all these wars; for the people discovered that the British were no superman. They were capable of making almost fatal mistakes – mistakes which perhaps clever adversaries could exploit.⁴³

As belief in the invincibility of the British army had almost ended, the sepoys convinced themselves that the many victories which the English had gained had been due entirely to the Indians’ prowess. They believed and voiced the belief in no uncertain terms that they had enabled the English to conquer Hindustan from Burma to Kabul.⁴⁴ The composition of the British army was also favourable to the growth of this belief. There were 360,000 sepoys as against British Soldiers, and 12,000 Indian gunners as against 6,500 European.⁴⁵ In these circumstances, the sepoys were quick to take offence when they were told that they would no longer enjoy the privileges of Foreign Service (batta) when serving in Sind, or on the Punjab. They asked why they should not have the same privileges merely because the British boundary – line had been extended to what was recently foreign soil. Reconciliation to the decision was almost impossible in the contest of their conviction that the territories could not have been conquered without them. They felt embittered because their employer the company had rewarded them for their food services by depriving them of a well – deserved portion of their pay.⁴⁶ Other

matter that touched the sepoys to the quick was company's alleged interference in their religious beliefs. Acts such as the abolition of sati, legalization of remarriage of Hindu widows, and prohibition of the killing of daughters, whether in themselves good or bad, were repugnant to Indian customs and socio – economic and also religious tradition. They increased the suspicions of the Indians masses.⁴⁷ During 1850, an act was passed permitting converts to Christianity to retain their patrimony. In the midst of the furore this created among Indian masses, a letter by one Mr. Edmond was circulated from Calcutta to all principal officials of the company's government. The letter said that as the entire sub-continent was under the control of a Christian power, it was but right to convert the Indian people to the Christian faith.⁴⁸ It was remoured that the Indian servants of the East India Company would be the first to be converted to Christianity and after that the mass of the people. It was presumed that the letter was written by order of the government. The denial offered only a temporary relief the general belief remained the government had only postponed the project and would resume it the moment it felt strong enough to do so.⁴⁹ During this period there was no communication between rulers and the ruled, no living together or near one another – as had always been the custom among conquerors who came from the north – west. The English rulers always looked forward to retirement and returning “home”. They seldom came to settle in India.⁵⁰ The Indian masses had no voice in the administration of the country. The greatest mischief lay in this that the people misunderstood the views and the motive of the British government. They misapprehended every act, and whatever law was passed was misconstrued by men who had no share in the framing of it, and hence no means of judging its spirit. The Indian masses had no voice in the administration of the country during the 1850's. The laws and

regulation passed by the British government, it could never hear, as it ought to have heard, the voice of the people on these subjects. The people had no means of protesting against what they felt was wrong, or of giving expression to their wishes.⁵¹ The masses of India misunderstood the views and the motives of the British government. They fell into the habit of thinking that all laws were passed with a view to degrade and ruin them, and to deprive them. At last came the time when all men looked upon the English government as slow poison, a rope of sand, a treacherous flame of fire. They began to believe that if today they escaped from the clutches of the government, tomorrow they would fall into them; or that even if they escaped the tomorrow, the third day would see their ruin. When the rulers and ruled occupy relatively such a position as this, what hope is there of loyalty or of good will?"⁵² The facts and circumstances that created in the minds of the people a vague dread of mass conversion to Christianity, strengthened by the letters of Edmond and activities of wheler, brought home to the mind of the sepoy the grave and imminent peril which threatened their religion;. And this feeling worked upon minds thoroughly disaffected against the British for many years past. A discerning eye could see that the mine was loaded and the train prepared, and the spark might be easily furnished by any inflammable passion. The story of the greased cartridge supplied the spark and caused an explosion which shook the British Empire in India to its very foundations.⁵³ It is to be observed that in the case of social reforms introduced by the British were looked upon with suspicion by the conservative sections of the Indian society. Reforms such as abolition of sati, legalization of widow remarriage and extension of western education to women were looked upon as examples of interference in the social customs of the country. The social discrimination faced by the Indian masses due to the British attitude

of racial superiority also led to much resentment. Educated Indians were denied promotions and appointments to high office. This turned them against the British. The increasing activities of the Christian missionaries and the actual conversions made by (Hindu to Christian) them were taken as a proof of this fear. The policy of taxing lands belonging to temples and mosques lent further support to this idea. The belief that their religion was under threat, united all sections of society against a common enemy that is British East Indian Company.

