

## CHAPTER – IV

### THE ROLE AND INFLUENCE OF THE REVOLUTIONEERS ON THE

#### REVOLT

A century of social deprivation before the outbreak of 1857 regularly gave birth to popular resistance. The colonial state always had maintained a realm of domination to subjugate the un-reconciled population, specially peasants and adibasis as well as common masses. Launching a resistance shedding blood and even accepting death was not a new thing or a very exclusive thing for the peasants and adibasis. Under such a situation, no exclusive conspiracy or a group of conspirators were required to launch a revolt. The initial sepoy revolts everywhere attracted a discrete rebel force whose principal body was consisted of peasants, adibasis, and local zamindars and in cities - rebel aristocrats. Peasants and adibasis spread the revolt in countryside and villages on the basis of their own initiative. Peasants and adibasis regularly revolted from 1757 onwards and so in 1857 when they discovered a breakdown of colonial order and an absence of colonial authority and the colonial state they spontaneously initiated and participated in the rebellion. It was they who always nurtured a latent but strong desire for change of colonial order and it was the social deprivation of colonial order which gave birth to, and nurtured the desire. In 1857 sepoys started the revolt. But in the subsequent period as we have noticed, they received active Cooperation from the villages. At a much later period thousands of adibasis and also lower caste people participated in the rebellion. These adibasi people were none but adibasi peasants, and villagers were none but peasants. For them causes like greased cartridge or annexation of Oudh mattered little or at all not. They simply participated because in the earlier years of

the 19th century and late 18<sup>th</sup> century also they tried to uproot colonial rule. The rebellion got strength only when peasants started to participate in it. For this reason Shahabad and palamou, parts of Central India and Awadh became a stronghold of the rebellion. In his letter to Turn bull in March 1858, Boyle has observed that Shahabad was the most eventful region in the entire lower provinces during the revolt.<sup>1</sup> So far as the sepoy soldiers were concerned the soldiers of the East India company were peasants in uniform and it was for this reason that everywhere, be it Bengal or Awadh, the Sepoys united themselves with the peasants and villagers aristocracy and common masses. It never appears that men like Bakht Khan, Teeka Singh, Jwalaprasad, Ahmadullah Shah, Beni Madho, peer Ali, Kunwar Singh, Amar Singh, the Sepoys of several regiments, the thousands of peasants of Shahabad, Awadh, Rohilkhad, Doab and the santals, kols, Bhils, Gujars were more designing men or seeking another employer. By resolutely destroying every signs of the colonial state the rebels established that they were not merely bargaining for a better deal. Rather they courageously and unhesitatingly sacrificed their life for a broader political purpose – the end of the colonial rule.<sup>2</sup> The bifurcation of the subject of the great revolt of 1857 into two distinct historical aspects, the military Meeting, and the civil rebellion, has the merit of a new approach and offers the most intelligible clue to proper understanding and rational evaluation of the main character of the revolution. That the sepoy struck the first blow is not denied, that their grievances flowed independently of any external pressure and originated from the conditions of the existing military service also appears quite probable. But their apprehensions and fears about the intentions of the British to destroy their caste and religion were exactly those which troubled the minds of the civil population or masses and the feudal aristocracy as

well. This connects the two aspects of the revolt in the historical process. When the sepoys had created the field and attained a certain measure of success, sections of the aristocracy and certain civil elements put themselves at the head of the movement, with the result that the military complexion of the insurrection was changed. The change was bound to take place as the sepoys did not produce a single competent commander who could channelize the activities of the rebellious troops.<sup>3</sup> Naturally enough the initiative and leadership passed into the hands of civilian leaders who turned the movement to their advantage and even led the soldiery to the attack. After the explosion at Meerut the mutinous troops made for Delhi where resided Bahadur shah the emperor. According to the Indian legitimists, this gave the movement a traditional countrywide base. The local troops having in a large measure accomplished their plan of overthrowing the British authority in their respective regions proclaimed that the hukumat or authority belonged now to the country chief who had exercised it in the past.<sup>4</sup> These are factors which irresistibly toned down the military character of the revolt and produced conditions favorable for the merging of the military rising into a popular rebellion. Few circumstances are more observable throughout the revolt than this ferment in the civil populace accompanying the Indian mutinies. Anything less than this (with so wide spread a sepoy war to encourage honest and natural motives of a patriotic and socialistic character) would have been extremely improbable in all conditions of political life, ancient and modern. A rumour, that the British power was gone unsettled the minds of the common masses and the tremendous events of the time ignited the embers of all latent discontent.<sup>5</sup> If it was so, it was not unlikely that the British had to face a really national and revolutionary situation growing out of the mutinies. A sense of righteous indignation

against the British, whose feelings are so different from those of the Indians and whose gods are so different, must have naturally flowed from the war of the mutinies which gave it the character of a just and righteous revolt, in reality great and formidable rebellion, as Disraeli said in the house of commons. Instead of being a partial military mutiny, a hectic revolt of the Bengal army alone, the outbreak gradually approached the character of a rising of the people as well as common masses<sup>6</sup>. The most immediate factor working out this change was the religious element which actuated the masses to sacrifice their lives. The many references to the jihads and the cry of religion in danger which was echoed and re-echoed in the seditious proclamations of the period entered into the composition of the upsurge.<sup>7</sup> Madness produced by fanaticism often outweighed all other feelings. The excesses of Irish rebellions and the French revolution are pertinent in this connection. Very authentic intelligence obtained from Lucknow in the period between 25 November and 2nd December runs: the war is now fully believed throughout Lucknow to be a religious crusade and numbers of people are flocking into the capital from the districts to take part in the struggle.<sup>8</sup> Then Lucknow fell finally in March, the British authorities were struck by the overwhelming number of placards and pamphlets which were hung up in every nook and corner of the city urging the people to die for their caste and creed.<sup>9</sup> The religious feeling mingled with the racial issue the universal hatred of the English aliens which gave the revolt of 1857, a national colouring, a strange socialistic colour, by no wisdom, by no system, as one contemporary British officer says, could they have prevented the antagonism of race.<sup>10</sup> This aspect of the revolt namely, the determination of the rebels to tear the English out of the land, root and branch.<sup>11</sup>

