

## CHAPTER- VI

### CONCLUSION

India's conquest by the British led not only to the loss of her political freedom; it also brought to light India's social and economic inferiority to the West, thus posing a challenge to her total identity. The failure of the 1857 Mutiny further confirmed what had already been demonstrated earlier – the vast gulf which separated the vanquished from the victor in terms of material and social progress. India was defeated because she had lagged behind on account of her grave internal weakness. The lesson of the Mutiny was not lost on sensitive Indians nor on the Indian society as a whole. This constituted the starting point of the new wave of Indian nationalism during the period following the Mutiny.<sup>1</sup> Bipan Chandra quoting from Jawaharlal Nehru's *Discovery of India* argued that under the colonial rule the dominant impulse was of fear, strangling fear, fear of army, police, secret service, law, prison, moneylender, unemployment and starvation.<sup>2</sup> There are ample example to suggest that it is justified to show actually how much the rebellious spirit exhibited by the popular militant movements or mass movements were deeply embedded in society. Bipan Chandra's opinion is insufficient to answer the question that does the entire population, especially poor landless peasants, workers, and also the adibasi peasants were in the grip of a never ending fear? Rather it appears that the poor peasants, adibasi peasant or artisans and workers never exhibited any fear and on the contrary always challenged the colonial state or imperial power. As in the 1834 during the chuar rebellion the judicial department in its letter to court observed that the insurgents rejected all terms of submission.<sup>3</sup> In the national government of Delhi, Bahadur Shah was only a nominal head and in reality sepoys used to take decision and

publish everything. If the proclamation issued from Delhi can be regarded as rebel voice and not a Badshahi voice then it becomes clear that the rebels did not want to restore Mughal Empire Sultanate or Gupta Empire. The proclamation addressed to Zaminder merchants, public servants, artisans and pandit or Fakir, Scholars, and to all the Sections, it was addressed that Badshahi government will bring back and restore the tradition and customs.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, in the proclamation of peshwa in late 1858 the villagers were assured that peasants were the friends of the rebels.<sup>5</sup> Thus it appears that far from establishing the old feudal regime the rebels had in mind something else. It appears from the proclamation that the rebels were trying to restore their previous condition, which were excluded by colonial rule and without uprooting colonial rule it was not possible. From the rebel proceedings and proclamation it appears that the rebels were actually trying to restore the old traditions, customs and practices of the country which formed the knowledge system of the country. Knowledge system of India which included indigenous history, philosophy, agriculture and irrigation, medicine and all were deeply embedded in the traditions and customs of the country, that which was excluded by the colonial rule from the very beginning. The rebel proceedings and efforts of restoring indigeneity also indicates that the rebels had a vision of “nation” and “nationalism” also in their mind but that was distinctly different from European “nation state” and “nationalism”.<sup>6</sup>

The Revolt of 1857 started with the call to protect religion. During the entire phase of the rebellion religion acted as the inspirer and the battle cry of the revolt. Everywhere the rebels killed several Europeans and the remaining Europeans fled. Immediately after that the rebels set-up a government with the apparatuses of a regular

government and tried to restore and even restored also the order. The main function of the rebel governments was to promote war. Promotion of war implied preservation of that which has been achieved and what was achieved was the power of ruling the country by its own people.<sup>7</sup> Henry Mead has observed that in Fyzabad a rebel told to the British officer that “proclamations have been received from the king of Delhi, informing all that he is once more on the throne of his fathers, and calling upon the whole army to join his standard..... The only ruler in India empowered to give Sunnuds is the king of Delhi, it is from him only that we shall receive our orders.”<sup>8</sup> In this context Marx also observed that Delhi was not a strategically important place. Still Delhi became important in the eyes of the rebels due to Historical tradition. This idea was visible everywhere. Charles Griffiths has observed that in Ferozpur after the outbreak the sepoy “quietly but firmly announced that they released themselves from the service of the East India Company and were about to become enrolled as subjects of the king of Delhi”.<sup>9</sup> Once this idea became firmly established people started to act. Similarly everywhere Revolts started to breakout Delhi became centre of assemblage, more than that Delhi became a symbol. Once people thought that the British rule has ended, people started to destroy all the signs of the British rule everywhere.<sup>10</sup> The rebel order gave highest priority to a consolidated effort to continue what has been achieved. The early proclamation from Delhi not only invited everybody to join the fight to save religion but it also requested everybody to remain united in the struggle for nation, “so that good order may be maintained”. The poorer classes kept contented, and they themselves be exalted to rank and dignity.<sup>11</sup> In another subsequent proclamation to everybody the rebel focused some more reasons. The rebels observed that, “In Hindustan they (the British Indian State) have exacted a revenue of

