CHAPTER- V

REVOLT OF 1857 IN THE MAHALWARI REGION

The Revolt of 1857 also called ‘The Great Indian Rebellion’ broke out on May 10, 1857 at Meerut as a ‘Sepoy Mutiny’ which ended with failure at immediate concern but a successful movement on the basis of its future outcome. The event of 1857 is increasingly and unanimously recognized as one of the major events of the nineteenth century.\(^1\) It considered as a historic landmark in our national evolution which proved to be a turning point in the history of British imperialism and an early anticipation of the saga of anti-colonial resistance. The rebellion showed a great patriotic fervor throughout the countryside which became the fundamental pillar and basis of India’s national liberation movement. Out of 132000 native sepoys of Bengal army, only 8000 remained loyal to the colonial Government of the East India Company.\(^2\) The figure showed the ratio of sepoys’ discontentment which was very high, more than 90 percent, itself displayed that the event was nevertheless a mere mutiny of sipahis or sepoys but more than that. The Revolt of 1857 event, which witnessed a sudden insurrection in larger parts of northern and central India, constitutes a watershed in the history of India as well as England\(^3\) and had been given many names like a sepoy mutiny, or a national revolt or a popular uprising of

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peasants et. Whether the event was a mere mutiny of sepoys, or a national struggle or a peasant revolt or a feudal uprising etc., has been a question of contesting and confronting debate for the historians.

**Outbreak of the Revolt:**

The rebellion triggered out when the resented, annoyed, and discontented native soldiers or sepoys of Bengal army have been denied the instruction and order to utilize the new Enfield Rifles, the bullet of which were prepared through the greasing of pig and cow fat. In the process of loading the new bullet into the rifle, the sepoys were entailed to bite the top crust of that bullet which created a sense of defiling and hurted them sentimentally because most of them belonged to twice-born Hindu and Ashraf Muslims. Touching the fat of cow destroyed the twice-born Hindus’ belief of sacredness and using of the cartridges greased by pig fat made the Muslims’ unclean and polluted spread a natural hatred among both the community. However, the matter of greased cartridges had only done the work of igniter in the explosive but the real ground for the revolt of 1857 have already been prepared by a number of political, economic, socio-religious and administrative factors which were accumulated in the minds of the Indian subjects through the British ill-featured and exploitative economic policies. Such a fierce conflagration and flame of horrid volcano never happened before in the history of British imperialism till that catastrophic incident and occupied a unique position and significance. It markedly

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changed the way and perspective of Indian historiography. This spontaneous heroic occurrence of insurrections or uprisings was unprecedented and unparalleled in several senses in history of mankind.⁶

Though one and half century have already been passed since the Uprising of 1857 but still it is topic of heated debate and interpreted contrastly on several occasions by the historians, either British imperialist, or Indian nationalist leaders on its motives, natures and consequences. The most important as well as contemporary writings on the subject of the revolt are the works of John W. Kaye, Charles Ball, Colonel G.B Malleson, John B. Norton, Henry Mead, Mclead Innes, Martin Gubbins, and R. Alexander Duff, Sir General H. Grant and T. Rice Holmes and many others.⁷ Most of them hold the view that it was primarily and essentially a mutiny of sepoys certainly drifted into the rebellion of the people. The other think-tank of imperialist historians is of the opinion that it was a rebellion and rebellion of the people rather than a mere mutiny of sepoys. Overall, the bulk portion of the Imperialist writings have been prejudiced by the superiority of imperial beliefs, feelings, sentiments and emotions with the combination of racial biasness, blending, spirit and ego which was an obvious, natural and a peculiar phenomenon called ‘The racial imperialist colonial combination of expression’.⁸

Sir John W. Kaye in his book entitled “A History of Sepoys War in India” tried to present the event of 1857 as a mere military mutiny, i.e. a struggle between the

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⁷ Kaushik Chakraborty; *Decolonizing the Revolt of 1857*, Readers Service, Calcutta, 2007, p. 20
government and soldiers, not between the subjects and government, which got some backing from angry and discontented agricultural population and community at the end.\(^9\) All the debates and discussions on the event’s nature ended with two major but contrasting outcomes, viz., first a ‘sepoy mutiny’ and second a ‘war of independence’. Most recently, William Dalrymple applied the term ‘Uprisings’ for the event.

John B. Norton, in his work entitled ‘Topics for Indian Statesmen’, published in 1858, in chapter second, he described the event as by quoting, ‘the outbreak was more a rebellion and rebellion of the people than merely a mutiny of the soldiers’.\(^{10}\) Charles Raikes, a Judge at Agra during the course of 1857 revolt, in his book entitled ‘Notes on the Revolt in North Western Provinces of India’ published in the same year, supported the view of Norton. Vinayak D. Savarkar in his book “The First War of Independence” declared it as a first war of India’s independence fought for swadharma and swaraj. Marxist explanations and interpretations on the nature of 1857 revolt were almost similar and unanimous. All of them tagged it as a feudal uprising. The most interesting and attracting thing about the event is that still no theory or claim about the memorable event either from the imperialist side or from the nationalist interpretation was considered

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exact and accepted without contest and confront.¹¹ No interpretation and opinion is considered to be final, unproblematic and remained forever. It is unnecessary to discuss all the existing theories and views so far held on the subject of 1857 event here.

A sketchy and thorough look on the history of the regime of the English East India company before the coming revolt of 1857, marks that the British expansionist policies, economic exploitation, administrative innovations and their contempt for the Indian cultures, religious traditions, and customs had adversely affected the position of almost all the sections of the Indian society - rulers of Indian states, sepoys, zamindars and talukdars, peasants, traders, artisans, pundits, moulvies etc. all got resented and that resentment of the Indians had found expression in a number of mutinies and insurrections from time to time in different parts of the country like- the mutiny at Vellore in 1806, uprising at Bareilly in 1816, mutiny at Barrakpore in 1824, the Kol insurrection in 1831-32, at Ferozpur in 1842, Bundela rising of 1843-44, the revolt of the rajas of Kangra, Jaswar in 1848, the mutiny of the 22nd infantry in 1849, the mutiny of 66th & 38th native infantry in 1850 & 1852, the Santhal rising in 1855-56 etc. and so the mutinies were not new for the Colonial India but it was the most severe outburst of anger and

discontent accumulated in the hearts of Indians ever since the establishment of the British rule in India\textsuperscript{12}.

It was the first large scale countrywide uprising against British rule in India. It spread like wildfire affected almost all the zones of north, south, East and the West. It was a reaction against the British expansionist zeal and exigency of more and more wealth. Therefore, it clearly demonstrated the great love for freedom and liberation of Indian people. However, it created panic and catastrophe everywhere in the country and both side either rebellious or administrative officials of the government were affected severely. The event was full of patriotic fervor occurred spontaneously against the tyrannical imperial rule termed as a great political earthquake which represented a most serious threat by resented and disgusted Indians to the mighty British Empire of the nineteenth century. It was a combined reaction of Indian people from all the walks of life against the cruel rule of British colonialism.\textsuperscript{13} No military event in the history of mankind had influenced the historiography in such a way as the revolt of 1857 and produced so much literature.

