

CHAPTER - II

SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL BACKGROUND OF THE FIRST WAR OF INDEPENDENCE, 1857.

The Second half of the 19th Century is very important because of the revolt of the Indian people against the British and their struggle for independence which took place in 1857. But it would not be out of place to mention some of the movements of the 18th Century which revitalised their efforts. These movements started in the second half of the 18th and the first half of the 19th Century. These were (I) Shah Waliulla's socio-religious Reform Movement (II) Fraizi Movement, (III) Wahabi Movement etc. ^{1A} The 18th century saw the beginning of the end of the Mughal Empire due to Political instability, weak central authority and growing economic poverty. This continued in the early decades of the 19th century, leading to the worst political condition. The Sikhs, the Marathas and the Muslims were not well-wishers to one another and to the English too. Though they realised that the British were their common foes, yet they could not unite together. There were mutual distrust and enmity among them. Taking advantage of this confusion the British carved out a place for themselves and they retained it for more than a century. Advanced industrial techniques and adept diplomacy further gave the British an upper hand and in collaboration with some of the indigenous states and rebellious princes they came into prominence and emerged victorious in some of the battles.

Nawab Sirajuddaulla of Bengal with his patriotic sentiment tried to combat and challenge the rising forces of the British. He had the foresight to clearly realise the menace latent in British expansion and tried to check it. Moreover, the additional military fortification of Calcutta by the British 'Provoked The Nawab's Wrath'. Sirajuddaulla marched to Calcutta and Fort William was captured by him on June 20, 1756. But it could not continue longer. One of his unfaithful General betrayed him and he was defeated in the battle of Plassey.⁽¹⁾ The British captured the states of Bengal, Orissa and Bihar after the battle of Palassey (1757) and Buxur (1764). Gradually the British snatched the land ownership from the Zamindars. Loot and exploitation became a common affairs feature of the day and the people escaped to Jungles to save their lives.

In the South Sultan Haider Ali, the ruler of Mysore was fully conscious of the danger that was ahead. He formed a confederacy of several powers but failed to overthrow the British. Haider Ali has left a great impression on history that he was a great fighter against the British. In 1781 when John Malcolm, a candidate for employment in the East India Company, was asked by the Director's as to what would he do if he was to meet Haider Ali ? The candidate without hesitation replied that with a sword he would cut off his head. This shows the impression Haider Ali had left on the average English boy.⁽²⁾

Tipu Sultan who succeeded his father continued his father's policy of ousting the British. He had developed a world of consciousness at a time when most of the Indian rulers were incapable of understanding the consequences of the rise of British. He followed Western techniques in his army, sent envoys to Turkey in 1784-85 ; and to Zaman Shah of Afghanistan in 1786 and in 1799 which was intercepted by the British. He did never look back, he generously borrowed both from the contemporary revolutionary ideas of the French Revolution of 1789 and from the military sciences of Napoleon. His 'Ahmadi' contingent of Muslim, neoconverts was modelled on the pattern of the most modern European states sometimes resembled to the janiscaries of the Ottoman Turks rather than the the army of the Mughal nobles.⁽³⁾ This clearly shows his preparation to resist the British expansion and his hatred for the imperialist.⁽⁴⁾

Tipu Sultan symbolised the Hindu - Muslim Unity. The Mysore Government still preserves his thirty letters in its Archaeological Department written to Shankar Acharya of Srinagarmat, a great saint of his time, reverentially begging him to return to his state and pray for his success in fighting against the foreigners.⁽⁵⁾ Tipu Sultan with his limited resources could not face a well-equipped army for long. Had he agreed to be a vassal of the English East India Company he would have saved his Kingdom. But Tipu Sultan was a patriot and defied the British even with his handful of army and fought in defence of his mother land. Paying tribute to Hyder Ali and Tipu Sultan

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activities of Majnun Shah continued and in December, 1786 he assaulted an army led by Lt. Brennan in which Majnun Shah got injuries and died a few months after. Nevertheless he left behind a burning spirit of patriotism and a mission unfinished. Majnun Shah's companions Chirag Ali Shah, Musa Shah, Zahori Shah, Subban Ali Shah, Madar Bux Shah, Mutiullah Shah, Karim Shah, Umoodi Shah and other continued their resistance but they suffered defeats at the hands of the British army.⁽⁹⁾

From strategic point of view, Oudh was an important factor in the north and it attracted the English. The interest of the English demanded that it should be made a strong barrier of defence on the north-west boundary of Bengal. The King of Afghanistan, Zaman Khan's invasion and mal-administration of the Nawab were taken as a pretext and Oudh fell a prey to British imperialism. Ultimately, the Nawab Vazir agreed to reduce his forces and came under British control for all practical purposes increasing the number of British troops in his states.⁽¹⁰⁾