British officials like major Williams of Meerut, F. Thompson of Allahabad, and M. Thornhill of Mathura were convinced that as a rule the extirpation of the British was the object which prompted the rebels to adopt ruthless measures. The massacre of the Europeans in the parade ground at Farrukhabad reflects the same sentiment. There was no proclamation to the effect. The day was rainy, yet there was a great assemblage of people to witness the dreadful spectacle.<sup>12</sup> In Delhi too, great crowds assembled to witness a similar scene on Saturday the 16<sup>th</sup> May.<sup>13</sup> That the people in general were in sympathy with the rebels may also be judged from the selfless spirit which is seen on a large scale in different regions of India during the epoch. Very few rebels craved for life or seemed to care to purchase it. They often courted death defiantly, like the Spartans.<sup>14</sup> What again was very remarkable was that the villagers did not betray their rebel leaders and very rarely, if ever, they earned, blood money, even though habitually poor. Military communications bear out the fact that the British punitive forces were constantly misled and misinformed as they went out to elicit information for military reconnaissance. The officiating magistrate of Bihar going in pursuit of Alikarim, found that the heart of the whole country was with the rebel and consequently could not get any assistance or information from the villagers regarding Karim's where - about, although he offered large rewards. Many other officers entrusted with the same mission experienced a similar situation. In fact, from the rarity of the occasions on which the British forces were able to surprise the rebel forces, it seems more than likely that the rebels were helped by the villagers all around them who kept them acquainted with the movement of the enemy troops. It is also a noteworthy fact that during the mutinies the British military command established flying corps; this indicates that they commanded only the spots of ground

held by their own troops in different scattered areas while for communication between the disjointed members of their army they depended on flying columns. They could depend neither on their sepoys nor on the country people to keep the communication lines open between the far-flung military posts. This is what the French had to go through in the Peninsular War in the face of the Spanish national rising. Apart from the fact that this military situation demonstrated the actual insufficiency of the British forces, it also brought into relief the prevalent spirit of disaffection. According to records, flying columns were scouring the Punjab, Rajputana, central India, as well as Oudh. All these are proofs of the fact that a vague feeling of patriotism lay behind the Mutiny and rebellion of 1857 official reports about men wandering in the guise of fakirs and unusual numbers of them appearing in the country side tampering with the villagers or carrying correspondence between different bodies of mutinous sepoys concealed in their bamboo lathies or employed in other emissary or reconnoitering work are too well-known to require detailed references.<sup>15</sup> The Magnitude of the rebellion is manifest from the returns of persons tried and punished as furnished by the district officers. On May 13, when it was known that the Mutiny of the Sepoys had been followed in many places by rebellion of the populace. The series of Acts which followed namely Acts, xvi, xvii, and xxv of 1857 were in the nature of retributory measures to meet the challenge to the government from the civil populace as well as common masses. Not only mere martial law was not proclaimed but every extensive measures were taken for the summary trial of offending persons of every class of people, civil as well as military and lower classes. Other severe measures were also adopted, even burning of offending villages was considered a necessity where the mass of the inhabitants had committed a grave outrage and the

perpetrators could not be traced.<sup>16</sup> Brigadier Neill's course from Benares to Allahabad was marked by corpses of villagers, and the riversides for miles presented an array of demolished houses. As he saw it, the rising was becoming something more than a military mutiny and he had not the tenderness to deter him from striking root and branch the people who were rising into rebellion on the ruins of the native Army.<sup>17</sup> The scene of alarm, scarcity and distress presented here brings into prominence the revolutionary character of the objectives of the rebels. It was sure enough not a mere wish to humble and humiliate the British government. The total subversion of the British authority in many sectors was only matched by the establishment of a rebel government of a determined character aiming to replace the former rule in all aspects, though many forms were not changed as new ones could not be devised an account of the exigency of the times. Otherwise most of the new governments aimed at justice and equality and embodied to a great degree the spirit of the times. Rani of Jhansi proved herself a most capable ruler.<sup>18</sup> The mass movement was a challenge to the British system of law, revenue, production, and properly relations. Yet the rebellion of 1857 was not the work of the dispossessed talukdars alone. The war of the talukdars was made possible only by the co-operation of the general mass of people, the country people, the villagers of different social status. A very singular circumstance which was apparent and worthy of consideration was that the low castes and the cultivators who received attention at the hands of the British government displayed the most marked hostility to it.<sup>19</sup> In Oudh the British were fighting not a mutiny, but the revolt of people under its hereditary chiefs and leaders.<sup>20</sup> In Budaun the mass of the population rose in a body and the work of rebellion after the sepoys had left, passed into the hands of the rural elements.<sup>21</sup> In some sector of

Saharanpur, as Kaye was able to find out from the materials at his disposal, even the Sepoys were regarded as protective elements by the British as against the inhabitants of towns and villages who turned out fiercely: the British officer could hardly realise this rapid change amongst the peaceful villagers.<sup>22</sup> In Debound, the resistance offered by the townspeople had been determined and the rebels were numerous. In Mathura whole country had risen almost instantaneously, immediately after the outbreak of the Sepoys. The authorities at Ghazipur were resisted by villagers who were organized in bodies of thousands in July 1857. Sherer, the magistrate of Fatehpur, while leaving the station and wandering in search of a place of safety, found the peasantry of the countryside in ferment, in a state jacquerie of the agricultural type.<sup>23</sup> The people of Jehanabad (Bihar) were also in open rebellion. All official sources agree in stating that in Allahabad the peasantry rose at once under their old talukdars, specially the rural population of the Doab, and all the muscle and sinew of the agricultural races were arrayed against the government.<sup>24</sup> In Rewah the whole of the population was hostile and country was secure only by the courage and resourcefulness of Captain Osborne. In Shahabad the rebellion of the people was found to be most determined and protracted of its kind. The sagar and Narmada countries were in blaze, seditious conspiracies were fermented in Belgaum, Hyderabad, and Poona and popular rising took place in far distance Kolhapur, Savantvadi, and Nargund. The commotion at the last named place took the form of a national resistance<sup>25</sup> within socialistic barriers. This sample survey taken of this vast and sombre scene of rebellion may confirm the view that the so-called Mutiny of 1857 has an internal consistency, only if we regard it as both a mutiny and a rebellion unmistakably united. In general, popular risings were excited by military disturbances yet sometimes

the fermentation appeared on the surface even without them. It is, however, not very easy to determine the duration of these occurrences, nor the sequence in which one act of revolt followed another but in most of the districts, as shown in the present work, elements, of revolt and embers of disaffection continued, to smoulder long after their re-occupation by the British. There is no gainsaying the fact that rebellion gripped many parts of India, even where agitation was not violent, there was no mistaking the unrest in people's minds and it is to be doubted if all acrimony was spent quickly. The village people were not certainly properly organized, and too often they broke out into small parties without any competent leadership, yet they fought heroically and even showed capacity for co-ordinated action.<sup>26</sup> There were some factories lying scattered in the whole country and coffee and indigo plantations run by Europeans, where a working class allied to the toiling population must have worked. The dismantling of the factories at shahjehanpur, saran, and Hazaribagh and the wholesale destruction of indigo factories at Shahabad and in many other places as already noticed, were a challenge to the system of exploitation and the instruments of production the primitive demand of the nascent proletariat. The fact that a proclamation had to be issued by the government for the recovery of indigo seed only serves to underline the resentment of this class against the planters and the cultivation of cash crop in general. Little is known of the facts relative to the social composition of the rebels. In general they may be classified as people who lived by profession of arms, agriculture workers, religious mendicants and priests, civil servants, shopkeepers, boatmen, and other professionals of this type. The commercial and industrial classes, the bankers and mahajans, were on the side of order and government and were the targets of attack in almost every place. So universal was this feature that