There has been little attempt to understand the thoughts and actions of thousands of ordinary villagers who rose on such a considerable scale. Even in the work, for instance, of S.B. Chaudhury, where ordinary people do come into picture, there is a tendency to treat their actions as nothing more than an automatic response to the objective changes brought about by British rule, or to consider them as a passive or semi-passive mass that was activated by the mobilization efforts of the leaders. There has been no real attempt to study the vital elements of popular consciousness, how the people worked out such perceptions and gave meanings to them in terms of their own cultural codes, symbols, and value systems. An aspect of autonomous popular consciousness and action during the Revolt of 1857 has started receiving greater attention. The complementarity of the taluqdar-peasant relationship – where inequality was circumscribed by customs and mediated by various forms of beneficence – was disrupted by alien colonialist operations with shocking repercussions on the ethical and normative visions of the peasants.⁵⁴ The essentialist construction of an Indian nature is evident – an Indian Rajput, under normal circumstances i.e. uncontrolled by British law and order, is essentially prone to plunder. As a sequel, therefore, they are met by a force which supplied whatever was wanted in

their former chastisement. 'And they have behaved well ever since,' thus concludes the contented civilizer.⁵⁵ The 1857 Revolt is thus given a character of 'a great struggle between light and darkness, civilization and savages'.⁵⁶ The solution advocated and practiced by historians like Ranajit Guha – to 'invert' these official sources in order to arrive at a knowledge of rebel mentality – seems to move within a frame work of binary opposites, which is problematic such an approach misses out on the whole range of nuances of intermediary attitudes and interpretations that various groups of rebels manifested through their actions and perceptions. It gives us little idea of the separate cultural domain that the groups of common men had tried to preserve against the onslaught of the colonialist regime. There is very little help from the official sources in trying to construct the various constituents of popular culture – notions of 'dharma' and life, its meaningful symbolism and ritual significance within polity and society arrived at by different groups of rebels – all of which are essential to truly grasp and understand the modalities and idioms of popular grievances and actions in 1857, along with their casual and characteristic inter-relation and spiritual variations.⁵⁷ There is no dearth of discussions on the causes and issues leading to the uprising of 1857. In the context of our study, it is more pertinent to begin with a cursory examination of the changing contours of society, economy and policy as a whole in the region under consideration in the years before 1857 under colonial rule, and examine how different sections of the population perceived and reacted to these changes with variations over geographical and social space. Under new colonialist policies were not only the statues of kings and chieftains – but even their social – cultural and ritualistic roles as a political functions were adversely affected, an attack on the symbolic legitimacy of the political order by the British could

very well mean an attack on the cherished values and norms that had sustained traditional society and polity, and was in fact perceived as such.⁵⁸ The introduction of contractual relations and European ideas of property, rent and revenue, meant that the kings were reduced to the status of chiefs; the local lords who were seen as upholders of a social order maintained through ritual practices who reduced to 'land lords', and soldiers, for whom military service to the overlord was duly affiliated with ethical and religious sentiments, were converted into 'recruits' serving for money with little actual understanding or regard for such sentiment.⁵⁹ It is also important to remember that most of the sepoys under the company were recruited from Awadh, the eastern district of Ghazipur – Ballia and Shahabad, and had an agrarian background with considerable peasant links. Thus the issues that affected the sepoys could also affect their peasant relatives back home, and vice versa.⁶⁰ In the fertile alluvial plains of the eastern district – Gorakhpur, Azamgarh, Jaunpur, Banaras, Ghazipur – Ballia and extending into the similar areas of western Bihar – dense settlement patterns and social networks based on clan and locality was the norm. Even in the doab regions of Kanpur, Fatehpur and Allahabad, though instant upheaval had made lasting rulership difficult, it had nevertheless led to an adoption of defiant independence on the part of all power – holders, from lineage chiefs to village Zamindars. The impact of British administrative and revenue policies on these groups is crucial as these were the people who would, by and large, emerge as active rebels in 1857.⁶¹ In the Banaras the land went from lineages and local chiefs into the hands of merchants, bankers, petty civil servants, and their descendants. These groups formed the new class of landlords – often absentee and managing affairs through managers – who were different in background and outlook from

the older group (means the local group of merchant as well as Zamindars and landlords). The paternal ties that used to take away the edge from the exploitative relationship between older landlords and peasants as well as common masses gave way to a system of cold, impersonal, and ruthless exploitation of peasants by this new class of landlords. Cohn has analysed the data on 283 public auctions of lands sold in the period 1795-1850 in the region comprising the four districts of Banaras, Ghazipur, Balia, Jaunpur and Mirzapur. Cohn concludes that the three groups – Rajputs, Brahmans and Muslims, who were forced to sell more than they bought – the Rajputs accounted for most of the total land lost. Cohn has shown that approximately 41% of the lands transferred in these auctions went to families whose principal occupations were money lending, service to law.⁶² The new purchasers were overwhelmingly non-resident; their contact with cultivators was limited to ruthless extortion of rents and all this disrupted the traditional moral economy of the countryside. This would prove a crucial factor in the participation of a large mass of peasants in the uprising, specifically targeting their attacks on the gaddis, shops, offices, and houses of these merchants and public servants. The organization of the rebels especially on the pre-rebellion period. The reason for this is obvious. The records about the nature, the functions and the structure of their secret organization. Books on the revolt are replete, no doubt, with the accounts of itinerant Moulavis, Faquirs, pandits and sanyasis, the volunteer begging parties and the Madaris who roamed from place to place and spread the message of revolt and also spread the exploitation of the British East India Company. Such books abound also in stories about the red lotuses and chappatis passing from village to village. The author of 'A Narrative of the Indian Revolt has described the passing of the lotus thus. "A man appeared with a