Rs.300 where only Rs.200 were due and Rs.500 where but Rs.400 were demandable. The people will thus be ruined and reduced to beggary". The proclamation also mentioned that the government has ruined Hindustan by heavy assessment and improper cesses and has attempted to destroy religion. The learned and respectable men lost their occupation.<sup>12</sup> At this stage religion and exploitation acted as the sole force of appeal, bondage and unity. The Delhi proclamation observed that man dies once but to die for religion being a laudable deed means that those who will die in the battle will become martyrs, the Muslims will attain Ghazidom and Hindus will reach to Baikunth.<sup>13</sup>

The proclamation of Kanpur gave the call to everybody to join in the fight to protect religion. It gave call to Muslims and gave call to Hindus by observing that those Hindus who will not join in such a noble act will be treated as an outcaste who can eat beef.<sup>14</sup> The proclamation issued from Bareilly also gave a similar call. The Bareilly proclamation also observed that under the British rule religion will definitely become destroyed. So the Muslims were given call in the name of Koran and the Hindus were given call in the name of Tulsi plant, image of Shalgram and water of Ganges. The proclamation also observed that if Hindus united with the Muslims in killing English then the Muslims will not only abstain from eating beef but will consider beef with similar horror which was associated with pork, but on the contrary if Hindus does not join in the fight then they will be considered guilty of eating beef.<sup>15</sup> The Delhi proclamation also observed that those Hindu and Muslims who will join the opponent of the rebels will have their face blackened in both the worlds and will get no peace.<sup>16</sup> Above all the Kanpur proclamation claimed that the British government due to its attempts to destroy the religion of Indians have "Incurred upon themselves the displeasure of the deity, who

has given the rule into our hands to punish them".<sup>17</sup> In the whole process what was marginalized, displaced was the indigenous tradition, indigenous knowledge system, indigenous custom which as a whole formed a 'nation'. The nation existed territorially although but it existed more in perception and vision. It was this nation which the rebels were thinking about in 1857 as it becomes evident from the rebel proclamations where they questioned new revenue, introduction of English customs, loss of occupancy right peasants, introduction of new knowledge, science and medicine. It will not be incorrect to argue that this obviously does not contradict with Marxist ideas. Lenin has observed that "The self determination of nations means the political separation of these nations from alien national bodies, and the formation of an independent national state."<sup>18</sup> Our entire study is demonstrating that in 1857 they were only desperately, and wholeheartedly want to separate themselves, to separate the indigenous nation from the alien British Indian State. In the Indian tradition the nation always existed in the commonness and continuity of custom and tradition up to the end of pre-colonial period. History was embedded in custom and tradition which formed part of itihasa purana tradition. Romila Thapar has observed that itihasa purana means something between perceived past and historicity.<sup>19</sup> The nation existed not as a territory but in perception of past which included the age old traditions and customs.<sup>20</sup> Rajat kanta Roy has observed that the revolt was a "legitimate restoration" - accomplishment of an act which the Mughal Cavaliers failed at Buxar is not exactly appropriate because it contradicts his own view and conclusions. Others like Susobhan Sarkar, Suproakash Roy, Rudrangshu Mukherjee, Hirendranath Mukhopadhyay, P.C. Joshi, Talmiz Kahldun, S.N. Sen, S.B. Chaudhury and John Pemble also viewed the revolt generally in this way. Such a view and an effort to accommodate

that view in the parameter of the nation state contradicts their own view, specially P.C. Joshi, Rajat Roy and Irfan Habib also observed that it was not a mere or a photocopy type of restoration.<sup>21</sup> P.C. Joshi has observed that the rebel army dictated terms to and crowned the Mughal Badsha.<sup>22</sup> Rajat Roy has observed that the restored chieftains had to come to terms with the Sepoy councils.<sup>23</sup> Irfan Habib has observed that the rebel regimes were not merely royal or princely old order restorations.<sup>24</sup> As a logical sequence came the general conclusion in all these works that it was a movement of freedom from colonial rule within the parameter of socialistic Mentality of the rebels. Mass extra-parliamentary Socio-political movements and struggles indeed remain the central axis, the decisive terrain of the struggle for a socialist revolution. The amount of violence that will be involved in a given revolutionary process is indeed impossible to predict in advance. It depends on the one hand on the nature and amount of ruling class resistance but in a large part, also, on how successfully the socialists have built people's social power from below and how hegemonic or influential they are in society as a whole. For socialists, revolution is a matter, not of violence or non-violence, but of fundamental structural change in society, revolutionaries to defend revolution with violence when the ruling classes violate the victories and rights of the people. People have a natural aversion to violence and revolutionaries respect it. Struggle for power or equality brings into focus the issue of revolutionary leadership in the struggle for socialism. The kind of socialist organizations that are required at any point of time is always linked with the kind of tasks required to be carried out.