G.H. Freeling of Banda could not help reporting that in no instance the bankers and traders, the class favored by them, had been able to keep their own in the struggle.<sup>27</sup> A very significant feature of the movements of the rebel leaders was that they did not confine their activities merely to their respective regions but moved to the neighboring areas to carry on the general struggle against the English. Not to speak of the military operation of the Fyzabad maulavi, Firuz Shah, Tantia Topi, the Rani of Jhansi, Rao Sahib and Kunwar Singh, a host of other leaders also made themselves conspicuous in many fronts of the Revolt throughout the whole upper-India.<sup>28</sup> In the country to the south of the Jamuna, Barjor Singh dominated the entire region from Kunch to Kalpi and the Sagar leader Daulat Singh swept through Jalaun, Jhansi, Hasangabad and Rajputana. There are many other instances to show that the leaders of the rebellion looked beyond their own immediate circle and showed a combination of wide vision and patriotic solidarity. Though they were mostly engaged in local rebellion, they frequently united their forces against the English in many sectors of the war to deliver the country as a whole, and not simply parts of it, from the yoke of the British rule. This combination is all the more remarkable as it cut across all barriers of caste and creed and of regions and provinces and united the Hindus and the Muslims – despite communal flare-ups here and there which broke out during this period – in a common endeavour to shake off the fetters of British rule and demonstrate their hatred of the regime in a perfectly national way. Disraeli's attack against the government in the House of Commons on 27 July was typical of the British imperialists, whose motto was Divide and Rule, yet it was an admission of the fact; for the first time in the history of your rule, you have the Hindu and Mohammedan making common cause against you.<sup>29</sup>

The numerous proclamations of the time which urged the people to combine and slay the British, added with the measures adopted by Bahadur Shah, the Nawab of Furrukhabad, and Khan Bahadur Khan of Bareilly and many others to placate the Hindus, roused to a great extent, a new feeling, a feeling of solidarity which reached its peak during the siege of Lucknow when in the face of a great impending danger the Hindus swore of the Ganges and the Mahomedans on the Koran and rushed out crying chalo bhai, to wipe out the English at Alambagh.<sup>30</sup> Similarly in Delhi it was a national defence which the British confronted. Colvin informed Havelock that the spirit in which both Hindus and Muslims acted together at Delhi was very remarkable.<sup>31</sup> W. Tayler<sup>32</sup> communicated to the government that the letters discovered in the house of Peerali Khan disclosed that for the purpose of the successful execution of the conspiracy, common cause was made by merging all religious differences.<sup>33</sup> At Jhansi the Mahomedans were wholly on the side of the Rani. Even in Rohilkhand, where communal tension prevailed, efforts of all kinds were made to raise the Hindu population against the British.<sup>34</sup> On this question of a common opposition to British rule by the Indian masses in those memorable years the evidence is of so compelling a nature that to Forest, the historian of the Mutiny, the great revolt only pointed to the stark fact that the British monopoly rested a thin crust. He observes: Among the many lesson which the Indian Mutiny conveys to the historian and administrator none is of greater importance than the warring that it is possible to have a revolution in which Brahmin and Sudra, Mahomedan and Hindu, were united against us.<sup>35</sup> The result of the British policy, for by the end of that period certain trends were emerging out of the confused mass of events which indicated that the mutiny was gradually merging into a rebellion. In a sense all mutinies turn into a mass movement

when they attain a certain measure of success but the Indian mutinies of the year 1857 had the peculiar feature that the rebel Bengal Army had from the beginning drawn the sympathies of the country people. The sepoys were not so much the avengers of professional grievances as the exponents of general discontent. They revolted against the authority, which they had sworn to obey, on grounds of national interest. The justification of sacrificing the military obligations rested on a widely based belief that their religion was in danger and since they were children of the soil, though mercenaries and had not abnegated their obligations to the country, their countrymen viewed them as martyrs to a great cause, holy and national, and as district magistrate said, willingly supplied their wants in almost all instances.<sup>36</sup> The subversion of the British system of administration in all its aspects by the abasement of the British rule to its utmost extent its extinction if it could be managed, was the ruling motive in general of the non-military chesses. The interaction of the two ideas, increasingly as the mutiny was turned into a rebellion, generated such a wave of popular feelings as can fairly be distinguished with the name of a national movement in its incipient form.<sup>37</sup> The city of Jhansi heard to the beat of drums the proclamation. The people are God's, the country is the king's (pad Shah's) and the two religions govern.<sup>38</sup> The mutineers did not intend to stay in Jhansi, for their chief purpose was to reach Delhi and install an alternative order that would replace British rule.<sup>39</sup> In this perspective Lakshmi Bai came to depend upon her two able lieutenants Raghunath Singh and Jawahar Singh. The first was her diwan, or finance minister and the second the landlord of Katili, who commanded her soldiers. Both of them were Bundela Rajputs of Jhansi and Powerful landlords in their own right. They were instrumental in inducting as many as 500 mounted Bundela soldiers into the Rani's army. It is unknown

when and how these two men joined Lakshmi Bai's close circle of trusted and faithful men but they proved fiercely loyal and passionately devoted to their queen. They were one of the reasons why the Bundelas in Jhansi and Lalitpur in the south supported Lakshmi Bai.<sup>40</sup> Robert Hamilton had left for England before the outbreak and was replaced for the time being by Lieutenant Colonel H.M. Durand as the officiating agent. His observation in October 1857, that Jhansi and the surrounding areas, the original source of great evil, were in the blazing state of insurrection,<sup>41</sup> was therefore not unexpected. From Indore, the situation appeared quite desperate. Durand feared that if matters were not corrected soon, the region in the south, more or less peaceful, would be threatened by a similar blaze. The Rani of Jhansi, though professedly ruling Jhansi on behalf of the British government, was for all practical purposes acting on her own. She was still under a cloud over the killings in Jhansi. On the other hand her dispute with her neighbors confirmed British suspicion that she was trying to strengthen her rule and that the uprising had fortuitously given her the opportunity that she had been negotiating so hard with the British for - the right to rule over her husband's kingdom. Her regular contact with Mardan Singh did her no good in the eyes of the British for, as we observed before, the Bundela Raja was already a condemned man. The British deputy commissioner A.C. Gordon had no doubts that he was at the centre of the Thakurs' rebellion, playing a double game with the British while promising to protect their interests.<sup>42</sup> Mardan Singh and Lakshmi Bai were in regular touch. When and how this connection was established between the Bundela chief and the Marathi Rani is hard to say. He visited Jhansi to settle her differences with the neighbouring Rajput state of Orchha. Even though both were ostensibly trying to restore peace and order in the hope of

returning the region to the British, the latter had stopped listening. Drowned in the mass of people celebrating the end of foreign rule, the Rani of Jhansi and the Raja of Banpur became, in British eyes, inseparable.<sup>43</sup> The town of Kalpi in Jalaun, overlooking the Yamuna, was emerging as the alternate centre of resistance from the time Tantia Tope moved there in October 1857. The chief of other states in Bundelkhand, except Jhansi, and leaders of the mutiny now began a resolute drive to mobilize support and galvanize defiance one last time in the south after Delhi and Kanpur were taken by British counter-insurgency forces. From the end of 1857, there began a frequent exchange of letters, notices and proclamations. They reached Jhansi, of course, and even though none were addressed to the Rani, they caused her some consternation, for the language used was very provocative.<sup>44</sup> The Nawab of Banda wrote to the rulers of the surrounding states of Shahgarh, Chattapur, Rewa, Bijaraghogarh and to Nana Sahib. His letter to the Raja of Shahgarh was fairly representative of the nature and purpose of letters exchanged: After expressing my desire to see and consult with you, which is so intense that the pen cannot describe, I have to state that after the destruction and flight of the infidels who were enemies to the religion and customs of everyone, in and from almost all the towns, the Emperor's rule has, by divine mercy, been established and several princess have declared themselves for the emperor, and fought memorably to protect their religion and destroy the enemy. Maharajah Sreemunt Nana Sahib Bahadoor began the praiseworthy act; and though evil tidings have lately been received, still the Sreemunt Sahib Bahadoor aforesaid has taken coverage and is reported to drive away the enemy.<sup>45</sup>