lotus flower and handed it to the chief of the regiment. He handed it on to another man who took it and passed it on and when it came to the last, he suddenly disappeared to the next station. There was not, it appears, a detachment, not a station on Bengal through which the lotus flower was not circulated.”⁶³ Sir George Otto Trevelyan is of the opinion that the red lotus united all the sepoys.⁶⁴ Each one was made to swear over the red lotus that he would act with the others when the call came.⁶⁵ According to Savarkar, the sepoys used to meet secretly at night. All resolutions were passed in the general meetings, and all the decisions that were taken in the inner circles were obeyed strictly.⁶⁶ Every regiment was a unit in the larger organization. To facilitate deliberations between the various regiments, it was arranged that on festive occasions regiments should invite one another for celebration. This afforded a pretext for united secret meetings. Selected sepoys met in the houses of the subedars. The work of deciding important matters was left to the officers.⁶⁷ The circulation of chappatis on the eve of the outbreak was, in all probability, a signal to prepare the people for the coming upheaval. Nawab Moinuddin describes how early one morning in February the watchman of Farukh Khan brought a chappati and asked him to cook five similar ones to send to the five nearest villages, with the instruction that each village chowkidar was to prepare five similar chappatis for distribution in the same way. Each chappati was made of barley and wheat flour. It was about the size of a man’s palm and weighed two tolas. This circulation of chappatis was an exact repetition of what had happened before the Mahrattas invaded northern India in 1803; the only difference was that in place of mutton, a spring of millet had accompanied the chapatti. Similarly, before the santal rebellion a branch of the sal tree had been circulated from village to village. According to Sir John Malcolm “there had been a

mysterious circulation of sugar grist before the Mutiny of the coast Army in 1806. Dim prophecies and rumours foreshadowing a holocaust came in the wake of these chappatis. They created alarm in the public mind.⁶⁸ In this regard the masses gathered against the British exploitation within the one revolt's lap.

A central question for any strategy of socialist transformation is the question of agency, the social forces that will carry out this transformation. Classical Marxist view of struggle for socialism as class struggle, properly interpreted, carries within it the basic elements of the answer to this question. It was characteristic of Marxism that even as it established the necessity and possibility of socialism in the material objective conditions first created for it by capitalism, it also looked for the social forces in society that can provided the decisive thrust to the struggle for the new historic form to be achieved. Marx, on the basis of his analysis of capitalism, located this social force, the revolutionary subject or agency above all in the proletariat of what were in his time the most the most advanced capitalist countries. Not because any class teleology or metaphysics was involved or, in Marx's words, because 'socialists considered the proletarians as gods'. But for the simple reason that as a class of the worst victims of capitalism which 'cannot free itself without abolishing the conditions of its own life', the proletariat was seen to have a most direct objective interest in transition to socialism, and because it was thought natural and easy for it to 'win the theoretical awareness of its loss', that is, acquire the revolutionary consciousness necessary for carrying out this transition. The growing numerical strength of the proletariat as well as its structural location in capitalism, at the very heart of production, was seen to give it a certain strategic social power and capacity for collective action to be an agent of revolutionary

transformation. While Marx never denied the role of another social forces in the revolutionary process, indeed sought them as allies of the proletariat, it was the proletariat the objective situation reinforcing its self awareness as the prime victim of capitalism and its sense of collective power, which was to be the strategic actor in the socialist revolution, the grave diggers' of capitalism as Marx called them.⁶⁹ In 1789, the French Revolution, generated the military philosophy known as "the nation in arms". In accordance with this idea, a state with popular sovereignty was stronger than an absolutist monarchy because its people willingly contributed their blood in defence of the country they considered their own⁷⁰, and this marked the rise of the people's war. It is to be noted that people's war in this context refers to interstate warfare and hence is different from the Maoist concept of people's war which involves the political mobilization of certain classes by the socialistic mentality for conducting guerrilla and conventional warfare against the ruling classes.

