

GEOGRAPHICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF

KANPUR

GEOGRAPHICAL PROFILE

Location The district of Kanpur occupies the north-western part of the Kanpur division (until 16 October 1988 it was a part of the Allahabad Division) and belongs to the tract known as the lower Doab (which comprises the eastern extremity of the strip of country lying between the Ganga and the Yamuna rivers). In shape it is an irregular quadrilateral and lies between the parallels of 25° 26' and 26° 58' north latitude and 79° 31' and 80° 34' east longitude. To the north east, beyond the Ganga, the deep stream of which forms the boundary of the district, lie the districts of Hardoi and Unnao while to the south across, the Yamuna, are the districts of Hamirpur and Jalaun. On the south east the boundary marches with that of district Fatehpur and to the west and north west are Auriya and Kannauj districts.¹

River System

The two chief rivers of the district are the Ganga and the Yamuna. The Isan and the Non are the tributaries of the Yamuna. The river next in importance is Pandu. The Ganga enters the village of

¹ Kailash Narayan Pande, *Gazetteer of India Uttar Pradesh District Kanpur*, Lucknow, 1989, p. 1.

Chita Mau and flows along the north eastern and western boundaries of the district for its entire length and also skirts the Bilhaur and Kanpur *tehsils*. It has a wide and sandy bed, changing its channel almost every year as its sand-banks are formed and washed away. In the rains the Ganga is of immense breadth but during the cold weather it shrinks to much small dimensions. The river leaves the district at village *Purwa Mir* in the Kanpur tehsil.

The Isan a tributary of the Ganga has its origin in the south-east of Aligarh and enters the district in the extreme north, a short distance from Makanpur.

The other tributary of the Ganga is the Non. The name obviously refers to the brackish nature of its water, a phenomenon which probably arises from the prevalence of the saline efflorescence known as *reh*, which abounds in the low, swampy tract on the northern borders of the Bilhaur tehsil, where the river takes its rise. It joins the Ganga in the south of Bithur.

The Pandu is the third tributary of the Ganga but does not join that river till its exit from the district, the junction taking place in Fatehpur, some 5 km beyond the Kanpur border. The Pandu rises in Farrukhabad and enters the district near the village of Naila (in tehsil Bithur) and then flows in a tortuous course but in a direction parallel to that of the Ganga.

Rind and Sengar are the two tributaries of the Yamuna particularly from the central water parting which lies between the Pandu and the next river to the west.

The Non (southern) takes its rise in several large depressions in the low central and southern tracts of the Akbarpur tehsil and the surplus drainage find its way southwards by several channels which unite on the Ghatampur border to form this river.

The Yamuna first touches the district in the extreme west of Bhognipur and maintains a south easterly course. It makes many loops and hands and leaves the district in the extreme south west of the Ghatampur tehsil. It separates this district from the Jalaun and Hamirpur districts in the south. The bed of the river is at a considerable depth below the level of the land to the north and in places there are many fertile stretches between the river and its high banks.²

Area and Population

The district of Kanpur covers an area of 3005 sq km of which the city proper makes up 1300 sq km. It is the largest and most populous city of Uttar Pradesh and the second largest in the Hindi heartland (after Delhi).

² Ibid., pp.5-7

According to 2001 census, the city had a population of 41,37,489 people giving it a density of 1366 people per sq km, thereby making it one of the most thickly populated cities of India.³

³ Jayant Kumar Banthia, *Census of India 2001:Provisional Population Totals*, p. 105.
Also see *Kanpur City: An Overview*, Department of Information and Public Relations, Kanpur, 2005, pp. 45-46.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Origin of the name of the district of Kanpur

Kanpur is said to be the corruption of Kanhaiyapur which was an unimportant village till its first contact with the British. According to a local tradition the name of Kanpur kohna owes its origin to Hindu Singh, raja of Sachendi who came here in about 1750 to bath in the holy river Ganga and established a village which he (possibly) named Kanhpur, the name becoming changed to Kanpur in the course of time.⁴

In the National Archives of India the first mention of Cawnpore occurs in 1770 (the British used to call it) in a report dated 2 May written by Captain Gabriel Harper from Faizabad the then capital of Avadh; *'The day before yesterday two battalions of the Nabob's sepoy's with two guns marched from hence to take possession of Cawnpore.'*⁵

Ancient Period

The region covered by the present kingdom was once included in the ancient kingdom of Panchala which extended from the Himalayan mountains in the north to the Chambal river in the south. The kingdom of Panchala comprised the present areas of Barielly,

⁴ Kailash Narayan Pande, op.cit., p.1.

⁵ Cf. Zoe Yalland, *Traders and Nabobs: The British in Cawnpore 1765-1857*, Salisbury, 1987, p.33.