**Causes of the Revolt in the Mahalwari Region:**

Any type of rebellion or insurrection in any locality took place only when the subjects of that particular locality realized and got aware about the concern and policies of government which were not coped with them and against the

\textsuperscript{12} Siba P. Nanda; *History of Modern India (1757-1947)*, Dominant Publishers and Distributors, New Delhi, 2003, pp.184-187

temperament, intention, determination, customs and traditions, social norms and
habits, etiquettes and practices, nature and mental makeup of those people who
turned themselves rebellious. A large number of grievances and happenings of
here and there ignited the minds of people from every section of the society who
were eagerly and desperately waiting for such an occasion to express their
resentment and discontentment.\textsuperscript{14}

Interestingly, most of the centers, cities and regions affected by the outbreak of
the revolt of 1857 coming under the administration of the North-western Provinces
experiencing the Mahalwari mode of land revenue collection.\textsuperscript{15} It was the
Mahalwari operated zone which got affected most seriously and severely by the
event of 1857 and from there the mutiny of sepoys drifted into the rebellion of the
people by the \textit{en masse} support and participation of peasants, talukdars and other
agricultural community. Even the Meerut city, from where the revolt got its
beginning was too a district of North Western Provinces. Almost all the popular
and powerful stall warts of the revolts like Begum Hazrat Mehal of Lucknow,
Rani Jhansi of Bundelkhand, Tantiya Tope of Kanpur, Mahmudullah khan of
Rohilkhand region belong to the Mahalwari region.

All the factors like socio-cultural, religious, political, administrative, economic,
and immediate cause contributed equally to the occurrence of the revolt but in the
North Western Provinces where only the Mahalwari system operated at full scale

\textsuperscript{14} Ashraf, op. cit., p. 107
\textsuperscript{15} Irfan Habib; \textit{The coming of 1857}, in Shireen Moosvi (ed.) \textit{Facets of the Great Revolt 1857},
Tulika Books, New Delhi, 2008, p. 2
before the advent of 1857 event; the economic cause and grievances played a role of greater significance than any other factors. It was the region of the North Western Provinces from where the mass insurrection and rebellion of agricultural community took place in the form of resentment and discontentment which transformed the Sepoy mutiny into the national revolt. Only from here, the revolt of 1857 displayed the character of popular rebellion of civilian population, who were indulged themselves into the event with great zeal and enthusiasm. The revolt of 1857, more or less affected the whole Mahalwari region. The Mahalwari region was the main enlisting zone of sepoys’ recruitment and most of them belonged to the agricultural family of twice born castes.16 The sepoys’ grievances too connected with the economic grievance because his family’s income largely derived from the agricultural activities. They joined the British army only for the sake of society’s status but the high standard of their life maintained only through the income coming from the agricultural productivity. David Washbrook quotes “the issues of beef and pig fat and the threats of forcible conversion to Christianity may have been the sparks to light the fuse, but the powder key of anger and resentment was already deeply and closely packed; in retrospect, the mutiny was an accident which was waiting to happen”.17 The above statement clearly indicates that there were a number of economic and administrative reform policies under the company administration which raised so many concerns and grievances of the

16 Habib, The Coming of 1857, op. cit., p. 2
mass population which concretely prepared the platform for the revolt and the issue of greased cartridges proved only an igniter in the explosion.

As economic gain and optimum exploitation of India’s natural resources and creation of more and more surplus value has been the prime concern and only impetus behind the British foreign imperialism. To achieve and meet their exigencies of more income, they introduced various land revenue settlements one after another in a series of experimentation. The whole administration of land revenue system and management was centered on the notion of the maximum possible extraction of land revenue. They introduced these land settlements with a single motto to generate more and more income so that meet the expenditures of wars and expedition and overcome to the shattered economy.\(^\text{18}\) They needed more income to fulfill their expansionist zeal and desire. The introduction of the Mahalwari system was the last effort in that process.

How the operation of Mahalwari system affected all the agricultural communities, i.e., peasants, landlords and agricultural labourers and contributed to the revolt cause? How its operation caused hatred, resentment, and discontentment among all the agricultural community and class which constituted more than two-third population of then society? Why these ordinary people had taken arms against the world’s mightiest empire? Why the people of Mahalwari region especially peasantry section become so disgusted and taken up arms against the company administration? How and at what level the mechanism of Mahalwari

system became so corrupt and oppressive which impoverished and deteriorated the peasantry gentry and provoked them to participate in the revolt of 1857.

Charles Raikes, an eyewitness of the event held the post of judge at Agra, in his book entitled ‘Notes on the Revolt of 1857 in the North-western Provinces’, has outlined three basic types of disturbances happened during the event of 1857 which took the form of a rebellion or revolt:19

i. By general mutiny in the native army.

ii. By the rapid violence and rapacity of the Gujarrs, Mewatis and some other clans, disposed in the best times to predatory habits.

iii. By the attempts of certain Quasi-royal pensioners and landholders to revive their lost ascendency.

He observed that the working system of then civil courts and hard pressed way of land revenue collection, often more than the government rental demand, proved to be a big reason for the outburst of 1857.20 Overall, Raikes had tried to present the event as a mutiny of the native army has got some support from civilian population at the latter stage in the form of violence and rapacity.

The region of the North Western Provinces together with the central provinces and the Punjab (i.e. British Punjab) formed the Mahalwari region, which possessed the territory of 30% areas of the total British India.21 Till 1857, the implementation

20 Ibid., pp. 6-7
of the Mahalwari system more or less confined to the region of the North Western Provinces. In other two provinces were the Central and Punjab where the full fledged Mahalwari settlement was implemented only after the event of 1857. There were exceptions of two or three districts in the central provinces, i.e. Nimar, Damoh, Sagar and Narbada territories, where the Mahalwari system implemented under the regulation IX of 1833.

The revolt of 1857 was itself a major consequence of existing land revenue system i.e., Mahalwari system operated in North-western provinces. Before the coming of 1857 event, the whole administration and control of the North Western Provinces mainly depended upon two primary things, viz. civil and criminal jurisdictions and the revenue management.\footnote{Raikes, op. cit., p. 184} Obviously, the land revenue management and administration of the province affected the whole pattern and set-up of the society because agriculture almost involved more than 90% population and only the source of income for the people. By the year 1857, the administration of the North Western Provinces was comprised of thirty one (31) districts, divided into eight (8) divisional heads including Oudh contained the population, in round figure, of thirty million..\footnote{Ibid., p. 182} Eight divisional heads of the province were the following:-

1. Upper Doab: Saharanpur, Muzaffarnagar, Meerut, Bulandshahr and Aligarh.
4. Rohilkhand: Moradabad, Pilibhit, Bijnaur, Bareilly, Badaun and Shahjehanpur.
6. Gorakhpur: covered the region of Trans-Ghaghra districts of Basti, Gorakhpur, and Azamgarh.