The Great Mutiny lasted from May 10, 1857 till April 1859. In certain aspects, the fighting during this period in south Asia approximated the paradigm of a people's war. All the elements characterizing a people's war were present in varying degrees in the conflagration of the Mutiny. The East India Company's wars with the indigenous powers between 1770 and 1849 were similar to the European 18th Century wars. But combat during 1857 represented a lethal increase as regards scope, intensity and impact on society. Alexander Llewellyn asserts that in 1857 both sides aimed at the complete destruction of the enemy.⁷¹ The distinction between combatants and non-combatants vanished in the case of people's war. Forster and Nagler claim that the civil war in US of 1861-65 and the Franco-Prussian war of 1871 witnessed the evolution of a strategy

directed against the civilians. This was because the civilians were necessary to sustain the war effort and the former often also joined the people's armies. The people took up arms and were either mobilized from above or they mobilized on their own spontaneously.⁷² The popular initiative shaped the mass violence that unfolded against the alien regime in 1857.⁷³ Rudrangshu Mukherjee goes on to say that the rebels indulged in acts of symbolic violence. Instances of popular unrest were symptoms of popular hatred and anger.⁷⁴ Popular folk culture perceived the Ghadar of 1857 as an attempt of the people (described as 'balwai' in colonial records) to free their mulk from the rule of the hated English (firangis). The popular perception of people towards the colonizers as Firangis, connotes certain characteristic and features. From certain interesting Bhojpuri, Avadhi, Bundeli and Bagheli folk cultural forms, we get some idea about what they actually meant when they referred to the English as firangis, they were perceived by the people as those who were fair-skinned (gora), were looters and exploiters of the country (mulk) and those who corrupted their religion and caste.⁷⁵ The Revolt of 1857, spread like wildfire. Within a week of the breaking out of the rebellion the English empire in upper India had all but disappeared.⁷⁶ Between the frontiers of Bengal and Punjab, English authority was acknowledged only for a few miles around Agra, and in some other isolated spots where there happened to be English regiments. "To live in India now", wrote Lowe "was like standing on the verge of a volcanic crater, the sides of which were fast crumbling away from our feet while the boiling lava was ready to erupt and consume us."⁷⁷ Every ploughshare in upper India was being turned into a sword; The Events of 1857 at Berhampur and Barrackpur created deep impressions in the minds of the sepoys and probably among people too. On the other hand this paved the way for others to think

about their possible acts under similar situation. Berhampur and Barrackpur no doubt inspired several sepoys and induced them to think that some people among them exhibited the courage and courted a glorious end to uphold their religion. The resolute and adamant attitude of the army authorities and the state's administration further strengthened their fear that the state was conspiring to deprive them of their religion; There was no reason for the sepoys, peasants, adibasis and even aristocrats to have any trust and confidence on any foodeill of the colonial state. All of them have seen heard from their parents and grandparents how a period systematic social deprivation originated in India after the beginning of the colonial rule in 1757. They have also seen heard from their parents and grandparents how several hundred and thousands of masses resisted the intrusion of colonial rule and sacrificed their life. They have also seen, heard from their parents and grandparents how the colonial state through its law, police, prison and army dominated village after village, killed and burnt and destroyed many of their cherished and beloved people and things. So at least on this issue sepoys became more resolute that they will not surrender their faith, religion, the only one left space of solace as well as the space to locate their own root in an alien overbearing state.⁷⁸

On 23rd April Colonel Carmichael's myth of Meerut cantonment ordered a parade of 90 skirmishers to be held on next day where the colonel would demonstrate how without biting by teeth the sepoys can load their cartridges. Next day when the sepoys arrived at the parade ground 85 cartridge and despite repeated efforts from the colonel they adhered to their poi9nt rigidly. Ultimately the parade was dismissed and a court of Enquiry was called on 25th April. The court gave the verdict later that the 85 rebels will have to be given 10 years of rigorous imprisonment. On 9th May morning at the parade ground of

the cantonment 85 sentenced sepoys were assembled, they were wearing uniform at that time. After the announcement of sentence their army uniform, medals etc. were taken away from them and then ironsmiths fixed iron shackles on their legs and this whole process took long time. This event no doubt created deep impression upon the minds of other sepoys assembled at the parade ground. In the eyes of all the other sepoys these 85 men of 3rd light cavalry were already examples of courage and sacrifice. Those 85 men sacrificed job, honor and were compelled to imprisonment for their resoluteness to protect their religion. After the parade ground the rebels were escorted to jail. When the court of enquiry was going on during that period the sepoys were becoming enraged. Hugh Gough mentioned that during those time incendiary fires destroyed huts at night and in the bazaar there prevailed an ill feeling among the people. This event indicates that already when at Berhampur and Barrackpur sepoys revolted and were punished, at that time again another penal measure on the same issue further enraged and irritated the sepoys and also the local people. The court martial added further fuel. Although the morning and midday of the 10th May showed no signs of a huge outburst but in the evening at 5 p.m. a cry was raised in the bazaar that European troops were coming in the Indian sepoy lines to disarm the Indian sepoys. The sepoys of the 20th N. I. rushed out with their arms, started firing and thus begun the preliminary proceedings of the coming cyclone. During that time a group of sepoys of the 3rd light cavalry marched to the jail and released their 85 prisoner comrades from the jail. By late evening several bungalows, houses, government establishment were burnt down. Palmer observed that when the sepoy lines broke open in revolt the news reached to the bazaar and there started violent activities in the bazaar. ⁷⁹ In late evening the sepoys released several hundred prisoners