Badaun, Farrukhabad, the adjoining districts of Rohilkhand and the central Doab. That the Panchala Kingdom was divided into two parts- North and South is ascertained from the age of *Jatakas* and *Mahabharata*. The area comprising the present district of Kanpur was included in the southern part, the capital of which was Kampilya (now in present district of Farrukhabad.)⁶

The early history of the district is usually meagre as there were hardly any towns of importance in this area and so can be traced only from vague legends and traditions. The town of Bithur is however a place of great antiquity. According to tradition, Brahma is said to have celebrated the completion of his creation by a horse sacrifice at the Brahmeshwar ghat of Bithur in the forest of Utpalaranya, which was supposed to be the most sacred place on earth. It has been said that after the performance of this sacrifice only the place came to be known as Brahmavarta and in the course of time due to difficulty in pronunciation it came to be known as Bithur.⁷

Historically Jajmau, on the eastern outskirts of present day Kanpur is regarded as one of the original settlements in the Kanpur district. Located about 8 km east of the city, it is considered to be

⁶ Alexander Cunningham, *The Ancient Geography of India*, Varanasi, 1963, p.303.

⁷ Ramdev Morolia & Balkrishna Maheshwari, *Kanpur Ka Itihaas*, Kanpur, 1940, p. 13.

the oldest existing site of Kanpur. According to a legend it was the capital of king Yayati and from it only it came to be known as Yayatimau and Jajmau is considered to be a corruption of that word. The famous Arab traveller, Al Beruni has mentioned Jajmau in his celebrated work *Kitab ul Hind*.⁸ At that time Jajmau was considered to be a famous town in the route between Kannauj and Prayag (Allahabad).⁹ Another famous name of Jajmau was Siddhapuri also. Legend has it that the famous *Chandravanshi* (Lunar) warriors had established the clan of Chandel Rajputs and their state of Shivrajpuri was here only. The Chandel ruler Chandravarman had built a strong fort over here which is now not even in ruins but in the form of a hilltop. Located near the banks of Ganga it is about one mile in length and two hundred metres in width. The exact length of the fort cannot be ascertained but heaps of brick and mortar could still be found lying over here and on digging they can be found 40 feet deep also. These things add credence to the fact the fort must have remained very strong.¹⁰

⁸ Alberuni says that, "A man marching from Kannauj to due south between the two rivers Jaun and Ganges passes the following well known places- Jajmau, twelve *farsakh* from Kannauj each *farsakh* being equal to four miles, Edward.C. Sachau, *Alberuni's India*, Delhi, 1979, p. 200.

⁹ Kanpur City: An Overview, op.cit., p.1.

¹⁰ Ramdev Morolia & Balkrishna Maheshwari, op.cit., pp. 21-22.

Medieval Period

On the eve of Muhammad Ghuri's invasion of northern India, towards the close of the twelfth century, the Gadhvala king, Jayachandra was the most powerful monarch of this region with his capital at Kannauj, which is situated in close proximity to the northern border of the Kanpur district. The district therefore must have been under the direct rule of Jayachandra, the king of Kannauj and formed a part of his kingdom.

After the region came under the Sultans of Delhi a mosque was also built on the famous hilltop fort which still exists. A Persian inscription inscribed on it says that one Umrao Qilich Khan of Delhi had built it in the year 1679. The famous Ilbari Sultan Qutubuddin Aibak had also come over here and along with him came the famous Sufi saint Makhdoom Shah Auliya and the latter also died here. His tomb here was built by the Tughlaq Sultan Firoz Shah Tughlaq. His shrine draws hundreds of people and is a landmark in Jajmau. An inscription inscribed in Persian here tells us that Firoz Shah Tughlaq had visited the place in the year 1358 and ordered the construction of the shrine.¹¹

Despite the close proximity of the important military stations of Kannauj and Kalpi the reference to this district in the annals of

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 22-23.

the early Sultans of Delhi are meagre and all that is known is derived from the histories of these two places and that of Etawah.¹²

During the Mughal era also, the present district was of hardly any importance and it is difficult to determine the exact limits of the district of Akbar's time, owing to the fact that the area was then divided among three sarkars belonging to the subahs of Agra and Allahabad and also to the many alterations of boundaries and nomenclature that took place. Two sarkars of subah Agra- Kalpi and Kannauj had their extensions in present Kanpur's southern and western parts.¹³ Today in some cases the old names remain, but it is doubtful whether the areas correspond even approximately to those of the old subdivisions. Roughly speaking, the north and west of the district formed part of the sarkar Kannauj, the south of Kalpi and the east of Kara, the last being included in the provincial government of Allahabad. Of the eight *mahals* (parganas) that comprised the Kara *sarkar* (in district Fatehpur) four lay wholly in the present Kanpur district and the rest in the Fatehpur district.¹⁴

¹²R.C. Majumdar & A.C. Pusalker (ed.), *The History and Culture of the Indian People- The Struggle For the Empire*, Vol. V, Bombay, 1957, pp. 51-55.