In the extreme north, the Gorkhas attacked the British and the conflict began on the question of border which ultimately led to war. The Gorkhas were defeated and the districts of Garhwal and Kumaon with a large portion of the Terai were captured by the British.⁽¹¹⁾

The Sikhs in the Punjab began to rise with the dissolution of the Mughal Empire in the West. They were

a religious sect and formed a military confederation because of the prosecution at the hands of the Mughal rulers. They were not inferior in any respect with the Marathas or Gorkhas. When the Punjab was invaded by Zaman Shah of Kabul in 1797. Ranjit attracted his attention. When Zaman Shah had to go back to Kabul to suppress the insurrection broke out in his Kingdom he conferred upon Ranjit Singh the Governorship of Lahore for services rendered by him.⁽¹²⁾ By 1806 Ranjit Singh had occupied all the lands of the Punjab right down to the river Sutlej. Afraid of the advance of Ranjit Singh, the Cis-Sutlej states appealed to the British for protection and this resulted in the Treaty of Amritsar (1809). Ranjit Singh conquered Kashmir in the year 1819 and in 1823 Peshwar also passed into his hands. Ranjit Singh never broke his promise with the British as agreed in the Treaty of Amritsar till his death (1839).

After the death of Ranjit Singh the whole administration had broken down, chaos and confusion reigned supreme in his mighty Kingdom. The Sikhs violated the Treaty and the British led a military expedition in reply. Ultimately after two successive wars, the Sikhs laid their arms down and the Punjab was annexed British territory.⁽¹³⁾ The British army had been permitted by the Amirs of Sindh to pass through their country to Kabul. Since that day Sindh had gained a value as the gate-way to Western Asia. The Amirs had rendered valuable services to the British Government during the Kabul Campaign but military and political strategy needed the immediate annexation of

Sindh. With this intention Sir Charles Napier was appointed the British agent in Sindh in October, 1842. In course of time Sir Charles Napier any how concluded that some of the Amirs were ill-wishers of the British Government and he declared War against them. The poor Amirs were so weak. They could not face a well-equipped army, and Sindh was annexed to the Indian Empire.⁽¹⁴⁾ In the same way, a War was declared against Burma on the Eastern frontier of the Empire and the in 1852 Lower Burma was also annexed.

The British was highly opportunist they annexed the States sometimes by War and sometimes by Peace as the situation demanded. The political history of India would be incomplete without a brief description of the territories annexed through persuasion and peaceful means and intervention. The Doctrine of Lapse', that mean the annexation of Indian States in the absence of any legal heir to the throne, was finally adopted. The states of Sambhalpur, Satara, Karauli, Jhansi, Oudh and Nagpur were annexed one after the other to the British territory either on the plea of gross misrule or the failure of natural heirs. Their unjust rule of annexation converted these friendly states into sore enemies and they demonstrated their anger and resentment during the lawful and terrible days of the First War of Independence, 1857.⁽¹⁵⁾

Indian manufactures were famous for there good qualities of products all over the world. Greeks used

Gangetika⁽¹⁶⁾ which was thought to be the work of fairies rather than that of man. The muslin was so fine that it could be drawn through a ring of moderate size.⁽¹⁷⁾ By far the most important item of export from the Country, says the great historian Dr. Tara Chand, was cotton piece goods. India was known for centuries all the world over for the excellence of her fine cotton products.⁽¹⁸⁾ Indian sandal wood boxes, shawls, cuttery, linens calicoes, embroidery and other textile manufactures received wide acclamation in foreign markets.⁽¹⁹⁾

But British changed the flow of this prosperous commerce. Plans were made to suppress Indian manufactures. The import of Indian goods to Europe was redirected by forcing the British Free Trade on India. Heavy duties on Indian manufactures were imposed in England while the export of raw material from India, to England under special privileges was freely permitted. Some times a penalty was also imposed on those who used Indian calicoes. No attempt was made to apply the new techniques in India and every attempt was made to prevent its economic development and the growth of new industry. Machines were not exported to India. Consequently a vacuum was created which could only be filled by British goods.⁽²⁰⁾

Mr. Montgomery Martin very frankly admitted that the Company had compelled the Indian territories to purchase their manufactures, imported

under nominal duties. He expressed his sorrow at the decay and destruction of Dacca, Murhsidabad and other flourishing centres of Indian industries.⁽²¹⁾ They basically did not want the development and improvement of India.⁽²²⁾ Thus they framed the commercial policy in such a way that British only could be the beneficiaries. India only remained a source of raw-materials and it reduced the national income. Not only the industries but the agriculture also suffered from this policy.