from old jail and this gave a fresh impetus. At late night as Palmer has observed that from the surrounding villages came several bands of Gujar adibasis who set fire to the unoccupied sappers and miners line. By that time the sepoy already left Meerut and divided in groups they marched towards Delhi.⁸⁰ As a result the entire Meerut district and Bulandshahr rose up in the Revolt of 1857.

The Revolt of 1857, in Delhi has been a subject of much interest among historians of modern India. Some of them have, rather incidentally also discussed the rebels' efforts at establishing a working administration of Delhi. Delhi was occupied by the rebel sepoy on 11 May. Colonel Vibart observed that after morning breakfast when all were taking rest at their bungalows at that time, an hour later came the news that sepoy of light cavalry from Meerut arrived at Delhi.⁸¹ S. N. Sen observed that there was no lack of sympathizers inside and once it became known to the city people that the sepoy from Meerut arrived at Delhi to fight for faith after killing the Europeans the streets were thronged with crowd.⁸² Chaplain John Rotton observed that long after the revolt of 1857 he came to know why in Delhi it took long time for the revolt to take place. Rotton narrated that the Deputy collector of Delhi told him that the king sent a sowaree camel down to the Meerut road to report how near the British troops were to his city. When the messenger returned, saying there were certainly no European soldiers within 20 miles of Delhi, the spirit of mutiny could restrain itself no longer. This was the reason, as Rotton concluded why the activities inside Delhi started after a delay. The rebel sepoy forced and eventually succeeded in convincing the unwilling emperor to assume the leadership.⁸³ The rebels attacked and destroyed post-office, electric telegraph, Delhi Bank, Delhi gazette press, every house in cantonments in the lines. Charles Ball mentioned that

at late hours of the day Gujar adibasis from the adjacent villages of Delhi started to arrive and then started full scale killing and plunder of Europeans and their houses from “foundation to roof”.⁸⁴ After the installation of Bahadur shah on the throne the rebels issued proclamations. In one of the earlier proclamations the rebels gave call to all people of the country to join in the war which they initiated to save their religion. In the proclamation the rebels invited all “Hindus and Musulmans” to “unite in this struggle”. The rebels also advised everybody to copy the proclamation and dispatch it everywhere and ‘all true Hindus and Musulmans’ were advised to” be alive and watchful. The rebels also invited people from all over to come and join them at Delhi. For this reason, although some rulers remained loyal to the colonial state but from many parts of the country it became an aim of the rebels to join in Delhi and subsequently several rebels started to arrive at Delhi. The Delhi court poet Ghalib observed that “The rebel armies were assembling from various places form India. Since, the name of the emperor was associated with the revolt, many officers from great distances had joined the rebellion.”⁸⁵ The entire region of Doab and Rohilkhand became a hotbed of rebellion. Rice Holmes observed that “Rajas emerged from their seclusion, gathered their retainers around them, and proclaimed their resolve to establish their authority, as vassals of the king of Delhi.” Everywhere the Gujar adibasis as well as masses joined in the rebellion and the dispossessed land owners also joined and drove the tahsildars, the country police.⁸⁶ When we see the action of the rebels sepoys in this broader historical context it is not surprising that they should have decided to set up their new state in the imperial capital (Delhi) with the Mughal emperor as its nominal head. They were not acting in impulse. They had a fairly good idea of the implications of this move, namely, that it would

convince people that the Government of the East India Company had been definitely overthrown. We should bear in mind that most of the rebel governments in different parts of Northern, central and eastern India invariably sought the formal sanction of the emperor to establish their legitimacy. For the company too, destroying the Delhi regime was the foremost priority.