¹³Cf. Lakshmikant Tripathi & Narayan Prasad Arora (ed.), *Kanpur Ka Itihaas*, Vol. I, Kanpur, 1950, pp. 46-47.

¹⁴H.R. Nevill, *Cawnpore, A Gazetteer*, Allahabad, 1929, p. 199.

Modern History

The history of modern Kanpur began in the eighteenth century. From early times until two hundred years ago, the place where the filthy, overcrowded, smoke belching city now stands was a lonely stretch of land between Bithur and Jajmau.¹⁵ It was traditional rural India, mile upon mile of flat brown earth, baked hard as a brick under the heart of the colourless sky.

The ongoing conflict between the Nawab of Avadh, Shuja ud Daulah and the Marathas heralded the growth of the city during the later eighteenth century.

It must be mentioned here that after the defeat of the allies (Nawab Shuja ud Daulah of Avadh, Mir Qasim- Nawab of Bengal and Mughal Emperor Shah Alam II) at the battle of Buxar in 1764, Shuja ud Daulah fled up country to seek help from the Marathas to fight again. The Company forces followed him closely up the Ganges. The Marathas had marched from the Rohilla country down the banks of the river to meet the army commanded by General John Charnac but when Charnac advanced the enemy would not face him. After the exchange of a few shots the Marathas galloped off the field.

¹⁵Zoe Yalland, op.cit., p.19.

Shuja ud Daulah incensed at their cowardice and treachery, realized that there was nothing left for him to do but swallow his pride and make friends with the Company. Shuja ud Daulah's meeting with the British (at Jajmau) was followed by a treaty concluded between them, whereby he recovered his dominions with the exception of the *sarkars* of Kara and Allahabad which were assigned to Shah Alam.¹⁶

In 1770, there arrived a small detachment of the East India Company troops, campaigning with the Nawab against their common enemy, the Marathas. The army camp was to grow rapidly to become the largest military encampment in northern India, to be used as a base in the fight with the Marathas. Traders of all description flocked

¹⁶The Treaty of Allahabad was signed between the English led by Robert Clive and Nawab Shuja-ud-Daulah on 16 August 1765. By the terms of this treaty Shuja-ud-Daulah was confirmed in his kingdom with the exception of the districts of Kara and Allahabad which were ceded to Emperor Shah Alam II. Shuja-ud-Daulah agreed to pay 50 lakhs of rupees in compensation for the expenses of the war, by which it engaged to help him with troops for the defence of his frontiers if he required them and agreed to pay the cost for its maintenance. He also agreed to allow the company to carry on a trade duty free throughout the whole of his dominions.

In short, Avadh became practically dependent on the Company and henceforth it was a matter of fixed policy (with the English) to maintain a close alliance with Avadh, which was useful as a bulwark or buffer state against the threatening power of the Marathas, S.C. Sarkar & K.K. Dutta, *Modern Indian History*, Vol. II, Allahabad, 1967, p. 82.

towards it knowing fully the safety it provided due to the presence of a large number of troops.¹⁷

If Cawnpore was to be used as a buffer between Avadh and the Marathas, the encampment had to be fortified. Captain Robert Brooke, the English commander who led the first detachment of Company troops to Kanpur, undertook the work at Nawab's request. The fortifications were to be the nucleus of a new station and Cawnpore emerged on the map of India. It was sometimes spelt *Cawnpoor*, *Khanpore* or *Kanhpore* but in official sources (from 1785 until 1947) it was referred to as Cawnpore.¹⁸

The distribution of territory made under the treaty was maintained till 1771, when Mughal Emperor Shah Alam left Allahabad for Delhi. The granting of the districts of Kara and Allahabad to the Marathas, was considered by the English and Shuja ud Daula to be a violation of the agreement with the result that in 1773 Kara and Allahabad were handed over to Shuja ud Daulah by the British for fifty lakhs of rupees. The administration was then entrusted to Mian Almas Ali Khan, who was a competent and energetic man and had been a minister.¹⁹

¹⁷ Zoe Yalland, op.cit., p. 21.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 36.

¹⁹ H.R. Nevill, op.cit., p.207.

Under the Avadh rule the district fared better than at other times. Almas Ali Khan²⁰ was a far more talented administrator than most of his compeers, but his object was to secure the maximum revenue by whatever means possible.²¹

By the treaty concluded on November 10, 1801 between Saadat Ali Khan (the Nawab of Avadh) and the East India Company, the area covered by the present district (together with some hill tracts) was ceded to the English in return for a guarantee of protection and for the extinction of the debt incurred on account of the Avadh local forces, some of which had been quartered in cantonments at Kanpur since 1778.²²

In 1778, when the Company's troops first moved to Kanpur, they were granted twelve villages stretching along the riverfront from old Kanpur on the west to Jajmau in the east.