Sir Henry Cotton says, 'The arts of spinning and weaving, which for ages afforded employment to numerous and industries population, have now become extinct. Families which were formerly in a state of affluence have been reduced to penury'.⁽²³⁾

Raja Ram Mohan Roy, the child of modern Indian renaissance, advised and encouraged the Hindus to promote a more liberal and they embraced the new knowledge of Western Science and Philosophy.

On the other hand, the Muslims had no such leadership and they did not adopt the modern western education. According to Dr. Tara Chand, the Muslim mind was soaked in medievalism and it was intellectually quite unprepared to withstand the attack from the West.⁽²⁷⁾ The Muslims completely ignored Western Education by clinging to their traditional Maktabs (Private Schools and Madararas).

At the first stage, Bismillah was introduced and then the students were made to repeat a few lines of the Holy Quran. The next stage was the frequent repetition of the Amadnamah and then some texts in Persian such as Gulistan and Bustan of Sadi; Firddausi's Shahnama and Nizami's Sikandar nameh and other works of famous Persian authours.⁽²⁸⁾ Moreover some popular romantic legends like Yusuf and Zulekha, Laila Majnun and Shirin Farahad were also taught. Maktabs were attached to mosques, supported either by the State or Private persons. Many centres of learning like Jaunpur, Khairabad and Agra had sprung up, to which students from all parts of India and even from Afganistan and Bokhara came to take lessons from brilliant and reputed specialists.²⁹ This kind of education made them well-versed in Arabic and Persian and capable of holding administrative posts under the Mughal.

Since British had started their own system of education, they were not satisfied. In the field of education, the British introduced a new system of education emphasising European history, western Philosophy and natural sciences using the English language as the only medium of instruction. Macaulay,²⁴ the brilliant educationist, highly advocated for the substitution of western education in India, as he was convinced 'that within a generation all respectable classes of Bengal would have ceased to be Hindu and' he wished to create a class of persons

who could be Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinion, in morals and in intellect'.²⁵ He was of the opinion that 'a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia.'²⁶ The Muslims thought that the English schools did not include religious instruction and the schools might tend to produce disbelief and corrupt morals and manners. They were firmly believed and were convinced that the insistence on English education would mean the conversion of their children to Christianity and would make them accept Western Literatures. Sir Willium Hunter himself affirms that our system of Public Instruction, which has awakened the Hindus from the sleep of centuries, and quickened their inert masses with some of the nobles impulses of a nation, is opposed to the traditions, unsuited to the requirements, and hateful to the religion of the Musalmans.'³⁰

Such ideas that the people might be Christianised created a religious revivalism in India and the revival movements in Hindu and Muslim Communities started. Hindus were the first to be affected by the English impact and religious revivalism among them came first.

Raja Ram Mohan Roy³¹ a moving spirit in the rediscovery of India's ancient heritage,³² might truly be considered the pioneer of the Indian Renaissance. For the purifications of Hinduisism and rejection of religious dogmas,

he founded the Brahma Samaj in Bengal. He intelligently combined ³³ the old and new learning. He advocated the abolition of Sati and engaged himself in religious discourse with traditional pundits. His intention was to propagate the true Hinduism based on the Upanishads and Vedanta.

He was succeeded by Devendra Nath Tagore and Keshab Chandra Sen who tried to eradicate the prevalent abuses in Hindu Society. The Arya Samaj of Radha Swami took the strongest root in U.P. and the Punjab. Dayanand Saraswati who raised the voice against social evils saved Hinduism from being engulfed by Christianity.³⁴ Justice Mahadev Govind Ranade also founded the Prarthana Samaj in Maharashtra. But infact, of all the religious movements of the 19th Century the Brahma Samaj was most powerful and influential.³⁵

Muslims also could not help being influenced by the Western impact and Missionary Propaganda. The slow degradation of their old system of education had convinced them of the necessity and urgency of religious revivalism.