Consequently the motives of the rebels have often been obscured. Yet the sepoys understood much better than we possibly can the political significance of associating the name of Bahadur Shah with their struggle against colonial rule.⁸⁷

The military cantonment of Nasirabad was situated near Ajmer. On 28th May revolt broke in this cantonment. Charles Ball narrated that at first the 15th N .I. took possession of the artillery but others showed no inclination to join them but by evening the situation changed and full scale revolt broke out. Henry Mead has noted that when the remaining Europeans left the station the local villagers appeared in the scene with their arms. After that the treasury was looted and bungalows burnt. Charles Ball also observed that finally the rebel sepoys left the station to go and join Delhi and in their route captain Nixon tried to stop them but ultimately the rebels were successful in reaching Delhi.⁸⁸

Henry Mead has observed that in Bareilly just before the outbreak fugitives from other corps passed through and influenced the minds of the men and told them that European troops were coming to destroy their caste.⁸⁹ The European officers at Bareilly were fully confident of their troops. They felt that their troops were loyal and would not revolt. At that time at Bareilly was stationed the 18th N. I., 8th irregular cavalry and 6th company of Bengal native artillery. Charles Ball has observed that the two infantry

regiments became highly excited when they heard that a king had been proclaimed at Delhi.⁹⁰ The British officers of the station remained in the dark up to the moment of the outbreak. Rebels acted according to their plan. On 31st May at 11'O clock a gun was fired by the artillery, the sepoy's rushed and took their arms and started indiscriminate firing. The rebels broke open the jail and released some 3000 prisoners and with them joined the locals. In Bareilly an artillery subedar Bakhtawar Khan assumed the position of commander – in – Chief and retired judge Khan Bahadur Khan proclaimed himself Nawab and set up the government. Henry Mead noted that the Bareilly rebels headed for Delhi with 700 carts laden with treasure which was looted from the treasuries of Rohilkhand.⁹¹

On the same day the sepoy's of the 28th N. I. revolted at Shahjahanpur. Here the sepoy's gathered with in one revolts lap. The sepoy's killed Reverend McCullum, Dr. Bowling, Captain James, Lieutenant Spans, Captain salmon and civil magistrate Mr. Ricketts.⁹²

What was important in all this was not the objective truth, but what the people believed the company was going to do or doing. And it was the belief about what was being done and the consequent panic that stirred men into feverish activity. Fear bred fear, and rumour spread from one sepoy line to another, generating activity and more panic. Rumour, fear and panic, for all their irrationality, brought men together, stoked their hatred and spurred them to violent action. The transmission of rumours and panic was facilitated by the fact that the sepoy's shared a common life style; very often they came from the same background. Events such as the seizure of Awadh or the way the first summary settlement in Awadh was disrupting the familiar world, when discussed in

the sepoy lines, could reinforce feelings of shared misfortune and generate mass violence. Rumours of attempts to undermine caste purity must have created widespread panic, stirring up the wind of Madness. Fantasy, which revealed deeprooted distrust, combined with facts to produce an image of the firangi Raj as the sacred. The episode of the greased cartridge must have provided the crucial element of psychological over-stimulation, transforming perception into action. The mutinies thus expressed a collective mentality of opposition that embodied in it a whole matrix of panic, anxiety and hope. Added to the force of rumours was the circulation of mysterious objects like chapattis and lotus flowers – the most commonly referred to incident of the mutiny – conveying unknown messages. In this context it is worth-while recalling, especially as religion had an obvious hold over the nineteenth century Indian mind, that there was current in India during this time the prophecy that the end of British rule was not far off.⁹³ As the uprisings took place in the various Awadh stations and British administration collapsed, the talukdars recovered the land they had lost. Very often in a remarkable act of loyalty the village proprietors returned the land voluntarily to the talukdar. Capt. Barrow, who had sought shelter with Hanwant Singh, watched this act of allegiance. The return of the sepoys from the mutinous regiments provided the talukdars with fighting men, and the allegiance of the village proprietors gave them a popular base. It was only then that conditions were fulfilled for the revolt of the army to be transformed into a revolt of the people.⁹⁴ In Awadh there were three distinct phase in the transformation of the army revolt into a general uprising of the masses and in the subsequent progress of the rebellion. The first phase was a direct sequel to the mutinies in the districts. With the collapse of the British administration in the districts the only area where British authority survived was

Lucknow. The attention increased once the British suffered their first major setback in the battle of chinhat (30th June 1857). From the battle of Chinhat to the first relief of Lucknow in September 1857 by Havelock and Outram, the city was under siege and was the centre of revolt in Awadh. The second phase, perhaps in one sense the most crucial, lasted from the first relief to the final fall of Lucknow in March 1858. During this phase the city was the focus and the fighting was for its control. The British were still in a precarious condition and under siege. The city had to be evacuated by them in November 1857, and from then until March the British and the rebels maintained the struggle for Lucknow because both sides realized the importance of holding it. But the fight was slowly spreading to the countryside. The Third phase was in March 1858 when the rebels, having lost the capital, dispersed into the countryside. This is the phase both of desperate struggle to continue the revolt and of conciliation and surrender to the columns of Lord Clyde which were then sweeping through Awadh. All three stages of the rebellion had, in a way, the capital city for their local point.⁹⁵ The rebels realized the advantages of the Indian summer. Khan Bahadur Khan urged them to keep fighting since British, he thought would not be able to withstand the summer.⁹⁶ Talukdars were convinced that theirs was an army composed of men of every village.⁹⁷ The chief of staff himself noted how the population of country rose and closed in on its rear, when the British army had advanced into Awadh.⁹⁸ It is be noted that contemporary British observers, more than modern day analysts, perceived clearly the power of the revolt in Awadh. It is necessary to underscore this in view of the common presumption that the revolt had run its course by the fall of Lucknow. For the rebels, doom came only when Lord Clyde overran Baiswara; till then the issue was still undecided and the rebellion retained much of its