It was referred to as "Kanpur-Kona" (Kanpur corner) differentiating it from 'Campoo' (camp) Kanpur or cantonment. The

²⁰Almas Ali Khan was ruling over Allahabad and Kara and had also started making administrative arrangements for Kanpur and local *kshatriya* rulers of the regions around the district sometimes paid taxes to him, Lakshmikant Tripathi & Narayan Prasad Arora, op.cit., p. 51.

²¹H.R. Nevill, op.cit., p.208.

²²Ibid., p.209. The treaty was signed between Lord Wellesley and the Nawab and by which the latter had to cede to the English half of his dominions comprising Rohilkhand and the lower *Doab*, that is the land lying between the Ganges and Yamuna. Thus Avadh, for all practical purposes, came under British control.

changing profile of the riverfront and the shifting boundaries of the cantonment expressed larger conflicts over space.²³

By 1803 it was the largest country cantonment in India.²⁴ On 18 March 1802 Mr. Abraham Walland was appointed as the first collector of Kanpur. At city's famous Sarsaiyya Ghat there once stood a bungalow, and at here only the first *katcheri* (court) was established. On 24 March 1803 Kanpur was declared a district.

At this time there were fifteen *parganas* in Kanpur district. They were Jajmau, Bithoor, Sheorajpur, Billhaur, Rasoolabad, Derapur, Sikandra, Bhognipur, Akbarpur, Ghatampur. Saadh-Salempur, Auraiya, Kannauj, Koda and Amauli. There used to be a collector (*tehsildar*) in each of these parganas. The head of the district used to be an English officer. But at that time the officer combined in himself all the three posts of the collector, the magistrate and the judge and corresponding powers. Mr. Walland was the first English officer to have held all the three posts. After few years the powers of the collector were reduced and for the remaining two posts of a judge

²³Chitra Joshi, *Lost Worlds: Indian Labour and Its Forgotten Histories*, Delhi, 2003, p. 23.

²⁴Cf. Zoe Yalland, *A Guide to the Katcheri Cemetery and the Early History of Kanpur*, London, 1983, p.7

and magistrate a second English officer was appointed. In 1827 even these two offices were also separated.²⁵

In 1814 the then Governor-General, Lord Hastings visited Kanpur and had a meeting with the Nawab of Avadh, Ghaziuddin Haidar. After having faced consecutive defeats in the battles of Khirkee and Asti, the beleaguered Maratha Peshwa Baji Rao II came to terms with the British and arrived in Bithoor on 18 March 1818. He was provided the *jagir* of Ramel and an annual pension of rupees 75 lakhs. With him came many other Maratha families and Bithoor became a bustling town.²⁶

The first communal riot broke out in the city during the year 1820 on account of the simultaneous occurrence of the festivals of Muharram and Dussehra. The then Judge-Magistrate Campbell Robertson ordered that Muslims should not visit the *chowk* (where the riot had broken out) and *Ramlila* should take place in Anwarganj area. As a result for many years the *Ramlila* continued to be held in Anwarganj. In 1825 the Governor-General Lord Amherst visited Kanpur and had a meeting with the Nawab, Ghaziuddin Haidar. A bridge was constructed on the Ganga during this year. The following year another bridge was constructed on the Yamuna to make way for

²⁵Laxmikant Tripathi & Narayan Prasad Arora (ed.), op.cit., p. 69.

²⁶Ibid., p. 70.

visiting Kalpi. In the year 1832, Governor-General Lord William Bentinck visited the city and had a meeting with the Nawab, Nasiruddin Haidar at the *Sawada kothi*. In 1833, the British further improved the construction of the Grand Trunk Road from Allahabad to Delhi via Kanpur. A telegraph line was laid in the city in the year 1855.²⁷

As the place was situated on a dangerous frontier zone where skirmishes between Nawab's forces and the Marathas were a frequent occurrence the British realized to have a substantial military presence here. Till the early nineteenth century the growing cantonment continued to be housed in tents. So strong in fact was the association of cantonment with camp that the term *campoo* came to be permanently associated with Kanpur in the nineteenth century, even after the camp colony had become a cantonment town.

By the first few decades of the nineteenth century the Company position in the region became militarily and commercially secure. Kanpur was no longer considered a dangerous frontier zone, and from a temporary camp the cantonment came to acquire the character of a permanent station. By the 1840's the cantonment filled out large bungalows, with 'splendid suites of apartments' well-fitted interiors'

²⁷Ibid.

and well kept gardens.’²⁸ In Cantonment houses thatch was replaced by tiles, and by the late nineteenth century, with brick roofs. The stability of Company power was, at this point, being celebrated by constructing lofty and elegant colonial buildings. Army men composed ditties, a popular one went

*Civil Servants who’ve come from all parts of the country
Boldly avow, indeed one of them swore,
For dancing, and dressing, for sky and caressing,
No Indian station can vie with Cawnpore.*²⁹

Up to the mid-nineteenth century Kanpur was still largely a cantonment town. The cantonment occupied the best stretches of land on the river front, and over 90 per cent of the space; in contrast to the 6477 acres of cantonment area in 1848, only 690 acres were under civilian control. The civil area was hemmed in by the military on three sides. The cantonment grew by displacing the old residents who had inhabited the river front in the Jajmau area, these were now pushed back, further away from the river to westwards towards old Kanpur and Nawabganj.