In the same section of letters was his mail seeking help from the Nana Sahib: after paying my respects and obeisance, I beg to inform you, that some time ago I forwarded to you a

letter by the hands of the trustworthy and confidential Madho Rao Punth, informing you the state affairs here, and requesting you to send troops, Artillery, Ammunition and money, of which I have not been honoured with an answer, not with-standing the lapse of a long time. Now the real fact is that this Government was supported only by pension, which has now ceased and the District of Banda being in the centre surrounded on all sides by the territories of the Bundelas, troops and money are necessary to retain possession of it. But this government is in want of both. The Bundelas have accordingly surrounded the District and some have advanced with their troops to a short distance from this, I am unable to drive them away owing to want of means. If now, you send me assistance agreeably to my request, I can take possession of the pergunnahs of Band....which belongs from time immemorial to the family of peshwa (i.e. you)...<sup>46</sup>

The purpose of these letters sent during December 1857 and January 1858 and the urgency with which they were composed were to persuade anyone unsympathetic to the cause. They were appeals and exhortations regarding the need for action to eliminate the enemy such as the infidel British rulers were. Religion offered a practical device for forgoing unity among different people against a common adversary. From January 1858, these letters became more urgent and more frequent as frenetic activities were afoot in the rebel camp with different leaders trying to coordinate their efforts. Tantia Tope regularly sent reports to Nana in Bithur, keeping the latter abreast of his plan of action. There was a small state in the district of Hamirpur called Chirkhari whose ruler remained staunchly in favour of the British government. Tantia decided to invade the fort of Chirkhari so that when British forces marched, the rebel army would not be distracted by a possible attack from the rear by an accomplice of the enemy. The justification for such actions was not

one of a struggle for power but safety of faith.<sup>47</sup> Circulars and proclamations urging those undecided to join used the strong, persuasive idiom of religion. It was a war fought to defend the faith of the Muslims and the Hindus that was being defiled by Christian rule:

God has provided you with bodies for the performance of his sacred rites; these are revealed to all by their religion and are stringently enjoined upon all. God has created you, oh Rajahs, for the destruction of the destroyers of your creed...<sup>48</sup> the circular goes on to list all the transgression that the English committed as 'preventers of all men's religion'. Missionary activities had deliberately defiled both Islam and Hinduism as had government measures against practices such as the forcible marriage of widows and abolition of the practice of Sati. The British had also prohibited adopted sons from inheriting thrones which are the stratagems by which the Europeans deprive us of our thrones and wealth. The latter thus urged that Hindus in the name of Ganga, Tulsi and Salikram, and Muslims by the name of God should:

Join us, in destroying the English for their mutual welfare. Let not this opportunity pass away. Know oh people! You will never have such another. Since letters are considered to be the half of a meeting it is hoped that the contents of this letter may be considered and replied to.<sup>49</sup> The Rani Lakshmi chose to ignore the gathering storm and instead concentrated on giving her people confidence and a sense of normalcy and routine. In keeping with royal traditions, she celebrated her army's victory in Mau Ranipur by firing a five gun salute in the city. But the battle, which was little more than a skirmish, was not enough to obscure the imminent danger. Some not so brave men packed their belongings and left with their family for the safer refuge of Gwalior, where the Scindia was an unwavering supporter of the British. Lakshmi Bai now tried hard to stop people from

being afraid, for widespread alarm was the last thing that the town could afford. Instead, she decided to divert the attention of her people by organizing the ‘Haldi-Kumkum’ ceremony. This was indeed a masterstroke in political tactics. For the ordinary residents, the times seemed to be normal, with the Rani in charge. Haldi-Kumkum, or ‘turmeric-vermilion’, was an annual ritual that all married Marathi women followed in spring. Lakshmi Bai decided to organize the ceremony in the royal palace inside the fort rather lavishly.<sup>50</sup> In this occasion married women from all castes and communities were invited to the fort. Hundreds of women came for offering. One hundred women were engaged to distribute turmeric, vermilion powder, flowers, sandal wood paste, sweets, and in small silver bowls, soaked gram, betel leaves and nuts, all symbolic of good fortune to women and long lives to their husbands. Huge quantities of flowers and sweets were given away and women dressed in their finery forgot they were living in uncertain times. The rich flaunted their expensive palanquins while the humble came to admire them. In the royal court, a tall throne measuring as high as the ceiling was built to install the image of ‘Gauri’, the goddess of beauty, as her loving subjects called her. Steps leading to her throne were filled with gifts and the best samples of Jhansi’s arts and crafts. It was a huge public spectacle staged for the political intent of assuring people that things were fine, and just as they should be. Festivities over, the Rani returned to her responsibility, which now was to keep vigilant. Villagers were asked to light a fire to indicate the route that the British army was taking. Lowe described what it looked like, “a mile or two ahead of our force, on an elevated piece of ground. A bright beacon was blazing out and then some seven or eight hundred yards in advance of another of this another burst up in flames, and as the column marched on and on, another and another bright fire shone out of the dark

masses of Jungle on the different hills, first on our right, then on our left, until the rendered them useless. The tension on both sides was palpable.”<sup>51</sup> The iconography of Hindu goddesses undergirds people’s diverse perceptions of the Rani: the adoring local populaces see her as ‘an incarnation of the glorious Uma’. While her fleeing enemies, when she enters Gwalior after defeating Sindhia in Battle, attribute her power to the “Sinister Durga, under whose protection... she was preserved from death”. It is said that she was “great in their eyes to be a terrible, awe inspiring figure”. Thus interestingly enough, the figuration of the rani in this novel feeds into what may be called an “Indian Nationalist” paradigm of patriotism and anti-colonial struggle. Indeed, at the end, when the Rani lies mortally wounded in her tent, her dying words express a “passionate love for her country, as she bids farewell in a patriotic outburst, o India, she cried... farewell”, prophesying a future of liberation from colonial domination: ‘A day will come when their law shall be no longer obeyed, and our temples and palaces rise a new from their ruins.’ By figuring the rani as voicing patriotic sentiments for ‘India’, rather than love for Jhansi alone. (“Mein Jhansi nahi Doongi”), the text projects her as an embodiment of patriotism.<sup>52</sup> As she comes to be inscribed as an icon of anti-colonial resistance, the narrative does seem to gesture at a conceptualization of the “Mutiny” as the “First War of Independence”.<sup>53</sup> The rani’s death itself is mystic and spiritual, rather in keeping with European chivalric traditions of the west; mortally wounded, she is laid, at her request, to die quietly alone in her tent with request that “no foreign eye doth gaze upon my body after I am dead;” In a little, a wail of lamentation rose across the intervening space between the camps of the two armies. The foreign soldiers asked its meaning to one another. The answer might have been that the spirit of the heroic Laxmi