(Source: Duthrie, J.P and Fuller, J.P; Report on the Field and Garden crops of the North-western Provinces and Oudh, Roorkee, Part-III.).

Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, Sadar Amin at Bijnaur, a contemporary official of company government associated with the revenue collecting management, in *Asbab-i Baghawat-i-Hind*, declared that the administrative policies of the colonial government was the sole cause of people’s resentment. However, at the same time, he states that “the fact is that for a long time many grievances rankling in the hearts of people, in course of time a vast store of explosive materials had been accumulated, arranged and collected, it wanted but the application of a match to light it and that match was applied by the mutinous army of Bengal”. He uses the word ‘many grievances’ in the statement where he must refer economic grievances as an important one among all the grievances which was the end result of colonial agrarian policies implemented under new land settlement. The gentry of peasantry

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forced to live in deteriorated and impoverished condition led the situation where such type of event i.e. the revolt of 1857 became inevitable and obvious.\(^\text{25}\) He states about the event to Sir J. Kaye in a letter, dated 14 Dec. 1864 and said that mutiny or rebellion in the North Western Provinces assumed three forms of reaction.\(^\text{26}\)

i. Robbers and dacoits not only attacked passersby but also plundered villages and towns.

ii. Some of the minor chiefs whose families had fallen into decay endeavoured the resurrection of the ancestral powers. This sort of mutiny occurred at four places only i.e. Kanpur, Bareilly, Bijnaur and Farrukhabad where they tried to restore themselves in power and take the mutiny as staircase for success.

iii. Some of the lower class people entered the service of such rebellious chiefs.

Sir Syed outlined the three above mentioned forms of Baghawat in the North Western Provinces and Oudh. Almost every part and every districts of the province got affected by the revolt and Ghadar of Sipahis accompanied by the civilian population which certainly assumed the character of people’s rebellion.

Karl Marx already declared it a peasant struggle against the tyrannical British rule happened due to the exploitative economic policies.\(^\text{27}\) According to Marx, the

\(^{25}\) Ibid, pp. 3-4.


motto of revenue collection of any government from the subjects lies in the welfare of that particular locality or country. The British rule in India never justified the objective of their land revenue realization and collection honestly because that amount not invested for the public works development programme. Marx said that British procedure of land revenue collection assumed the form of extortion. He asserts that the complete ignorance of public welfare programme costs dear to the British Empire resulted into the outburst of 1857. When the event declared as the peasant war then the operation land revenue settlement must be a matter of concern and attention to deal.

There were a series of British records in the form of administrative reports and the narratives of the events by British military officers itself provide large materials to study the economic background of the event by reflecting the illustration of the course of rebellion district by district, the part played by the peasants, cultivation, wage earners, and other rural elements in the rebellion.28

Before the full fledge implementation of the Mahalwari system of land revenue, summary settlement was in operation in that particular region. The land revenue assessment under the summary settlement already burdened the peasantry section. However, the land revenue assessment procedure even not improved satisfactorily after the implementation of Mahalwari system. In the pre mutiny period, the assessment of land revenue was totally based on the criterion of net produce. But that criterion too not

applied properly. Even under the Mahalwari operation, Land revenue assessment was enhanced with every new revision in the region and promises made to landholders were dropped by denying them the term of permanent settlement. Denying of the permanent settlement discontent talukdars and zamindars of the region on one hand and the continuous enhancement in the land revenue made angry to the peasantry yeomanry on the other. The discontentment landlords and the exploited peasantry in combined showed their resentment with the policies of government. These smaller chiefs and landlords resented by loss of prestige, enhanced revenue demand and deprivation or reduction of their estates and broke out into open revolt against the British administration whenever they could do so with impunity. The classes who possessed proprietary rights in the North Western Provinces were the zamindars, the taluqdars, and the rent-free tenure holders all entered into the zone of discomfort and stood against the company government. The exhorbitant assessment was realized by exceedingly harsh methods. The results may be described in the words of John W. Kaye, “under the system which we introduced, men who had been proprietors of vast tracts of country as far as the eye could reach shriveled into tenants of mud huts and possessors only of a view of cooking pots”.

No doubt the land revenue settlement introduced by the British Colonial government does it greatest credit and must given due acclaim and accolade. But, at the same juncture, it falls heavily on the peasantry and other lower

29 Bakshi, op. cit., p.47  
31 Ashraf, op. cit., p. 136
agricultural community in comparison to the Mughal India where land revenue was largely collected in kind not cash. During the entire course of Mughal rule, the central authority of the empire should be the real sufferer in case of low agricultural productivity happened due to natural calamities. Peasants and other cultivating communities were kept away from all those losses of productivity in agriculture. In real sense, they never got affected seriously and severely by those losses and remained peaceful with their all hearths and homes even during the time famines and floods. They consider the loss occurred due to nature’s interference. Peasants remained peaceful also because the collection procedure of land revenue was not as harsh as it after the establishment of British Empire.\footnote{Khan, op. cit., pp. 27-28}

The Mahalwari system was the last land settlement experimented by the company government considered as an obvious improvement over the previous settlements because it possessed the features of both zamindari and the ryotwari settlement\footnote{S. C. Gupta, *Agrarian Relations And Early British Rule in India: A Case Study of Ceded and Conquered Provinces, (Uttar Pradesh), 1801-1833*, Asia Publishing House, New Delhi, 1963, p. 156} They did not pick up those features which were beneficial to the agricultural class and raised the productivity of the peasants. They picked up only those features of both the settlement which raised their income and fill their treasury. The whole and sole emphasis of any land revenue settlement under the British was the maximization of land revenue collection with little effort.\footnote{Chakraborty, op. cit., p. 66} And they never showed any committed concern about the welfare of agricultural
community and productivity. They were not even bothered about the degradation of soils fertility, prosperity and potentiality. They never thought about the condition of the peasants and not give any relaxation and collected the revenue amount even during the bad times of famine and floods.\footnote{Bipin Chandra, \textit{India’s struggle for Independence 1857-1947}, Penguin Books, New Delhi, 1988, p. 36} These happenings naturally increased the burden of the peasantry and brought disaffection against the Government.

There was not a uniform method of land revenue assessment for the whole region of the North Western provinces. Not having a uniform method of assessment obviously created too many hurdles and obstacles in the procedure of land revenue collection and realization.\footnote{B. H Baden Powell, \textit{Land System of British India}, Vol. II, Oxford at Clarendon Press, London, 1892. pp. 261-266} Naturally, it becomes a source of exploitation and corrupt practices in the mechanism of land revenue collection. Now, the settlement officers with the corrupt native officials like Lombardars, Patwaris, and Qanungoes, etc. set their own criteria of land revenue assessment and realization by which they often used to raise the magnitude of rent and collected it at their will when they felt need. According to C. Bayley, every district of the North Western Provinces had suffered wholly or partially from over-assessment.\footnote{C. J. Connell, \textit{Land Revenue Policy: Northern India}, Neeraj Publishing House, Delhi, 1983, p. 39} Already deplorable condition of peasantry became unbearable with the load of double burden. Most of the time, the collected amount of land revenue appeared to be higher than the actual rental demand fixed by the government. It
jeopardized the agricultural productivity and soils fertility in the region of the North Western Provinces which forced the peasants into a situation of tenants-at-will and even to beggary condition.