Prior to the outbreak of the Revolt of 1857, the industrial and commercial progress of the city continued unabated. As it was an

²⁸Emma Roberts, *Hindustan: The Shores of the Red Sea and the Mountains*, Vol.II, London, 1850, [reprint 1972, Delhi], p. 44.

²⁹Cf. Zoe Yalland, *Traders and Nabobs*, op.cit., p. 167.

army camp there was less fear of loss of life and property. Internal security of the country was not very sound. The rulers of Awadh were living in luxury, indifferent to the needs of administration. The dacoits of Delhi and Bundelkhand region were quite powerful. As a result of these factors, traders of north India (particularly of Delhi and Lucknow) and small merchants of Kalpi and Jhansi found Kanpur a safe place. So was the case with the daily wage workers, who were now coming to the city in large numbers. Before the revolt broke out the business in the city had flourished so much that in 1857 trading transaction of rupees 90 lakhs had taken place in the city. Kanpur had become the chief trading centre of north India. A second big market was of Farrukhabad town which had flourished massively during the rule of Bangash Nawabs. But now the dynasty was in decline and so workers and traders of Farrukhabad too were coming to Kanpur. And amongst these traders of Farrukhabad only, were the ancestors of city's most prominent Indian industrial house of modern times- Jhuggilal Kamalpat (JK) group.³⁰

Until this point of time the rule of the East India Company had taken strong roots over north India and a visible despair and hatred for it had started culminating among the natives. The role of Christian missionaries in promoting their faith and their denouncement

³⁰Ramdev Morolia & Balkrishna Maheshwari, op.cit., pp, 68-70.

of Hinduism and Islam was taken as a grave insult. Lord Dalhousie's much hated 'Doctrine Of Lapse' had deprived many princes of their right to succession.³¹ And in Kanpur the grudge was bore by Dhondu Pant alias Nana Saheb, the adopted son of Peshwa Baji Rao II. Sometime in December 1856 Nana Saheb started sending his messengers to the courts of small and big rajahs. He also appealed to the Court of Directors and sent his chief adviser Azeemullah,³² to London to plead his case. However this attempt didn't bear the

³¹The East India Company had acquired a paramount position and extensive territories after the fall of the Mughal Empire and defeat of the Marathas. According to the Doctrine of Lapse, Dalhousie maintained that the British government in its exercise of a wise and pragmatic approach in Indian affairs is bound not to put aside or neglect such rightful opportunity of acquiring territory or revenue as may from time to time present itself. Holding that the British rule was a blessing to the people of India Dalhousie strove to extend it by all means in his power, and when any of the native princes died childless, he refused to negotiate the right of an heir adopted by the prince himself before his death, or his widow, unless the consent of the British Government had been previously granted. Satara and Jhansi were annexed (in 1848 and 1853 respectively) because the consent of the paramount power i.e. British government had not been asked previous to the adoption. Nagpur (also annexed in 1853) because there was no heir at all, M. Prothero & Satis Chandra Vidhyabhusana, *History of India: Down to the End of the Reign of Queen Victoria*, Delhi, 1915, p. 510.

³² Azeemullah was said to have been born in a degraded Muslim family. In his youth he had secured a job in the house of an Anglo-Indian family and later took the job of a cook. A man of consummate skill and talent he soon became well versed in English and French languages. After this he became a master in Free School in Kanpur which was the only English school of the city run by Christian missionaries. He rose on this post and his fame reached Nana Saheb's court who called him and enlisted him in his service, Quoted in Lakshmikant Tripathi & Narayan Prasad Arora, op.cit., p. 352.

desired result but Nana was not frustrated. About this time only Wajid Ali Shah the last Nawab of Awadh had been deposed and his state was annexed.

In April 1857 the disbanded sepoy of the 19th Native Infantry, when passing through Kanpur openly stated that they had a difference with government regarding the introduction of the newly 'greased' cartridges.³³ As a consequence the receiving of the news of the Meerut outbreak, and the taking of Delhi by the rebel sepoy, caused much excitement not only in the city, but amongst the native troops in special, who already discontented appeared to have openly lended their support to their rebel brethren.