Bai had been gathered to the protecting arms of Parameswars the merciful, the just, the all supreme God, alike of the Hindu, the Mohammedan and the Christian. Michael White's strikingly unconventional novel 'Lachmi Bai' breaks free from the stereotypes of cruelty, treachery and sensuality usually associated with the rani in colonial "Mutiny" novel. Instead, it goes even beyond Taylor's sympathetic scripting of the Rani as a deeply wronged person and presents her in an idealized manner. As its title suggests, it attempts to situate Lakshmbai in the mould of Joan of Arc, who was associated with driving out the English from her land and the suggestion is that the chaste Rani will similarly drive out the English occupiers of her beloved country. Moreover, it gives greater multilayered depth to the trope of the heroic Virangana that Taylor had used 30 years ago. It enriches the concept of the fearless "Women warrior" by intermeshing various strands drawn from European and Indian traditions of the courageous female fighter who resists evil and oppression. In this section the image of the rani of Jhansi was etched diversely in colonial literary discourse in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Numerous colonial "Mutiny" novels that appeared in the 30 years period stretching from the 1870s-1900 inscribed the historical figure of the rebel queen variously. Some novels on Rani of Jhansi represented Lakshmi Bai within colonial race, class and gender stereotypes. They figured her as cruel and licentious and circulated colonial stereotypes about the 'Mutiny' in order to disseminate colonial knowledge about the events of 1857 as well as the Rani's role in it. However there were two unusual novels which were written right at the beginning and the end of this period which presented her with sympathy and admiration. Both of these texts, Philip Meadows Taylor's famous novel 'Seeta' (1872) and the lesser – known 'Laxmi Bai, Rani of Jhansi' (1901) by Michael White, drew upon the paradigm of the virangana or warrior women,

and indeed, the latter novel which appeared at the turn of the century went further and projected her as a patriotic and fearless freedom fighter in a manner that fed into Indian nationalistic iconography.<sup>54</sup> Take Rabindranath Tagore's great novel *Gora*, serialized first in the Bengali magazine *prabasi* between the years 1907 and 1909. The novel is set in Calcutta in the 1880s. *Gora*, the central character of the novel, is a child brought up by Hindu-Bengali foster – parents. In his 20s, he becomes a convert to the stridently Hindu nationalism that was sweeping across Bengal at the time. It is only towards the end of the novel, faced with a dying father who tells *Gora* that he has no right to perform “*Sradhha*” should the father die, that he discovers suddenly his biological identity: he was not born a Hindu. He was born of Irish parents during the tumultuous events of 1857. *Krishnadayal*, his foster – father says to him: “It was during the Mutiny. We were in Etawa then your mother fled from the sipahis and sought refuge one night in our house, your father was killed in the previous day's fighting. .... He was an Irishman. That very night your mother died after giving birth to you. Even since then you have been brought up in our house.” *Krishna Dayal* offered to tell *Gora* the name of his biological father: “His name was -”. *Gora* stopped him midway through the sentence: “His name is not necessary. I don't need to know his name.”<sup>55</sup> As is well known, it was on this deliberate refusal on *Gora*'s part to know the lost object of his grief – on this void – that Tagore outlined the condition that made it possible for *Gora* to be both expansively and inclusively Indian. “Today” says *Gora* in the last chapter of novel, “I am *Bharatiya*, within me there is no conflict between communities, whether Hindu or Muslim or *khristan*. Today all the castes of *Bharat* are my caste, whatever everybody eats is my food”. And he continues in this vein. “I have taken birth this morning, with an utterly naked consciousness, in my own

Bharatvarsha....Teach me the mantra of that deity who belongs to all – Hindu, Musalman, Khrishtan, Brahma – the doors of whose temple are never closed to any person- the deity not only of Hindus but of Bharatvarsha’’.<sup>56</sup> It was as if only by making the grief of the Irish family (including his own) unavailable to any order of signs that Gora could bring his identity as Indian within the sphere of representation. For the Indian rebels there is not even this much detail, about the complexities of familial grief and the process of remembering / forgetting that challenge became representation.<sup>57</sup> Eric Stokes commented on the heat of reactions even in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century to the rebellion of 1857-58. He referred to the notorious scene of the massacre in Kanpur, the well down which victims were stuffed, and the site of a memorial from which Indians other than Christians were barred until independence. It was then replaced by a bronze effigy of Nana Sahib's general, Tatyá Tope. This singularly tasteless and vicious reprisal was curious evidence of the power of symbols, according to Stokes. The memory of Europeans dead was desecrated while more numerous Indian victims of British atrocities went without memorial. For both India and Pakistan, Stokes argued, the rebellion had become the formative violence of their national history; the proof that colonialism had been withstood even unto blood.<sup>58</sup> The revolt is still so prominent in the popular imagination in India today as it was in Britain in the later 19<sup>th</sup> Century. The key aspect is that it is regarded not just as mutiny in the Indian army and an uprising in regions of India but as an Indian revolt against the British. The rebellion was thus a crucial stage and expression of two nations in making. States built from sentiment and loyalty as well as from self interest and force. In this section technological and material changes are equally important to the creation of nations. The Indian uprising mattered much more if the

British had been thrown out of India. Its material consequences were minor by comparison with its impact on the mind.<sup>59</sup> H.G. Keene<sup>60</sup> did recognize the important sentiment, as well as the immediate loss of life, the interruption of business, and the financial burden; he considered there were major long-term costs from the suspension of all good feeling between the European community and the native population.<sup>61</sup> Many contemporary officials blamed disaffected Muslims; and later that friend of Pakistan, Ian Stephen (among other) attributed a decline in Muslim fortunes to their consequent victimization by the British.<sup>62</sup> Saiyed Ahmad Khan made his initial reputation among the British by rebutting this supposed Islamic perfidy, while echoing those who blamed British incompetence. On the other hand, another contemporary official, Charles Metcalfe, thought Muslims too clumsy to plot whereas Hindus had a 'genius for conspiracy'<sup>63</sup>. Muslim responsibility had been assumed from their alleged violence and fanaticism while Hindus were thought passive and Metcalfe's view as they faced Hindu protesters and revolutionaries, and sought to make allies of the Muslims. Even in the 1920s, Al cart hill (the pseudonym of BC Kennedy, ICS) was convinced there had been a Hindu revolt in 1857, fomented out of the brahminical supremacy that had arisen among the Marathas and that later would inspire those Hindu nationalists who reacted against western rule and knowledge, by Cart hill. According to Kennedy's account, the rebellion was an early part of "a secular war with the west" that would eventually grip both Hindus and Muslims.<sup>64</sup> In such colonial histories we find the familiar tropes of contented and ignorant dupes led astray by cynics or fanatics, and of secret combinations among opponents unknown to the British. They were not devised in 1857, and are arguably inherent in the attitudes of all governments. But certainly the many accounts of mutiny