As a matter of fact, in the 19th century Islam in India had become moribund and signs of healthy vigour had disappeared. The mosques stood, as it were, only as symbols of the glories of Islam. The majority of the Muslims just listened to pirs and faqirs and went on pilgrimage to the tombs of holy men. Superstition had engulfed them and the moral teachings of the Quran became

meaningless to them ³⁶. Such pitiable condition which became still graver due to the missionary propaganda, called for an immediate action against ensuing dangers. The slogans like 'Back to the example of the Prophet', 'Back to early Khilafat' were the call of the revivalism which occurred among the Muslims.³⁷

Shah Waliullah (1703-1765 AD) who emerged as a great theologian in 18th century played a vital role to arrest the fall of Muslims who had gone to the lowest depth of degradation. An immediate reform was necessary in which besides Shah Waliullah Dehlvi his son Hazrat Shah Abdul Aziz Dehlvi (1750 AD - 1828 AD) also tried to purify Islam from corrupt vices and stirred the Muslim masses to abandon un-Islamic practices. Shah Waliullah translated the Quran into Persian and introduced the teaching of Hadith in India and his son Shah Abdul Aziz popularised the teachings of his father.³⁸ He formed a central body consisting of Maulana Rafiuddin, Maulana Abdul Qadir and Maulana Abdul Gani to make his movement a success and through the efforts of this body an organisation was formed with Maulana Ismail Shaheed, Maulana Mohammad Ishaq and Maulana Abdul Hai Dehlvi and he himself continued delivering bi-weekly lectures on the pattern of his father.³⁹ They considered India under British Rule as Darul-Harb (Land of War) where a true Muslim could not live peacefully and the restoration of Darul Islam (Land of Peace) was therefore an urgent necessity. Therefore

liberation of India from British control and to convert it is to Darul Islam from Darul-Harb had become their immediate goal. This ideology found its clear expression in the movement of Syed Ahmed Shaheed (1786-1831) of Rai Baraily. The Movement led by him was named by the Britishers the Wahavi Movement in order to demoralise it among its followers.⁴⁰ Besides the Mujahids continued their activities against the foreign power.

Besides the above, in the beginning of the 19th century the Fraizi Movement founded by Shariatullah (1781-1840) of Faridpur who preached a revolutionary doctrine against the British also emerged. Before starting the movement he had gone to Macca at the age of 18 years old and stayed there for about 20 years as a disciple of Shaikh Tahir-as-Sunbal-al-Makki, the head of the Safai sect. He began to propagate his newly framed doctrines while he returned to India in 1802. He declared that India under non-Muslim rule was Darul - Harb (Land of War) where a true Muslim should not live.^{40A} Hence it was the Farz (duties) of the Muslims to oust the British and this justifies the name of the Movement. Dudu Mian, (1819-1859) son of Shariatullah, was much political minded and further organised the movement by dividing Bengal strategically for the expulsion of the British.⁴¹ Dadu Mian became a terror to Zamindars who oppressed the cultivators by introducing reforms among the cultivators.⁴² Meer Nihar Ali Miyan of Chandpur (Barasat) who championed the cause of Hindu-Muslim peasantry and who was in command

of the Fraizi Army had become so fearful that the Government had to send a strong contingent of armed forces in which Titu Miyan was defeated. Many of his men were captured, tried and sent to Andamans. The songs of their patriotic fervour are still well-known in Bengal. After the fall of Titu Miyan, Dadu Miyan during 1840-47 raised an army of 80,000 soldiers and fought against the British at Barasat, Jaisoor, Patna, Malda, Dhaka but could not defeat them.⁴³ Though defeated he roused the people to a higher revolutionary political level by urging them to join the freedom struggle.⁴⁴ He was tried and imprisoned at the Alipore Jail and died in 1859 a few days after his release.⁴⁵ But the movement continued in spite of his death. The evils of the existing societies of Hindus and Muslims led the religious leaders to take an immediate action against these evils which also attracted the attention of the British Government. Thus the first half of the nineteenth century can rightly be called a period of reforms in which many inhuman activities were eradicated and Sati, infanticide and Thaggee were abolished.

It would be better here to discuss the social life in India before we enter into the final phase of the First War of Independence, 1857. Having conquered India, Muslims made it their permanent abode and mutual intercourse

and mutual understanding developed among Hindus and Muslims. Muslim monarches endowed Hindu temples and granted Jagirs to Hindus. Hindu rulers also made such endowments to the places of workship of the Muslims. The Muslim Sultans⁴⁶ visited the temple and Hindus also showed reverence to the tombs of Muslim Saints.⁴⁷ This developed among them the bond of unity and mutual understanding, along with many other, causes that inspired both the communities to reaffirm their loyalty to Bahadur Shah. This led to the catastrophe of the First War of Independence 1857.

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bic, Sanskrit, Hindi, Wrote two books
in Persian, three in Hindi, thirty
two in Bengali, two in Sanskrit; star-
ted an Anglo. Hindu School for impar-
ting English education; in 1805 he
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