The British community at Kanpur in May 1857, besides the Civil and Military Officers of government, were composed of a large number of Europeans and Eurasians of mixed classes, including many women and children. The European and Native troops were as per

³³In 1856 the Government decided to replace the old fashioned musket by the Enfield Rifle (named after the British government arms factory at Enfield, in north London.) It was not the rifles that the sepoy objected to using, nor the cartridges supplied with them, but the screw of the greased paper in which the cartridges were individually wrapped. A rumour began and quickly spread, that the grease used was made from the rendered fat of cattle and possibly pigs, forbidden substances for both Hindus and Muslims. On learning of this, the sepoy believed it was a further assault by the British on their caste and religion, and a direct attempt to turn them all into Christians, Rosie Llewellyn Jones, *The Great Uprising In India 1857-58: Untold stories Indian and British*, Delhi, 2010, p. 9.

margin commanded by Major General Hugh Wheeler whose reputation as an officer was very high in the Indian Army. The East India Company had four Indian military regiments in Kanpur (1, 53, 56 Native Infantries and 2nd Bengal Cavalry).³⁴ Most of the soldiers of the 53 and 56 Naative Infantry consisted of high caste men from Avadh who were looked upon by the native population as aristocrats and were held in high esteem.³⁵

The city of Kanpur contained about sixty thousand and the military bazaar forty thousand native residents. The evidence record says that as at Meerut the same old and ‘false rumour’ of greased cartridges was brought forward. The alleged contamination of food by impure adulterations spread dismay- the distrust of Europeans, as evinced by the erection of a low mud wall by way of precaution- the escape from punishment of an officer for firing at a piquet of troopers; - and the rumour that gain ground because of all these things that the European Cavalry were to be employed in lieu of native- these things hastened the coming of the catastrophe. Above all the calling of Nana Saheb, the deceased Peshwa’s (Baji Rao II) son to the aid of General Wheeler was a big mistake as he had been

³⁴Evidence given by John Fitchett, a bugler of the 6th Native Infantry in *Review Of The Evidence: Taken At Cawnpore Regarding The Revolt At That Station in June and July 1857*, UPSA.

³⁵Harprasad Chattopadhyay, *The Sepoy Mutiny: A Social Study and Analysis*, Calcutta, 1957, p. 175.

denied succession to his father's property and title and thus inwardly was bearing a grudge and outwardly was pretending to be a supporter of the English.³⁶

Since the time of the outbreak at Meerut, the British in Kanpur had been making preparations to protect themselves. Wheeler though was a favourite of the sepoys and had a strong conviction in the loyalty of his troops nevertheless decided to take precautions. He decided, principally because he did not want to be too distant from the sepoy lines, not to use the Magazine which rested on the river and was surrounded by a strong wall and was therefore the best suited as a defensive position. Instead he chose an area nearer the sepoy lines which had two single-storied barracks with verandahs around them and several outhouses. This was the spot he began to fortify and entrench there artillery and other necessary provisions. As the alarm spread in Kanpur he ordered all Europeans into this entrenchment which came to be swelled by some 900 people.³⁷

There were no traces visible of any conspiracy previous to the arrival of Nana but it seems that two sawars in his service one named Rahim Khan of Bishenpur near Bithoor, and the other Madad

³⁶*Review Of The Evidence*; op.cit.,

³⁷Rudrangshu Mukherjee, *Spectre of Violence: The 1857 Kanpur Massacres*, Delhi, 1998, pp. 49-50.

Ali³⁸ of Banda were employed to temper with the troops. The 2nd Cavalry which was simmering with anger needed little persuasion. Subedar Tika Singh, Havaldar Major Gopal Singh, and sawars Shamsuddin Khan, Shaikh Balaki, Sardar Beg and Rai Singh were the one to lead the charge in the 2nd Cavalry. They used to meet sometimes in the house of Shamsuddin Khan and sometimes at Tika Singh's residence. A risaladar of Nana's sawars named Jwala Prasad was a frequent visitor at Major Gopal Singh's house. Tika Singh was also admitted to interviews with the Nana and his brother Bala Rao, at one of which the subedar is stated to have said, that the Hindus and Muslims of the army had united as one for the defence of their respective religions, and to have asked how the Nana could side with the British by guarding their Magazine and treasury; and to which Nana replied that he is now at the disposal of the army. A meeting was said to have been held at Sookha Malla's ghat, at which the Nana and his brother Bala, Azeemullah, the two sawars Rahim Khan and Madad Ali, with the leading conspirators of the 2nd Cavalry, met in consultation for the purpose for fixing the day for the rebellion to break out; since the next day one of the conspirators named

³⁸While details for Rahim Khan are lacking, Madad Ali has some information. He was discharged from his position of *sawar* in the army and commenced business as a horse dealer and used to visit Nana sahib in the way of business, S.A.A. Rizvi, *Freedom Struggle in Uttar Pradesh*, Vol. IV, Lucknow, 1959, p. 521.