They are needed to affirm a socialist presence, to advance socialist alternatives, to inscribe immediate demands and grievances into a larger framework, to mount a moral

and intellectual challenge to capitalist hegemony, and to provide leadership to a society wide struggle for socialism. The need for a revolutionary party of socialism can never be over-emphasized, well described as the concrete expression of the Marxist synthesis of determinism and voluntarism in revolutionary practice, it has to be a party which is capable of bringing together under socialist hegemony all the actual and potential anti-capitalist forces in society, including the new social movements, and mobilizing and leading the mass of the working people in their struggle for political supremacy in the state, it has to be party which aims to achieve representation within existing institutions but which is even more actively involved in actions and struggle outside and can successfully articulate all the different forms of struggle in pursuit of its revolutionary objective.<sup>25</sup> Socialism is not just a changed society, a superior social order, it is today the necessary defence of humanity and our planet earth. This in its own way makes socialism all the more possible as an alternative to capitalism. Alternatives are discovered or invented, or even recovered when it becomes clear that we cannot survive without them. Pointing to the human tragedy that capitalism's continued existence now portends for humankind, this is how Chomsky has put it in his characteristically simple manner. At this stage of history, either one of two things is possible. Either general population will take control of its own destiny and will concern itself with community interests, guided by values of solidarity, sympathy, and concern for others, or alternatively there will be no destiny for anyone to control. Socialism is necessary and also an objective possibility defined by the socio-economic conditions of capitalist and the alternative people may come to seek. It is the subjective factor, the conscious political intervention which is decisive in the actualization of the possibility of socialism. As in the past so

now, the possibility of socialism is spur enough for them to act and the perspective remains on the one hand of a long march guided and fired by the vision of a radically different society and on the other of a movement which learns and becomes more conscious as it advances and whose members do not mix up their own mortality with a timetable for the achievement of socialist goals, they know that history does not always deliver victories within mentality of the rebels.<sup>26</sup>



REFERENCES

- 1) Nanda, B.R, (ed.), “*Socialism in India*” New Delhi, Vikash Publishing House, 1972, p.122.
- 2) Chandra, Bipan, (ed.), *India’s Struggle for Independence*, Kolkata, 1988, p.20.
- 3) Judicial letter to the Court of Directors, 31<sup>st</sup> March, 1834, No.3 (WBSA).
- 4) Proclamation of Delhi, (In Ball, Charles, *The history of the Indian Mutiny*, London & New York, 1887, Vol - II ), p.630-32.
- 5) Proclamation of Rao Sahib, 7<sup>th</sup> November, 1858, in *Ibid*, p.546.
- 6) Chakraborty, Kaushik, *Decolonising the revolt of 1857. Colonial order, rebel order, rebel vision and the Sahkespearean Weltans Chauung of the Bengali Babu*, Kolkata, Readers Service, 2007, p.47.
- 7) *Ibid.*, p.201.
- 8) Mead, Henry, *The Sepoy revolt*, London, 1858, Reprint, New Delhi, 1986, p.122.
- 9) Chakraborty, *op. cit.*, p.202.
- 10) *Ibid.*
- 11) Delhi proclamation, in *Ball-I*, p.459.
- 12) Delhi proclamation, in Nigam, N.K, *Delhi 1857*, New Delhi, 1957, p.86.
- 13) *Ibid.*, pp.83, 86.

- 14) Kanpur proclamation, in Shepherd, p.29.
- 15) Bareilly Proclamation, in Ball-II, *op. cit.*, p.29.
- 16) Delhi proclamation, in Nigam, *op. cit.*, p.88.
- 17) Kanpur proclamation, in Shepherd, W.J, *Massacre at Cawnpore, Lucknow, 1879*, New Delhi, 1973, p.29.
- 18) Lenin, V.I, *Collected Works*, Vol.20, Moscow, 1977, p.397.
- 19) Thapar, Romila, *Interpreting Early India, in History and Beyond*, New Delhi, 2000, p.151.
- 20) Chakraborty, Kaushik, *op. cit.*, p.215.
- 21) *Ibid.*, p.219.
- 22) Joshi, P.C, *1857 in our History*, New Delhi, NBT, 2007, p.188.
- 23) Ray, Rajat Kanta, *The Felt Community commonality and mentality before the emergence of Indian Nationalism*; OUP, New Delhi, 2007 p.356.
- 24) Habib, Irfan, The coming of 1857, in *social scientist*, Vol.26, No.1-4, January – April, 1998.
- 25) Singh, Randhir, “*Struggle for Socialism*”, New Delhi, Aakar, 2010 pp.146-149.
- 26) *Ibid.*, pp.162-163.