In all Mahalwari areas, the magnitude of rent had always been increased by the settlement officers on the pretentious provision of revision. Everywhere in the region, the land revenue was revised periodically. By the provision of revision, most of the time, the amount of government demand had been raised at every revision, which was fixed on rental value basis (that means rent or land revenue should be based on ‘Net- Produce’ criterion and adjusted with the current price). Generally, the revision period of the settlement have been fixed for the 20 or 30 years span but often it happened within the decade, that is, the period of 10 years\(^38\). At some occasion, revision of the settlement took place only after the period of 5 years or within 5 years or even in a span of 3 years time like the revision of Summary settlement\(^39\). The short-term revisions of the settlement become a regular practice in all Mahalwari regions by 1840s which increased the burden and amount of pressure of peasantry class. It proved too harmful for the peasantry and petty holders of the region and doubled their burden because short-term revision increased the rent in real terms. Peasants suffered most greatly because at each and every revision the amount of rent falls heavily on them which increased the amount of arrears and naturally raised the agricultural and rural


\(^{39}\) Ibid.,
indebtedness. Though, the magnitude of rent seems to be decreased at every new revision in terms of percentage but increased the government demand in real terms always would be bigger than the previous amount collected at rental value basis.

The operation of Mahalwari system brought the capitalistic mode of production in agriculture through the creation of Private property in land and the encouragement given to grow more and more commercial crops.\textsuperscript{40} Now, peasants were instructed to grow commercial crops like Indigo, Poppy, Cotton, and sugarcane etc. to feed the need of British industries. The British Empire of East India Company developed the capitalistic form of property relations because they created an environment, though forcefully, where agricultural production rose for the concern of market benefit only. The company rule of British colonial government develops a material based relationship in Indian society which established on quasi-bourgeoisies sense of ownership. The agricultural productivity treated as commodities and produced for market. The creation of surplus value was the direct aim and determining motive of production now.

The Commercialization of agriculture was another important consequence of new land revenue implementation. As commercialization started in Indian agriculture, the prices of food grains increased obviously because it brought a certain scarcity of food items due to extension of commercial cultivation. The price of food grains increased also due to export of rice by the coming of 19th

\textsuperscript{40} Utsa Patnaik: \textit{Agrarian Relation and Accumulation: The ‘Mode of Production’ Debate in India}, Oxford University Press for Samiksha Trust, New Delhi, 1990, pp. 191-194
century. Famines also contributed greatly in the shortage of food grains. The shortage of food grains leads to the situation of starvation.\textsuperscript{41} This type of situation naturally created discontentment among all the section of the society.

The tax collecting agent of native officials like Tehsildars, Lambardars, Muqaddams, and Patel etc. were appointed on the salaries of incentives basis. The salaries of these tax collecting agents were never be constant but varied with the increase or decrease in incentives according to their fixed percentage\textsuperscript{42}. This incentive based salary became a source of all corruption and malpractices. All the officers tried to collect maximum possible land revenue for the concern of their handsome salary. Small landholders were the main suffers from these malpractices. The malpractices of the settlement officers hand in glove with the corrupt native officials of collecting machinery sharply increased the amount of land revenue doubled the burden of peasantry naturally caused hatred, disaffection, and discontentment. These malpractices and corruption together disastrously affected all the agricultural community but peasantry at extreme extent. In that process, these collecting agents have gone through the exploitation and oppression of peasantry gentry. The burden of peasantry had gone upto unbearable condition. Naturally, peasants and other cultivating community got resented against the colonial administration of East India Company because they felt that all the misery came due to their exploitative and oppressive policies.

\textsuperscript{41} Chakraborty, op. cit., pp. 68-74
\textsuperscript{42} Gupta, op. cit., p. 47
All the above factors in combined given birth to the malpractices, corruption, oppressiveness, harshness in the procedure of land revenue collection. Even they adopted the torturous and coercive path of land revenue collection. The mechanism of land revenue collection became the source of all evils in all Mahalwari regions due to their corrupt settlement officers. It became a common practice among all the tax collecting agents. Sometimes, the collection procedure was so torturous that it assumed the path of violence and punishment. W.H Sleeman, in his travelogue *Journey through the Oudh*, mentioned about the cases of tortures and violence prevailed in the land revenue collecting machinery of the North Western Provinces & Oudh. Karl Marx, noted communist, given a vivid pictures of the cases of tortures and coerciveness in one of his series of articles on ‘Colonialism’ entitled ‘Investigation of tortures in India’. How commonly the cases of coerciveness were prevailed could be understood by the following statement of B. Chandra that ‘only in the Rohilkhand region of the North Western provinces, there were as many as 237,388 cases of coercive collection appeared only during the eight years span of time i.e., 1848-56. There were various administrative and settlement reports of districts level which was full of information mentioned about the cases of tortures and coerciveness throughout the region of the North Western provinces. Most of the time, these cases of tortures

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43 Chandra, op. cit., p. 36  
45 Chandra, op. cit., p. 36
and coerce became the means of harassments and punishments given with floggings and rapes of peasant’s female members done by the English settlement officers but often by the big zamindars and taluqdarś.46 When the settlement officers collected the heavy amount of revenue from the peasants then he got congratulated and appreciated for their zeal, ability, and indefatigable labour.

The civil rebellion had a broad social base there, embracing all section of society and that resulted in popular uprisings. The Bengal sipahis from Oudh always filed petition about the hardship in revenue collection to the government. The working of different land tenures at different places was also a cause of corruption and malpractices. For example in Bhaichara tenure the rights and interest in of each co sharers are determined not only by his ancestral shares but by custom or possession. Cornel James Connell in his book land revenue policy of northern India quotes that the proper exercise of powers entrusted to settlement officers and collectors hangs the future welfare of all owners of land. He highlighted that the manner in which our land revenue assessment and collection of land tax ingeniously affected the interest both of land owners and cultivators.47 He argued that the actions and government interferences in the process of revenue collection in Mahalwari areas may fairly held the responsible for the disastrous result. He further quotes that “the agricultural community should have restore to violence could be put down to motives of plunder and their apex on government

47 Connell, op. cit., pp. 1-2
officers and burring of records was crowning result of determination to have no obligations”.