Shamsuddin who was having a drink at the house of Azeezanbai,³⁹ the famous courtesan of the 2nd Cavalry troopers, told her that in two or three days the Peshwa's rule would be proclaimed, and then Nana sahib will rule the roost; and then he would fill Azeezan's house not with silver but with gold mohurs.⁴⁰

The unfortunate incident of firing on the night of June 2 by a cashiered officer named Lt. Cox on a patrol of the 2nd Cavalry and his subsequent acquittal on the next day on the plea of being unconscious and in a state of drunkenness, caused great disaffection, the already angered cavalry declaring openly that perhaps that their fire-arms might also be discharged by accident some day. This attitude of the cavalry had also prompted many to take refuge in the entrenchment.⁴¹

³⁹Azeezan was a famous prostitute and many of the troopers used to frequent her house and so was in knowledge of the rebel activities. She had informed Kanhaiya Prasad, a *mahajan* of Kanpur that, "The sawars of the 2nd Cavalry were plotting with the Nana, and that a mutiny had taken place between the parties.", S.A.A. Rizvi, *Ibid.*, Sudarshan Chakr the famous Marxist poet of Kanpur has also paid tribute to Azeezan in his poem '*Azeezan Randi*' by refiguring her image and by expressing the purity within sin and says '*Paap ka punya roop jo swatantra ke liye lara*' (The pious form of evil who fought for the independence of her land). He also valorizes her by saying, '*Bujdil darpok jawaano ko balvan banaya Randi ne*' (The coward jawans were made brave and fearless by a prostitute.), Sudarshan Chakr, *Shaheedon ki Kataar*, Kanpur, 1953, p. 11.

⁴⁰Depositions of Witnesses no. 11, 16 and 17 in the *Synopsis of The Evidence Of The Cawnpore Mutiny*, UPSA.

⁴¹Deposition of Witnesses no. 18 & 19 in *Ibid.*,

The revolt began on the midnight of 4th June when the 2nd Cavalry sepoys sent away their families to the city and subedar Tika Singh, who was on duty with 50 sawars near the entrenchments led off his contingent towards Nawabgunj where treasury was located. The 1st Native Infantry which was still a little bit unsure was sent a message to its Havaldar Major of the corps by Gopal Singh, Havaldar Major of the 2nd Cavalry asking why the delay is taking place on which the sepoys of 1st Native Infantry joined the rebel sepoys. At about 2 a.m. the sepoys of the 53rd and 56th Native Infantries (who were guarding the treasury) also lended their support to the rebel sepoys. These bands then started moving towards the entrenchment of Wheeler.⁴²

The rebels returned to Kanpur and the Nana informed General Wheeler on June 7 of his intentions to attack the British entrenchment. The siege had begun.⁴³

On June 25, the British pickets saw a woman approaching towards the entrenchments. The identity of the woman is not clear. She carried a letter with her which stated. 'All those who are in no way connected with the acts of Lord Dalhousie, and are willing to lay down their arms, shall receive a safe passage to Allahabad'. The letter

⁴²Deposition of Witnesses no. 12, 14 & 19 in Ibid.,

⁴³Rudrangshu Mukherjee, op.cit., p. 51.

carried no signature but the writing was recognized as that of Azeemullah's. Negotiations soon commenced, terms of surrender were agreed upon and the treaty signed by Nana Saheb.⁴⁴

On the morning of June 27, the British left the entrenchments to proceed towards Satichaura Ghat where the boats were kept. According to one estimate made after comparing different accounts, 450 persons came out of the entrenchments. As the British were embarking on the boats, guns opened fire from both the banks and the thatched awnings of the boats were set alight. All but a hundred and thirty were slaughtered; twenty of the survivors managed to escape, the rest were taken prisoners.⁴⁵ This was the infamous 'Satichaura Ghat Massacre'. The worst was to follow immediately for the prisoners who were later massacred at the Bibi Ghar.

The events of the Great revolt of 1857 marked the city with a new significance. The chief event by which Kanpur was remembered in the annals of the revolt when they were about to board boats to flee the city besieged by rebels. Before retreating from Kanpur in July 1857, Nana Saheb Peshwa reportedly ordered the massacre of civilian hostages. But whether Nana was behind this decision is shrouded in mystery. The women and children who survived were taken back up

⁴⁴Ibid.,

⁴⁵Ibid., pp. 51-52.

the sandy path from the river and imprisoned in the Bibighar, a house which had served as a zenana for an Indian mistress, a *bibi*, in happier times. The role of Hussaini Begum, a prostitute who was given the charge by Nana has also drawn attention as she had a universal hatred for the English and it was her influence that led Sarwar Khan one of Nana Saheb's bodyguards, who was the Anglo-Indian son of a pathan prostitute and a British soldier born of an English soldier and a prostitute to order en masse slaughter of the hostages. By the next morning, (17 July) only three women and three little boys were still alive. Nana sahib who had established his headquarters only a few yards away from the Bibighar, ordered them to be 'disposed of' and they were thrown alive into a dry well where some of the other European corpses had been put by the sweepers.⁴⁶

This event for long time to come remained engrossed in the hearts and minds of the British and provided a sort of conformity to their old adage of Indians as being a brutal and uncivilized people.