and revolt gave them credence and publicity. Elements were repeated many times in a wide range of different situations during colonial rule. They were applied, we may note, particularly to religions as units of political analysis and fitted neatly with stereotypes about Indian religiosity. Rice Holmes thought he 'ought to reserve his detailed narrative for events of historical importance'. The choices he made are plain to see. His much reprinted book, first published in 1883, was called in full a History of the Indian Mutiny and of the disturbances which accompanied it among the civil population.<sup>65</sup> Late 19<sup>th</sup> century British accounts it was no longer acceptable to think that under interference by Dalhousie and Canning had stirred up feelings and caused a popular rebellion. V.D. Savarkar famously dubbed character of the revolt of India's first war of Independence; later his followers appropriated it for an Indian history. Savarkar justified violent resistance, noted Hindu- Muslim cooperation in 1857, and rejected Muslim domination<sup>66</sup>. S.N. Sen found that there had been a spontaneous revolt from all sections of the people. He admitted that law breakers were not necessarily patriots. He studied the multiplicity of actions and motives that combined in the rebellion. He agreed and that 'the conception of Indian nationality was yet in embryo' and there was "no conception of Individual liberty" either. However, sen asserted, there was nonetheless a 'main movement' that was a popular revolt of a national character.<sup>67</sup> By contrast, Michael Mann's stimulating study identified major economic, social and ecological damage in north India even, from the early years after British annexation, and an agricultural transformation carried on by cultivators who had to exploit the land beyond its natural capacity.<sup>68</sup> The real problem, however, is not in showing economic or other general motives for the rebellion. It is that people who feel aggrieved have a choice of how to act. There may be passivity,

avoidance, individual or group protest, political organization, or insurrection. Common actions require not only a common purpose but generalisable means and understandings. The vivid diary of Munshi Jeevan Lal, who was so terrified at the Mutiny of the army that “his heart almost ceased to beat”, supports the accidental and extempore character of the revolt in Delhi.<sup>69</sup> Markovits uses the cliché of the prairie fire to describe the spread of the revolt. But a veritable cult, he asserts, has grown up around two now-legendary figures, the unassailable Tantya Tope and Lakshmibai, Rani of Jhansi.<sup>70</sup> There is still a reluctance to think through the implications of Stokes’ work. No serious historian believes the myth of unity among all Indians or even all Hindus that legitimised, in advanced, the struggles for independence. But Stokes’ findings sit uneasily with popular and much scholarly understanding. Sen’s “main movement” expressing generic interests, even though there may well have been common grievances. But it is being described as a general movement every time we talk of Indian and the British, or Hindus and Muslims. The stereotypes in the picture of 1857 were of two large opponents, Europeans and Indians, and of two components within India: Muslims and Hindus. We know that both are misleading. But both remain fundamental to almost all studies of the rebellion, and certainly are taken to be axiomatic in all popular accounts, both in India and in Britain. In these sections Hindus and Muslims operated as fully unitary categories in 1857.<sup>71</sup> But even without the detailed evidence of the nature of local revolts that has now accumulated, it seems wrongheaded to regard the rebellion as a wide spread reaction against the British because they were foreign. Rule by outsiders (or people of different kind) was the norm rather than the exception in India, and had been for many hundreds of years. For the rebellion to have been a reaction against “foreign” rule, the two sides would have needed to be

“Indian” and British or Hindu/Muslim and European. Ethnicity has to be at the heart of any so-called ‘Indian’ revolt against British rule. There were two models of modern nationhood presented to India during colonial rule. They are not usually separated, though they (Indians or rebels) have been implicitly by scholars of international law, for example by James Crawford in a volume discussing the extension of the concept of rights. He advanced a thoroughly intermingled definition of the state as the social fact of a territorial community of persons with a certain political organization. But he then went on drawing on Sieghart’s definitions, to distinguish between rights relating to sovereignty and rights relating to the continuity of groups.<sup>72</sup> Similarly the first concept of the state that identity is based around territory. It was reinforced by claims to sovereignty through regulation and policy, and by notions of national interest and state responsibility.<sup>73</sup> It produced citizens of the land and the law. It was potentially multicultural. Heterogeneity of class and culture was immaterial to this nationalism because of the common place of birth, the common allegiance to a state, the common subjection to the rules, and the common involvement in national project. This nationality was constructed from actions, jurisdictions and benefits defined within bounded space. As Sugata Bose put it, modern colonial empires drew heavily from the model of European nation states in their centralized structures and unitary ideologies of Sovereignty and they bequeathed these to post colonial nation states.<sup>74</sup> The second model of nation hood depended on ethnicity and culture. It became important in the history of modern states, especially for its rhetorical force. Here were citizens by type, or the nation as community. It was effectively monoculture. A fundamental homogeneity had to be imagined, regardless of class or other conflicting interests, though of course within perceivable limits and affinities. One

touch stone was the degree of constitutional prominence given to the idea of representation. The emergence of people's war allowed the women in India to come out of purdah in order to direct public affairs. The participation of women in warfare in India before 1857 was very limited. The Nizam of Hyderabad had two battalions of female sepoy of 1,000 each. In 1795 they took part in the battle of Khardah against Marathas. In 1857, the most famous female warlord to emerge on the Indian side was Wajid Ali's beautiful Begum Hazrat Mahal. Hazrat Mahal, originally a dancing girl named Iftikhar-un-nisa hailed from poor family. In 1856, when Wajid Ali Shah was deposed by the British and left Lucknow for Kolkata, she remained in Awadh. The Begum's ambition was to make Awadh independent of the British and to place her son Bajris Qadr on the throne. In August 1857, 12 years old Bajris Qadr was crowned and his mother emerged as the real power behind the throne. She got her son's enthronement legitimised by the rebel government in Delhi. She symbolised the spirit of resistance in Awadh. In Awadh the chief centre of rebellion was Lucknow, where the rebels under the leadership of Begum went on a strategic defensive. Hazrat Mahal used to hold durbar where she provoked the chieftains and the soldiers to fight the British with vigour. However, during the 1857 Uprising very few women actually took position on the firing line. The women played very important role in strengthening morale, sustaining the home front and in vital non combat jobs associated with army's i.e., providing food, munitions and other logistical back up.<sup>75</sup> In people's war most participants risk their lives not for tangible incentives but for ideological reasons. The confederate and the union soldiers were inspired by the ideas of liberty and republicanism. Many confederate soldiers were willing to die for the idea of self government. James M. McPherson in his study of the