Pc Joshi argued that every class of Indian society suffered at its new spoliators hands. The landlords where disposed and peasant rendered paupers, the merchant bourgeoisie of India liquidated as an independent class and artisan and craftsman deprived of their productive professions. Such unprecedented destruction of whole economic order produced a great social upheaval and that was the national uprising in 1857. From Awadh alone a petition signed by 80000 people was sent to queen Victoria of England in 1856 requesting her to check the unbridled aggression, violence, and maladministration of east India Company in India. Unfortunately the queen did practically nothing to check the flow of blood in this country.

It was the Mahalwari region of the North-Western Provinces from where almost unbridled urge for land revenue maximization could be attained. Most often, the collected amount of rent would be far enough than the actual rent due to corrupt settlement officers and lambardars. In all Mahalwari areas, more or less, the basis of corrupt and malpractices were the following:-

(1) Pretentious provision of revision.

(2) No Uniform and Universal Method of Assessment in whole region.

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49 Srivastava, op. cit., Forward Section, p. x
(3) Government demand should be paid in rental value determine with Net Produce criterion.

(4) Appointment of native officials on the salary of incentive basis.

(5) Rent demanded and accepted in cash only.

**Peasants and Taluqdars Responses:**

Peasantry became the targeted community of both the British colonial government as well as of intermediary groups of collecting agent’s especially by urban merchants of bania or moneylenders communities. They were targeted by the corrupt settlement officers and the greedy native officials like lambardars, Tahsildars, Patwaris, Qanungoes and Patels etc. They became corrupt when they tried to meet the set-target of government demand by all possible means of hooks and crooks. They targeted peasantry for the concern of more incentives to raise their salaries. In that process, exploitation of peasants became obvious and inevitable. Peasants were the worst sufferers due to the operation of Mahalwari system because they were the real losers of the wealth and property.

Under the British colonial government, the land revenue tax should strictly be demanded in cash. Naturally, it created problems to peasantry class due to harsh and coarse method collection. Both the cultivators as well as zamindars suffered severely. The cultivators were forced to a situation where they did not have any

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50 Connell, op. cit., p. 30
51 Ashraf, op. cit., p. 137
means to cultivate or harvest the field or soils.\textsuperscript{52} Rottenly, the officers and officials of land revenue collecting management got congratulated for the collection of bigger amount of land revenue. When the settled officers collected the targeted amount of land revenue, the company administration of colonial government got delighted by the performance of those officers and congratulated them for their good show of responsibility, zeal, ability and extra labour.\textsuperscript{53} Finally, they forced into the situation of tenants-at-will. The regular increment in rental demand of government with the amount of revenue arrears, and burdens of loans and interests raised the deteriorated conditions of peasants and forced them into beggary which ultimately angered the bulk section of country’s population. Many rent paying zamindars and Taluqdars, who possessed lot of means and resources, cultivation engagements, and also had strong financial backing lost all the ground of their wealth, became bankrupt and forced into a condition of stricken poverty.\textsuperscript{54} Zamindars were got discontented against the British because they lost all the illegal privileges what they enjoyed under the Mughal. The cultivators as well as holding communities of taluqdars and zamindars engulfed into poverty under the British rule.

Peasants were forcefully driven into the situation of starvation. For example, Mr. Hooper, the collector of Banda wrote that “a very large number of lower classes of people clearly demonstrated by their people that either they were

\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., p. 138  
\textsuperscript{53} Chandra, op. cit., p. 36  
\textsuperscript{54} Ashraf; op. cit., p. 138
habitually half starved or had been in their earlier years exposed to trials, severities of famines. Mr. Harrington, the commissioner of Fyzabad maintained that the assertion that the greater proportion of the population of India suffer from daily insufficient of food was perfectly true as regards varying but always considerable part of the year in the greater part of India. F. B Gubbins, the commissioner of Banaras, in a report asserts that, “the price of grain as high as during the last week and the misery of the lower classes is rather increasing than otherwise”.

The regional based studies and writings on the subject by noted historian like Eric Stokes, Irfan Habib, R.Mukherjee, Tapti Roy and some others declared the revolt of 1857 as the popular resistance of peasants definitely demonstrate how the operation of Mahalwari system in the region of north-western provinces was responsible for the outbreak of such catastrophic incident. They all tried to display the popular character of the movement which became the basis of mass support all over the country by the large scale participation of agricultural population. For Example, Rudrankshe Mukherjee in his book entitled ‘Awadh in Revolt, 1857-58: A Study of Popular Resistance’ has described the event as a people’s resistance in peasant uniform which represented not a revolutionary challenge, but a popular rejection of an alien order. Tapti Roy, in her brilliant paper entitled ‘The Politics of Popular Uprising: Bundelkhand in 1857’ declared the event as a multi-layered and multi-coloured resistance which was the product of a particular conjecture in

55 Settlement Report, Faizabad, Arthur Harrington, p. 32 in Dufferrin Report, 1887-88
time and which in turn created local responses to the situation.\textsuperscript{57} Ramesh C. Majumdar, in his book entitled “Sepoy Mutiny and the Revolt of 1857” termed the event as a dying groans of the absolute aristocracy and centrifugal feudalism of the medieval age.\textsuperscript{58} They all placed it as a popular resistance of peasants against the British imperialism and parasitic nature of indigenous landlordism. Most of the times, the event has been described as a counter-revolution of feudal chiefs.

Prof. Irfan Habib, a leading Marxist historian, tried to depict the event of 1857 as a major consequence of the British agrarian policies and land litigation laws. In his paper entitled ‘The coming of 1857’ he states that the land transfers from peasantry section to money lending class in bulk was one of the important cause of hatred among all the agricultural community which outburst in the revolt of 1857. He further states that under the operation of Mahalwari system the British confiscated even the maafi or revenue-free land created disgust among the petty peasants who took up arms against the mighty British Empire. The peasants reacted against the extra burden of land revenue amount combined with harsh collection procedure.

Shashi Bhushan Chaudhari placed the revolt as a “multi-layered political action both a mutiny of the sepoys and the rebellion or rising of the people”. He argues that agrarian distress, over assessment of land revenue and the evil effects of the resumptions of lakhiraj or maafi land all in combined created a wave of discontentment.

\textsuperscript{57} Ibid.,
\textsuperscript{58} Gupta, Rebellion in Little Known District of the Empire, op. cit., p. 114
among all the agrarian community.\textsuperscript{59} The Gujarrs, Jats and the Mewatis, whose prime occupation was agriculture, all displayed a brave courage of fighting against the British in the Mahalwari regions because they were the real sufferer there from the operation of new land revenue system.

The situation of Agrarian Depression from 1828 to early 1840s was one of the important factors for the outbreak of the 1857 revolt about which Asia Siddiqui mentioned in her work entitled “Agrarian changes in Northern Indian State, 1819-1833”. She correlates this situation of Depression with the shortage of food grains. She said that how commercialization of agriculture with regular occurrences of large scale famines during the decades of 1820s and 1830s created the situation of Agrarian Depression almost affected the whole region of the North Western Provinces.\textsuperscript{60} This situation increased the prices of food grains and multiplied the misery of peasants and other cultivating communities of the society. Obviously, it brought disaffection and discontentment against the British administration.