robustness and man power, and even elements of planning and co-ordination and also co-operation. The real strength of the talukdar's resistance, and indeed of the revolt in Awadh, sprang from the unhesitating and complete support received from the peasantry and the general populace of the Awadh countryside.⁹⁹ In the revolt the talukdars did provide the bulk of the fighting force. For example Rana Raghunath Singh of Khajurgaon had 1,500 retainers, but within a few hours he could provide three to four thousand men.¹⁰⁰ It is probable that the revolt was so intense because the people of Awadh thought they were fighting in a just and legitimate war. In Awadh the opposition to the British in 1857 was truly Universal, a people's resistance.¹⁰¹ It represented not a revolutionary challenge but a popular rejection of an alien order.

In May 1857, the news of the outbreak in Meerut and following that the fall of Delhi a few days later, had an electrifying effect on the troops and the population in Kanpur as well as all over north India. In the summer of 1857, there were rumours about the cartridges of the new Enfield rifle being coated with the fat of cows and pigs; about flour being polluted by bone – dust; about forcible conversions to Christianity; about the intentions of the British to disarm the sepoy; and about the end of British rule at the centenary of Plassey. All these circulating together aggregated into one gigantic rumour about the evil intentions of the British. Untraceable in their origin and unverifiable in their import, the rumours moved in powerful current touching on issues that were profoundly close to indigenous sentiments. Rumour spread from village to village, from bazaar to bazaar and from one sepoy line to another, bringing men together and pushing them to resist what they considered an alien intervention.¹⁰² The leaders in their turn, recognizing the strength and importance of the people, sought to keep them happy. Thus

we read in Tantia Topi's 'order book' instructions like, 'Anyone who takes wood etc. from the Godown or from the houses of the poor, should be punished by order of a court';¹⁰³ or again, 'all the commanding officers are requested to give strict orders to their men..... that if they are found extorting money from the poor villagers or plundering them they will be severely punished'.¹⁰⁴ There is a deliberate coming together here of the two domains, of the popular and of that which was represented by Nana and his men. It leads to the formation of a unity against a common enemy whose complete annihilation alone can lead to a stable reconstitution of the old order. A single thought ran through every mind in the area – "now or never was the time to shake off the oppression of the stranger".¹⁰⁵ In Jhansi, Lakshmi Bai "raised the banner of revolt". The fanatical influence of the wahabis in Patna and of the Brahmins in Banaras made these two cities formidable. The high price of food grains and other provisions which were always attributed to British rule came in handy as justification and propaganda to the reels of Allahabad. In Bihar the permanent settlement vanished like a dream. Generally, the revolt of the sepoys was followed or accompanied by a rebellion in the city and the countryside. But in several places the people rose in revolt before the sepoys.¹⁰⁶ The Lieutenant Governor of Bengal, Halliday had observed that Bengal presidency was also a theatre of events similar in character to that of upper and central provinces.¹⁰⁷ The affected districts of Bengal presidency were Shahabad, Patna, Gaya, Champaran, Saran, Tirhut, Bhagalpur; Purnia, chotanagpur, Dacca, Chittagong, Palamou and Burdwan. The Gaya Magistrate reported that people were talking to their neighbours that the "yoke" is nearing its end.¹⁰⁸ The event of 1857 started with the Mutiny of the Indian sepoys over the use of greased cartridges, but the sepoys were soon joined by broader sections of the civil society whose

moral economy had been disrupted by the political East India Company. The rebels had expected active support from the Punjab.¹⁰⁹

The sepoys at Jullundur, Ludhiana, Ferozepur, Sialkot etc. had established contact with the local inhabitants of the respective areas. It became possible for them to carry on their struggle with widespread local support. The revolt was at least in Punjab, everybody's concern. Barring a few ruling princes and their hangers – on, the people belonging to different religions, castes, and classes had an interest – a positive interest to be precise – in it. The poorer sections of the people or masses, the illiterate, and the lower castes were a part of the struggle.¹¹⁰ It is necessary to form an accurate picture of the rebellious movement both among the sepoys and the masses. The masses or the civil population in each locality revolted only when the British authority had left it and the administrative machinery had completely broken down. The people came to believe that the British Raj was at an end and merely took advantage of the political vacuum thus created to serve their own material interests. From the very beginning the goonda elements of the population and particularly the marauding tribes like Gujars, Ranghars etc. took a prominent part in the local risings. Even the ordinary people were animated more by subversive than constructive activities. The result was that plunder, rapine, massacre, and incendiarism, on a large scale, directed against the Europeans as well as Indians, mostly characterized these outbreaks. In addition to these, personal vendetta, a desire to gain by force what was lost by legal process, settling old scores and satisfying personal grudge played a large part in the popular upsurge almost wherever it occurred.¹¹¹