combat motivation of the American civil war soldiers asserts that patriotism was the last refuge of genuinely committed soldiers especially when the going became tough. Along with the secular ideology of nationalism, religion played an important role in egging the participants to participate in the “firing line”<sup>76</sup>. C.A. Bayly writes that at least in some portions of India, the rebellion assumed the proportions of a patriotic revolt.<sup>77</sup> In mid 19<sup>th</sup> century India, a complex compound between religion, caste and racial feelings gave rise to anti-foreign (white men) nationalism among large chunks of Hindus and Muslims in north India. The rebels to great extent relied on mobilising the Indians on the issue of religion. The civilian bureaucrat George Clerk was quite right in asserting before the Peel Commission (which was set up in 1859 to ascertain causes behind the 1857 uprising) that religious fanaticism played an important role in the 1857 rebellion.<sup>78</sup> The rebels did not fight merely professional pride or the lure of monetary gains. Those who joined the side of the rebels had an ideology to fight or die for the unity against British rule. The use of religion as a motivating ideology was spontaneous among the common masses as well as rebel leaders. On June 6, 1857, a group of 50 sowars and 300 sepoys led by Bakshi Ali the jail darogha in Jhansi raised the cry of “deen ki Jai” (victory of religion).<sup>79</sup> When the 3<sup>rd</sup> cavalry entered Delhi, they shouted “Deen Deen”. And they were followed by an excited Muslim mob. The rebels used religion to legitimize their action within the wider Indian Society. And the Indian leaders used this card with, ruthlessness. The rani of Jhansi utilized the issue of religion for gaining recruits to her standard. The Rani used religious mendicants to fan the embers of religious hatred among the people.<sup>80</sup> Nana Sahib also played a religious card. Rumour being the principal subaltern means of communication played an important role in mobilisation of the insurgents. Rumour

evoked comradeship. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak writes that the mindset of the illiterate peasants is influenced by the phonocentrism of a tradition where ‘Sruti’ – that which is heard – has the greatest authority. Her observations are all the more applicable to the peasants of mid – 19<sup>th</sup> century India.<sup>81</sup> The emergence of the people’s war also witnessed the rise of several civilian leaders among the Indians who were gathered and influenced the masses within the revolt’s lap. The best commander on the rebel side was Tantia Tope (real name Ramchandra Pandurang) a Brahmin aged 41 with pock marked face.<sup>82</sup> The rebels were motivated by a ‘mix’ of religion and caste pride that constituted a short pre-modern nationalism. About women participation, if we compare Indian revolt of 1857 with American Civil War then we can find women both in the American civil war and in the mutiny played an important role. Comparative history is also a short parallel history. And parallel history like parallel lines never meet. So a lot of dissimilarities do exist and can be observed between the people’s war in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century North America and in 1857-59 India. In American civil war the participation of the marginal group (i.e. blacks) was much more intense in North America during the civil war compared to the role played by the tribes and low castes in India during the 1857 uprising which changed the face of war and breaking the traditional socio-religious division created by the society, fighting shoulder to shoulder against common exploiter, and which was also done within socialistic way. The latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was a period of social and religious awakening and the growth of a new spirit leading to socio – religious movement. These movements with regional differences were more or less identical in character, because the focus was on the socio-economic and religious uplift of the society and free from exploitation by British. This movement produced a multifarious intellectual expression of

the social and cultural transformations.<sup>83</sup> In majority of the cases religion was the basic guiding force.<sup>84</sup> In Haryana also, some movements sprang up among the Muslim and Hindu communities. Their main objects were the eradication of social evils, the education of the people and the revival of their old religion. In order to know the popular awakening in the different spheres, it would be pertinent to have a graphic account of the socio-religious against such common enemy. Marx had suggested in his article published in the New York Daily Tribune of 14 August 1857 that the rebelling sepoys were in reality acting as the “instruments of the Indian people’s” upsurge against British colonial rule.<sup>85</sup> According to him, by creating the 200,000 strong native army British rules had brought into existence the first general centre of resistance which the Indian people ever possessed.<sup>86</sup> In 1857, it was this center, comprising the peasants and artisans in uniform, that were apparently seeking to act, with all its ideological and organizational failures, as the vanguard of the spontaneous people’s uprising.<sup>87</sup> Marx’s own subsequent information as well as the detailed researches of the later writers have fully upheld these early insights into the character of the 1857 Revolt: that all the sections of the native army, including some of the exclusively Sikh corps were affected by the rebellious sentiments, that in many places the sepoy revolts were followed by the stirring into action of the artisans and other poor sections of the urban and rural populace,<sup>88</sup> that in the northern subdivisions of the Muzaffarnagar districts the rival khaps of the jats peasantry had come together, defying the English authority, under the leadership of a Mewati Muslim; that the Jat peasantry of the same district had also aligned itself with the petty Muslim gentry elements, then fighting last ditch battles against the advancing English troops,<sup>89</sup> that the Zamindars and other landowning groups in Awadh as well as in other parts of the then

North-Western provinces and central India, at least initially, not only looked with approval at the rebellious acts of the sepoys, but, in many cases actually participated in the rebellion;<sup>90</sup> that the so-called wahabis armed with a consistent anti British ideology and also having at their disposal a network of organized centers spread all over northern India, were in the forefront of the struggle in all main centers of the Revolt,<sup>91</sup> are now well known and almost universally recognized as the general features of 1857 rebellion that testify to its character as a national or people's uprising spearheaded by the sepoys. If the sepoy mutiny formed the backbone of the 1857 Revolt, it is equally certain that it would not have acquired the dimensions it did, had the revolt not immediately touched a sympathetic chord in the heart of large sections of the civil population of the large tract from Haryana to Bihar from whose villages the sepoys came. The Mutiny took on the complexion, over large areas of an agrarian revolt. The participation of the city's poor as auxiliaries in the Revolt was quite a noticeable feature at many places. At Delhi, weavers, artisans and other wage earners' joined the sepoys under the rebel commander Bakht Khan.<sup>92</sup> In the detailed memoir that Syed Ahmed Khan wrote on the events of the Revolt in the district of Bijnor, he noted scornfully that the professional sepoys and soldiers under the local rebel leader Mahmud Khan, were reinforced by cotton-carders and weavers who had never held any sword, except yarn.<sup>93</sup> The terminology continues to change in accordance with the new spirit as the days pass: the Rebel Army becomes the Sipah – I – Hindostan (the Army of India) and there are appeals to fellow countrymen (ahl-i-wantan), 'dear compatriots'(aziz-ham-watan), with specific exhortations for a united rallying of Hindus and Muslims. The English being Christians and so believing in the trinity of God are held to be polytheists and infidels (kafir), while the Hindus being

believers in 'Adi purush' share the basic belief in one God with Muslims and so closed to them.<sup>94</sup> In view of this close proximity in belief, both Hindus and Muslims are called upon to unite and fight and destroy the Christian English.<sup>95</sup> There is very little help from the official sources in trying to reconstruct the various constituents of popular culture notions of 'dharma' and life the systems of symbolism and ritual significance active within polity and society and arrived at by different groups of rebels all of which are essential to truly be able to grasp and understand the modalities and idioms of popular grievances and actions in 1857 with the causal and characteristics inter-relations and spatial variations. It is here that the importance of sources of oral and popular history like folk songs, folk tales etc., as a primary source for reconstructing the history of 1857 from the point of view of a common rebel acquires relevance. Though historians have made use of the proclamations and letters of rebel leaders of note to comment on the particulars of the ideological inclinations, aims and interests of the Rajas and chieftains, for a deeper insight into the ideological predilections, mental makeup and the arena of realities of the common rebels during 1857. For the rebels, destruction had its own joy. It signified triumph, liberation from perpetual exploitation and oppression under the colonialist institutions.<sup>96</sup> In fact folklore has a valuable advantage in that it denotes the voice of feelings of a community rather than the individual. Even if they are seen as hailing the glories of an individual leader; the semiology and the choice of words and their presentation often provide us with a significant insight into the mental domain of the community, its normative structure, its systems of deference to tradition or resistance to forces of change and the trajectories through which such attitudes moved during 1857-59 in different areas. In some folk songs the reasons given for Kunwar Singh's rebellion