By the end of 1856, there were a number of shortcomings and limitations arose in the administrative setup of the East India Company which together penetrated almost every aspect of the Indian situation and condition\textsuperscript{61}. There were a number of issues and problems emerge in the existing social structure due to the British land litigation laws and agrarian policies. The large geographic region of North Western Provinces affected by the revolt possessed the population of nearly

\textsuperscript{59} Chaudhari, Civil Rebellion, op. cit., p. 13  
\textsuperscript{60} Asia Siddiqui; Agrarian Change in Northern State , U.P (1819-1833), Oxford at Clarendon Press, 1973, pp. 168-178  
\textsuperscript{61} Ashraf, J; op. cit, p. 119
a quarter of the total contemporary population itself displayed its nationalistic importance and character, what Disraeli and Marx designated to the event with national argument\textsuperscript{62}. The opportunity to express their feelings have been provided by the sepoys of Bengal British army when they rose into revolt on the issue of the use of greased cartridges, the people of India, who largely associated themselves with the agricultural activities and occupation were full of common grievances and problems, had welcomed the event with open arms and gave all the back-up to the rebellious native soldiers. The innovation of railways and better road facilities proved to be an important source of people’s discontentment. The upper caste Hindu realized that their caste dignity and status got polluted by traveling in trains with the shudras and non-vegetarian people like Christians Muslims.

The people of India always possessed great love, affection and respect to their ancestral traditions and customs and in no circumstances they were ready to drop-out those prevailing traditions and customs by the sudden intervention of the company administration. When the colonial state of the company government started modernization process of Indian social structure they wiped-out all the indigenous traditions, customs and beliefs which were non-Christian and tried to infiltrate the exiting Indian society.\textsuperscript{63} In that process, they began the marginalization and deprivation of indigenous population from their local

\textsuperscript{62} Moosvi, op. cit., Introduction, p. xi
\textsuperscript{63} Chakraborty, op. cit., p.13
traditions and customs which was a part of long based culture and religion on a regular and systematic basis.

In the year 1857, the indigenous population was not allowed to formulate any secular programme against the colonial state of government.\(^6^4\) This type of situation naturally made such an event as an inevitable to happen and worked fuel into the fire in already tensed subjects due to many economic, political and socio-religious grievances have been created by the British ill-featured economic and administrative policies towards India and when the event occurred, the whole country within a short span of time came under the flames, fires and conflagration of the revolt of 1857.

The devastating consequences of the British land revenue system had been admitted by the British historians too. For example, Sir J. Strachey, in his book entitled “India, its, administration and Progress”, has said “our policy has been to encourage the growth of private property in land….former governments hardly recognized the existence of such property”\(^6^5\)

“It can hardly be doubted that their indebtedness is greater now than it was before the establishment of our government because the right of private property in land has been virtually almost creates by us. When there was practically no such right, there was comparatively speaking, no credit; there was no adequate security

\(^6^4\) Chakraborty, op. cit., p. 12-14
that a landlord desirous of borrowing could offer, and there was, therefore, less indebtedness.”

“If landlord does not pay at the district treasury on the appointed date, no questions are asked….The estate is put to public auction”.  

Sir Charles Metcalfe, Lt. Governor of Western Provinces, in his minute of seventh November 1830 already quotes that “I believe that the happiness of the bulk inhabitants of the Western Provinces depends more on revenue settlement than any other things whatever.” Fredrick shore, son of the john shore, served in the revenue and judicial departments of the Western Province, already alarmed the company government when he published his collected articles of Indian gazette, Calcutta daily papers, in a book from under the title ‘notes on Indian affairs”. “Throughout the book he repeatedly pointed out that even though outwardly everything was calm, the situation was charged with dynamite and it needed only a spark to start a violent conflagration”.

Ultimately this simmering discontent broke out in the outburst of 1857. In 1834, a contemporary English poet, who was a company civil servant too confessed about the shortcomings of the Company administration;

“We live among them like a walking blight
Our very name the watch ward of affright

No sympathy, No pity, No remorse

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66 P. C. Joshi, 1857 in Our History, pp.142-142 in Joshi (ed.) Rebellion 1857, op. cit.,
67 Metcalfe’s view on the operation of land revenue settlement, cf., James Connell; Land Revenue policy: Northern India, p. 2
68 S. N Sen; Eighteen Fifteen Seven, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, Calcutta, 1957, p. xx, Forward Section
Our end is profit and our means are force”69

The poet fell that such inhuman attitude of the British was dangerous and pregnant with horrible consequences which resulted in the revolt of 1857.

But James Thomason, lieutenant governor of the North Western Province in 1840s believed that the existence of big nobles and landlords could be a source of danger to the company. Therefore, he wanted a land settlement which should eliminate the power of big zamindars and taluqdars, and establish a direct contact with the peasants.70 The implication of Mahalwari system was an attempt to disposes those taluqdars and zamindars from their ancestral land. It proved harmful in the long run and created a widespread discontentment among these dispossessed taluqdars and zamindars who still maintain their influential powers to control the existing agrarian structure of Indian society.

The remarks of Mr. Crosthwaite in his essays entitled ‘A Land policy for the northern India’ published in Calcutta review, 1874 clearly demonstrate the bad impact of the operation of the Mahalwari system. He says “if the pressure of our revenue system derives the landowners into debt, it must be from one of the two causes; either the assessment is immoderately high or our system of revenue collection must be bad. There was no third cause that can be attributed”.71 Regarding the land assessment procedure, he notes that it was continuously on an

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69 View of Contemporary Poet who was also a company civil servant, cf. Srivastava, op. cit., p. xi, Forward Section
70 cf. Sen, op. cit., p. xx, Forward Section
71 J. Crosthwaite, ‘A Land policy for the northern India’ published in Calcutta review,, 1874, No- CXII
increasing tendency after 1830s in an effective sense throughout the North Western Provinces.

Karl Marx observed that the operation of British Land revenue system in India had done a great havoc to Indian peasantry and other agricultural community. He described that pitiable situation in the following words:-

‘If any nation’s history, then it is the history of the English management of India which is a string of unsuccessful and really absurd (and in practice, infamous) experiments in economics; In Bengal, they created a caricature English Landed-property on large scale; in the south-east India a caricature of small allotment of property; in the north-west, they transformed to the utmost of their ability the Indian commune with common ownership of the soil into a caricature of itself’.72

Eric Stokes noted economic historian of utilitarian schools of philosophy, declared the revolt of 1857 as ‘a peasant war against the indigenous landlordism and foreign imperialism’. He described it ‘a post-pacification revolt where mass of the people backed up by the peasant community. In his book entitled “the Peasant and the Raj” he noted that, in the north western provinces British found themselves up against the hard fact that even when they had a side over lord claims and settled directly for the land revenue with village land holders, they were still dealing with classes priding themselves on the martial or secret status

72 Karl Marx; Capital, Vol- III, p. 392ff
and disdaining to engage directly in agriculture.\textsuperscript{73} Further, in his brilliant essays on the economic growth and development of the upper and central Doab region as a case study concluded a valid and established reason that “the rural political affiliations in hour of economic crisis in British India have a direct connectivity to the British land revenue policies which impacted the whole pattern of land holding distribution.\textsuperscript{74} He further argues that the outbreak of 1857 revolt was the reaction of general discontentment among the peasants yeomanry against the alteration of socio-economic structure of Indian society from mutual to material base under the operation of Mahalwari system.