The mutiny was most widely spread in the area now covered by the state of Uttarpradesh

and fringes of neighbouring territories in all directions save the north, and there the civil population was also largely affected. The state of things outside the area requires a detailed consideration. There was for a time turned into a mass movement, mainly due to the predatory habits of large elements of population. But order was soon restored with the aid of the loyal chiefs of Patiala, Nabha and Jhind and the Sikhs and other loyal elements of the population. In Bengal and East Bihar, some sepoys mutinied at Dacca, chittagong, Tipperah, and Bhagalpur, but were dispersed without difficulty. The civil population was unaffected, though there was an outbreak among the sandals, who had also revolted only two years before.¹¹² Even the British authorities in England had to admit the special reason for violent outbreak in Awadh, as is shown by the following extract from a letter written by the secret committee of the court of Directors to the Governor- General on 19th April, 1858. "War in oudh has derived much of its popular character from the sudden dethronement of the crown and the summary settlement of the revenue which deprived a large number of landlords of their lands. Under the circumstances, hostilities which have been carried on in oudh have rather the character of legitimate war than that of rebellion".¹¹³ For from enlisting the sympathy and support of the people at large, they were intent on plundering them and burning their villages. It is undeniable fact that both Europeans and Indians were alike victims to their fury and greed, and in many places they inspired a sense of dread and terror rather than that of sympathy and fellow-feeling among the people. The sepoys at Delhi refused to fight unless they were paid their salaries, and that on an adequate scale, - a demand which is hardly in consonance with the spirit which should guide a fighter in a war of independence. Many sepoys at Delhi, Bareilly and Allahabad and probably in other places, too, after plundering

indiscriminately, went back to their homes to enjoy the wealth they had secured, without any thought of any other question or policy. There is nothing in the conduct or behavior of the sepoys which would justify us in the belief, or even assumption, that they were inspired by love for their country and fought against the British with the definite idea of freeing their motherland. It is difficult to resist the conclusion that the attitude and activities of the sepoys in 1849 certainly did not correspond to the patriotic fervour with which they were supposed to be endowed in 1857. Unless, therefore, we suppose that this sentiment was suddenly developed during the short interval of eight years, we can hardly regard the sepoys, who rebelled in 1857, as being inspired by the idea of regaining freedom in India.¹¹⁴ The upsurge of the people was limited to a comparatively narrow region of India, comprising at best the greater part of U. P. and a narrow zone to its east, west and south. The whole of Bengal, Assam, Orissa, Rajasthan and greater Parts of the Punjab, Bihar and Madhya Pradesh as well as the whole of India, south of the Narmada, hardly witnessed any over act of rebellion on the part of the people.¹¹⁵ Even within the narrow zone where the civil population revolted against the common enemy within the revolt's lap. An analysis of historical examples would prove that struggle of common masses must have as its primary object the expulsion of foreign rulers, simply as because they are foreigners, though there are usually many grievances against them which rouse the spirit of the people and impel them to such revolt. During the period of this event, there is unimpeachable evidence to show that the people were engaged in all kinds of subversive activities, and individual classes, and states were fighting with one common interest. On the other hand, one looks in vain for any evidence to show that the common masses realized the value and importance of the recovery of lost independence, and made

an organized and determined effort to maintain it by evolving a suitable plan for defence. Anyone with a modicum of knowledge and common sense must have felt that the avenging British forces were sure to come, sooner or later to recover the lost dominions. But contemporary evidence leaves no doubt that many eminent leaders and local chiefs, who had established their authority, discounted even the very possibility of such a contingency. The masses felt and perhaps rightly, that the whole authority of the British Government depended upon the vast force of the sepoy and the tiny British force counted for little. They knew too little of the power of England and recent reverses at Crimea suffered by the British at the hands of the Russians, of which very exaggerated accounts were afloat in India, made them belittle the power and might of the British Government. So when the Mutiny of sepoy took away the very prop on which the British rule in India rested the people not unreasonably believed that their hour had come.¹¹⁶ The participation of civil population or masses in the revolt was foreshadowed by the many instances of open resistance against the British. The lawless elements which joined the Mutiny to serve their own ends and robbed alike the British and the Indians were common factors in all outbreaks during the century preceding the revolt.

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