indicate less of his actual motivations than the fact that people created images of Kunwar Singh based on their own miseries and hopes. *Kailas des par julum jor firangia/julum kahani suni tadpe kunwar singh/ Ban ke lutera utral fauj firangia/sahar gaon looti phunki, dihlas firangia/sunsun kunwar ke hirday legal agia.* (The firangi forcibly oppressed the country and Kunwar Singh was deeply moved when he heard the tales of their atrocities. The firangi army arrived to loot and it looted and burnt cities and villages. When he came to know of all this, Kunwar Singh was enraged.<sup>97</sup> It is true that the impact of British policies in the first half of the nineteenth century, and the changes affecting various sections of the population provide us with a proper perspective to study 1857. In this perspective people visualized the revolt in terms of their grievances, expectations, desires and hopes.

Needless to say, different sets of people had different aspirations from the revolt, and they reacted to it in various ways. Again the same issue could be interpreted differently by different sets of people depending on social outlook, political inclinations, region specific situations or cultural traditions and they fought against common enemy. The rebel figure Kunwar Singh here is a symbol of these proud warriors fighting to redeem the infringement of their honour. For the people, Kunwar Singh is not a remote ruler on the throne, he is a community leader attached to the commoners through ties of blood and kinship.<sup>98</sup> In popular perception, Kunwar Singh seemed to be fighting less for his personal jagirdari privileges and much more to keep safe our pride and our plenty/our religion, our cows! /oh Babua, to protect the rent free lands of our father and grandfather.<sup>99</sup> The song shows that the narrow definition of Kunwar Singh as a defender of Hinduism in Bihar is not an adequate description. Dharma in popular understanding

stood for a whole range of political and social values that their hero sought to defend. The notion of Dharma, honour and prosperity intermingled with each other in popular consciousness. This political articulation derives its legitimacy from a cultural code where traditions and customs of the past are venerated, and where changes brought about by the British are resented as they tarnish these tradition which are symbolized by the 'fair names of our father and grandfathers'. Thus it is not only material deprivation, but politics of a particular kind-rooted in cultural traditions and articulated through cultural symbols-that insighted and signified the broad sweep of rebellion in Shahabad. In fact, a comparison of the folk songs of the Awadh heartland with those of Shahabad reveals that while in the case of Awadh such concerns as outlined above, though present, were often over determined and overshadowed by images of pathos for the Nawab and his lost splendour and kingly opulence, in the case of Shahabad community concerns occupied a privileged place. It is for this reason that Shahabad and the adjoining Bhojpuri belt provides us with perhaps the best region to study popular mentalities during 1857. A popular Bhojpuri folktale, in fact goes to the extent of giving the credit, for the taking up of arms by Kunwar Singh, to a call by the people as well as masses of the region. Popular memory in the Bhojpuri region recalls one Bunsuria Baba as having been the 'guru' and advisor of Kunwar Singh.<sup>100</sup> The fact that traces and images of the Revolt of 1857 are still imprinted in the various folk cultures suggests that it was a popular mass struggle. Its memories were transformed into a stream of folk tradition and popular values which are, even today, very much a part of village culture. The peasants of the regions where the Revolt spread were so deeply and actively involved in it that it became a part of their collective memory. D.D. Kosambi, in his quest for social and historical truths, made

meaningful attempts to analyse popular forms of the cultural behaviour of peoples.<sup>101</sup> In Indian society studying folk culture is crucial to understanding peasant society because the everyday life of peasants is reflected in their folk culture. On the other hand folk culture itself influences the consciousness of the peasantry. Popular folk culture perceived the Ghadar of 1857 as an attempt of the people to free their mulk from the rule of the hated English (firangis). The popular perception of people towards the colonizers as Firangis, connotes certain characteristics and features. Firangis were perceived by the people as those who were fair skinned (gora) and looters, and exploiters of the country (mulk) and those who corrupted their religion and caste. The folk perception of 1857 was that it was an attempt towards the liberation of their mulk from the oppressive rule of the Firangis. A Bhojpuri folk song is cited here which conveys the collective feelings of the people.

*“Ab chhod re firangiya hamar deswa/ lutpat kaile tuhun, majwa udaile/ Kailas des per julion jor/sahar gaon luti, phunki, dihiat firangiya,/suni suni kunwar ke hridaya me lagal agiya/Ab chhod re firangiya Hamar deswa”*(British, now quit our country, for you lost us enjoy the luxuries of our countrymen(in return). You have looted and burnt the hamlets our cities and villages. Kunwars heart burns to know all this. O British! Now quit our country).<sup>102</sup>

Popular culture has perceived the revolt as an expression of self sacrifice by the rebels. This self-sacrifice is reflected in the form as well as content of folk cultures. Folk lore or folk song actively invites the people to participate in the struggle against the British. The folk song or culture also worked as a medium of communication. The folk songs of patia tried to motivate people to join the rebels, asking them to make the sacrifice of their lives.

This call has been put forward in the patia form and subsequently used by masses during various popular mobilizations.<sup>103</sup> Some lines of a patia form, and the ghadar of 1857 are as follows: *Bajan ganwai ke nevtā/ churl forwai ke nevtā/sindoor pochhwai ke nevtā/jei ho hamar to nath del/jei ho hamar te sath del!* This patia inviting people to sacrifice for their mulk and exhorting women to be prepared to break their bangles and to remove vermilion from their forehead represents the popular mentality of people and presents a model of peasant consciousness. Thus in folk culture, the revolt of 1857 does not appear as a struggle confined to a caste, religion or specific class. In popular perception it was a war of liberation from foreign oppression and humiliation. Communal and caste harmony is very much evident in such folklore. The folk consciousness contains much hatred against the exploiter. In the context of 1857, people were organized, committed and involved in conscious mass mobilization. The continuum of folk consciousness assimilates cultural and historical memories within it to make these memories within the cultural traditions of people through popular practice come alive. People keep alive only those memories that still have relevance for their lives. The contemporaneity of the past provides reference points for the recurrence of the concerned memory. Many values are reflected by these popular traditions and people relate themselves to these values. In fact the values that emerged from 1857 provide the relevance of the event in contemporary life. Through these popular practices and traditions the memory of the unfinished agenda of this struggle remained imprinted in the psyche of people as well as common masses. The narratives, the memories and the values of 1857, have thus become a part of folk tradition, which remain alive and are practices even today.<sup>104</sup> The entire discussion on resistance in 1857 indicates that during the revolt of 1857 resistance

actually took a social form and for that reason it is apt to declare the resistance during the revolt of 1857 as popular resistance. The most noticeable point is that peasant and adibasi and general masses resistance to the colonial rule originated not from within a separate domain of the peasants and adibasi. They fought together within one revolt's lap. The revolt of 1857 demonstrates a massive and willing participation of the peasants and adibasis on the basis of their own initiative.

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