T. Rice Holmes, in his book ‘\textit{History of the Indian Mutiny}’, and produced 5\textsuperscript{th} and, observed that civilian participation in the rebellion was a secondary phenomenon, the chance upsurge of unruly and discontent, just as a general mutiny of the London police would be followed by a violent outburst of crime on the part of the London thieves and roughs so the taluqadors, the disposed the landlords, the Gujars and the budmashes or criminals of India welcomed the first signal of governmental weakness as a signal for gratifying their selfish instincts.\textsuperscript{75}

\textit{Zamindars} and \textit{taluqdars} combined with other agricultural forces always played key role in the ground level administration and considered as the most

\textsuperscript{73} Eric Stokes, \textit{The Peasant Armed: The Indian Revolt of 1857}, Oxford at Clarendon Press, 1986, p. 10
\textsuperscript{74} cf. Sen, op. cit., p. vi, Introduction Section
important pillar of administration during the entire course of Mughal rule.\textsuperscript{76} They placed only next to the princely class (royal elites) in Indian society and enjoying key importance in administrative set up before the advent of British. They were the aristocratic elite and great estate holders’ who controlled the land naturally dominated the existing rural society. They played a critical role as revenue collecting intermediaries or brokers of power between the state and village. In fact, zamindars and taluqdar were the tool of immense importance which maintained the genesis and legacy of the institution of village community and so village economical basis on the notion of mutual benefit.\textsuperscript{77}

How the implementation of new land revenue system alienated all classes and section of Indian society in whole countryside. Surendra Nath Sen in his book entitled ‘Eighteen Fifty Seven’ arguably described about that aspects. He states about agrarian change as:-

“\textit{But the zamindars and taluqdar were not the only person to lose their ancestral occupations. The new law of sale caused equal hardship to the peasant as well. He was in chronic debt and the baniya who was village moneylender was not an honest creditor. He practiced usury as a rule and did not always shrink from fraud. Under the protection of their feudal lords the illiterate debtors were previously safe. But the new law permitted the sale of land for unpaid debts and with land, the peasant also lost his occupation. The dispossessed peasant and the dispossessed

\textsuperscript{76} Bakshi; op. cit., p. 72 \\
\textsuperscript{77} Bakshi, op. cit., p. 71-73
landlord were united not only by the bond of common adversity but also by feudal
ties of protection and loyalty. The zamindars lived in his village and, although the
peasant often suffered at his hands, he could nonetheless count upon his master’s
support and sympathy in times of difficulty. The baniya however, was an outsider.
He purchased the proprietary rights and the peasants holding for the sake of the
financial gains likely to accrue. Between him and the peasant, therefore, no
sentimental tie of affection or loyalty was ordinarily possible. And the peasant still
felt bound to stand by his former feudal chief."  

Though, the land transfer or change of hands in lands happened during the
Mughal India but on the basis of mutual consent and wishes consent. The transfer
of land rights was not appeared for the first time in India but its character and
nature got a drastic shift by the establishment of British rule. It took place on
greater scale and became a common practice. For example, in Aligarh only, which
was the worst hit districts by the operation of Mahalwari system, more than 50%
of the holdings changed their hands between 1834 to 1858.  

Now, the holdings of land have been transformed from the ancestral based traditional zamindars and
taluqdars to new emerging class of urban-merchant or moneylender class. The
moneylenders famous with many names like Baniya, Sahukars, Mahajans and Seths. The British government of East India Company gave greater importance to

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78 Sen, op. cit., pp.34-35
79 Habib, The coming of 1857, in Moosvi (ed.), op. cit., p. 4
80 Ibid
urban merchants of Baniya community in the agrarian set-up of Indian society. They became the master and dominating class of agrarian society.

Under the colonial empire, land transfers became possible only through the action of selling, purchasing and mortgaging which was not the case during the Mughal rule. The sale of lands and confiscation of lands due to the big amount of land revenue arrears became the part of daily routine. In British India, most of the land transfer cases happened due to the increased amount of land revenue arrears and agricultural indebtedness.\(^81\) Loans and interests under duress was one of the factors which increased the cases of land transfers.

Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, a contemporary statesman, who had a whole life association with the land revenue management under the British government at Bijnor, given a very good description about the cases of lands transfers happened during the British rule. He quotes in Asbab-\(_i\) -Baghawat-\(_i\) -Hind;\(^82\)

“Under former rulers, in old times, the system of buying and selling rights in landed property, or mortgage, and of transfer by gift, undoubtedly prevailed. But there was little of it, and what little there was, was due to the consent and wishes of the parties concerned…..

“In the first days of British rule, sales of landed property were so numerous that the whole country turned upside down……

\(^{81}\) Metcalf; op. cit., p. 150
\(^{82}\) Ahmad Khan, op. cit., pp. 27-30
“So too the practice of sale in satisfaction of debt has been most objectionable. Bakers and moneylenders have availed themselves of it to advance money to landlords, resorting to every kind of trickery and roguery, to rob them of their property. They have instituted suits without end in the civil courts, some fraudulent, some correct enough. The consequences has been that they have very generally ousted the old landlords and insinuated themselves into their properties. Troubles of this kind have ruined landlords throughout the length and breadth of the land…….

“The system of revenue settlement introduced by the English Government does it the greatest credit. But, it is heavy compared with former settlements. Formerly the revenue was realized by sharing the actual crops with the cultivator….The assessment imposed by the English government have been fixed without any regard to various contingencies”.

This statement of Sir Syed clearly shows that how the establishment of British Empire brought a drastic change in the nature of land transfer which completely altered the agrarian set up of Indian society.

The proclamation of Bahadur Shah and Feroz shah also described the importance of land transfers and land confiscation carried out by the company administration. Though the proclamation of these two rulers of India highlighted only the grievances of talukdars and zamindars not of peasants but raised the
people on economic concern. Meanwhile, the company administration of British government did not able to develop a proper pattern of land transfers. They transferred the land in topsy-turvy way. The litigation process of holding rights became expensive and tuff. The immense value of stamps and other unnecessary expenses of the civil courts which were pregnant with all sorts of crooked dealings and the practice of allowing a case to hang on for several years definitely impoverish the litigants. This type of extravagance tensions the zamindars and litigants both.

The traditional class of landed gentry i.e. zamindars and taluqdars were suffered most and extremely dissatisfied with the changing nature of land transfers. The operation of Mahalwari system greatly affected the pattern of land transfers. They did not want to fed-up their traditional zamindari rights and when they lost their ancestral rights over the land; they felt that they lost their kingdom. Often, loss happened due to non-payment of rent. The company government ignored the existing reality and did nothing to stop these types of land transfers. These happenings given birth to the hundreds of new problems of a different kind which dismantled the whole population of British India.

The public sale of land rights for arrears of revenue or the execution of decreased for debt which not merely uprooted the ordinary villagers from there

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84 Ibid., p.144
85 Ashraf, op. cit., p. 134
small holdings even destroy the gentry of the country. The increased cases of land sale and its confiscation definitely resented both the community of zamindari as well as taluqdari of agricultural population. The cases of confiscation especially of Maafi and Inam lands resented the petty taluqdar who were generally belonged to the theologian section of society which alarmed the situation. For example, in Azamgarh the number of sales rose from 45 in 1837 to 200 five years later. In Gorakhpur sales jumped from 6 to 186 between 1837 and 1840.

Though the revolt spread like a wild fire throughout the country but its magnitude of resistance in the Mahalwari zone was much alarming than the other parts of British India territory. The participation of bulk population associated with agriculture sector particularly from this region characterized the event as a popular war or resistance of people. The mass participation of the population from the North Western Provinces turned the ‘limited war’ of the 18th century into the ‘people’s war’ of the mid-nineteenth century. The participation of the peasants in the revolt from the North Western Provinces at a larger scale characterized it as a people’s war. According to Stig Forster and Jorg Nagler, people’s war was conducted by the peoples armies and made clear distinction between the armed forces and the civilians. In such type of a war, citizens become soldiers and the home front was also mobilized to support the war effort. It was totally a different

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86 Metcalf; op. cit., p. 113
87 Ibid., p. 124
88 Kaushik Roy; The Beginning of ‘people’s war’ in India, (ed.) in Samiksha Trust, 1857: Essays from Economic and Political Weekly. p. 135
89 K. Roy, The Beginning of People’s War, op. cit., p.135
war, where mass citizens were the weapon of the struggle. In people’s war, most of the participants risked their lives not for tangible incentives but for ideological differences and reasons. C.A. Baylay, a noted imperialist historian states that “at least in some portions of India, the rebellion assumed the proportions of a patriotic revolt”. He definitely and certainly argued about the northern Indian states, i.e. North Western Provinces. It was the mass involvement of the agricultural population in the revolt from the North Western Provinces characterized the event up to national level what Disraeli and Marx already opinioned in 1850s. The mass participation in the revolt from this particular region rightly supported the view of V.D Savarkar, who declared the event as ‘the first war of India’s independence’. According to Marxist perception, if any revolt finds alliance in peasant community then it must be a mass movement or struggle because peasants representing the largest share of population of any society and when mass got them involved in the struggle it assumed the status of the national level. Then the revolt of 1857 has all the characters to be called as the national struggle.

From the above explanation it seems that the revolt of 1857 was itself one of the major consequences of existing land revenue system i.e., Mahalwari system operated in North-western provinces. It was the participation of mass peasants and lower classes from this particular region characterized the revolt of 1857 as the first war of India’s independence.

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90 Christopher Baylay; Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and social communication in India, 1780-1870, Foundation Books, New Delhi, 1999, p. 317
By 1843, the Board of Revenue had become thoroughly alarmed by the rapid rise in sales for debt. They ‘bemoaned’ the entire prostration of the indigent, but powerful debtor before the weak but wealthy creditor, which the British system had brought about and they feared that this” frequent result of our system” might be seen as an ingenious device” for breaking the power of all those who from hereditary wealth or influence might endanger our supremacy”.

A year later the commissioner of Agra went on to lay at the doors of the courts responsibility for the constant formation of successive bands of robbers which were a source of constant trouble for the people. Yet, no remedy had been taken for this evil state of barbarism. The Board of Revenue recommended only that the sale of laws be carried into effect fairly and open. Sales, they said should be conducted with an advance notice and publicity to avoid ex-prate or collusive decrees and the districts collector, not a judge should be charged with executing the decrees.

In the absence of any effective check, sales for debt continued at a high level even after the end of the immediate economic crisis. Although the number of such sales declined after 1845, they leveled off at a figure substantially above that for arrears of revenue. In the years just before the mutiny estates assessed at over one lack of rupees changed hands annually by the decree of the court, while sales for arrears rarely exceeded half lack of assessed jama and were often much less than that amount. The final blow came with the failure of the rains and the

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91 Metcalf, op. cit., p. 125
92 Ibid., p. 126
inundation of the Jumna during the two successive years of 1843 and 1844. These bad seasons made it at once impossible from the impoverished landholders to pay back their advances. The continuous bad seasons had ruined the cultivators because they were totally dependent upon the rains due to the shortage of irrigation facilities.\textsuperscript{93} During the first decade of the regular settlement upto 1847-4, 33,657 acres or more than one-third of the entire pargana were either sold or farmed-out for arrears of revenue in Tappal only.

A large number of documents produced by S. A. A. Rizvi in a compiled form entitled “Freedom Struggle in Uttar Pradesh”, enough evidences which proved that how the people of the North Western Provinces and Oudh, be they landlords, Taluqdars, peasants and commoners had stood up against the so called ‘Benign Government’ of the company.\textsuperscript{94} There were a number of Taluqdars who had not lost their estate or had lost a part, or even some were benefited under the summary settlement naturally joined the rebel side or groups and challenged the British authority to a greater extent and proved the nationalistic character of the revolt or rebellion. For example, the Raja of Churda and Bhinga did not lose a single village under the settlement norms, but both participated in the revolt with great enthusiasm.\textsuperscript{95} The Raja of Gonda, who lost only 30 villages out of 400 and his income, had been reduced by some 10,000 rupees through assessment. He supported the rebel side and at occasion participated in the rebellious activities.

\textsuperscript{93} Metcalf, op. cit., p. 111
\textsuperscript{94} S. A. A. Rizvi, Freedom Struggle in Uttar Pradesh, Vol. II, Publication Bureau, Information Department, Uttar Pradesh, 1958, Introduction, p. 1
\textsuperscript{95} Ibid.
Ashraf Baksh Khan, a big taluqdar of Gonda, who even got benefited from the implementation of the new land revenue settlements under the British rule came up with the rebellious groups and supported them financially and physically as well.  

These were the examples which showed the nationalist character of the event. At last, the event seems to be a reactionary movement against the company government’s economic reform policies which were directly and indirectly directed against the will, wish, mood and expectations of a larger section of society’s population.

The revolt of 1857 ended with failure at immediate concern but a successful movement on the basis of its future outcome. It became the basis of India’s liberation movement of independence because it provided the source of inspiration to the nationalist leaders. In Indian mind, the event lives as a year of popular memory in which the mightiest colonial government of the world under the banner of English East India company was challenged so seriously by the native subjects of the empire for the very first time and that almost shook the British dominance and forced the British crown or parliament to take the administration into its own hands.

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