Azeemullah who was Nana's chief adviser had gone to England to plead the case for his pension and as a shrewd observer he saw first hand the mechanisms the English were playing and thought it prudent that an opportunity to strike at the very roots of

⁴⁶Rosie Llewellyn Jones, op.cit., p. 157.

the British rule has arrived. To create a condition for the same he issued a newspaper on 8 February 1857, entitled *Payam-I-Azadi* the copy of which is still secured in the British Museum.⁴⁷

The famous song of the revolt called *Qaumi Tarana*, written by Azeemullah was first published in the paper *Payam-I-Azadi* only. The newspaper (which was published both in Hindi and Urdu) had become the voice paper of the revolt. After the suppression of the revolt the British had sewn its editor, Mirza Bedaar Bakht alive in pig skin and later hanged.⁴⁸

Official descriptions of Kanpur and travel accounts of the late nineteenth century dwell almost entirely on the happenings of 1857. It was as if this event had repressed all other histories, all other memories and associations of the place. *The Story of the Cawnpore Mission*, published in 1923 begins dramatically:

CAWNPORE! More than sixty years have passed since the name sent a thrill through the heart of every man and woman of English race. Only those that were alive then can imagine the shock and the sense of horror and astonishment that fell upon England when the tidings came of the surrender of the beleaguered British garrison and the treacherous, cold

⁴⁷Virendra Nath Dixit (ed), *Swatantra Sangram Aur Kanpur*, Kanpur, 2008, p. 3.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 3-4.

blooded massacre of over 1,000 of our countrymen including women and children.⁴⁹

The Bibi Ghar (memorial well) has come to symbolize a tale of brutality and counter brutality and has taken in its stride many stories. It is the only monument of Kanpur that was not fully opened for the Indians until the country got independence on the midnight of 14 August 1947.⁵⁰ Later Kanpur Memorial Church (now All Souls' Church) was built in 1875 in honour of the British who lost their lives in the war of 1857. The church was designed by Walter Grenville, architect of East Bengal Railway.⁵¹

Colonel James Neill⁵² who had been left at Allahabad was now ordered by the authorities to reach Kanpur and he was also elevated to the rank of Brigadier General. On his arrival in the city he ordered a very horrendous punishment for the rebels found guilty of the murder of English women and children and also for those found guilty by association. They were taken into the blood stained Bibighar by a sweeper and were made to crouch down and lick clean a square foot of the floor before being taken out and hanged. The

⁴⁹Quoted in Chitra Joshi, op.cit., p. 30.

⁵⁰Ramprakash Mishra (ed.), *Azaadi Ke Ye Matwaale*, Kanpur, 1997, p. 25.

⁵¹Ecclesiastical Department, File No. 137/1938, 1938, UPSA.

⁵²James Neill, a Scottish had been a soldier all through his life and was a fervent Christian who believed that God has chosen him to take part in suppressing the revolt, Rosie Llewellyn Jones, op.cit., p. 155.

blood had of course long since dried into flakes, but was moistened with water, and prisoners were lashed until they obeyed.⁵³

To symbolize the brutality of the rebels in the massacre at Bibighar, Neill first of all ordered a crucifix to be placed on the spot. Below it was written that 'it is a house of massacre' and 'In the pious memory of Christians who were brutally slaughtered on 16 June 1857 and were thrown in this well'. The well became a memorial and to ensure its safety and sanctity around 40 acres of land around the Bibi Ghar was confiscated. The work of providing safety to the structure was given to the army. Indians were debarred from entering it. In 1919 a Society called *The Cawnpore Memorial Well Garden Society* was established to look after the compound. It was given an order that no new construction would be taken up in the compound before taking the permission from the provincial government.⁵⁴

The first protest lodged against this was by a band of Congress activists. There was also an Englishman in it. The 40th session of the Indian National Congress was held in the city in 1925. On 27 December a seven member group of Congress activists entered the compound without prior permission of the authorities. The band

⁵³Ibid., p. 158.

⁵⁴Ram Prakash Mishra, op.cit., pp. 25-26.

included one Dr. Rutherford (who was an MP from England) wearing a Gandhi cap, T.C. Goswami (M.L.A. from Punjab), Dewan Chaman Lall (M.L.A. from Lahore), N.C. Chander (M.L.C. from Bengal), Nalini Ranjan Sarkar (M.L.A. from Bengal), Bidhan Chandra Roy (M.L.C. from Bengal) and Rai Harendra Nath Chowdhry (M.L.C. from Bengal).⁵⁵ Being members of the councils and assemblies they were let free after being given stern warning.

In the year 1934 the Society decided to frame rules for allowing Indians to enter the compound and a 2 anna fee was fixed for them. No such fee existed for the Europeans. After the country got independence the first chief minister of UP Pandit Govind Ballabh Pant declared the Memorial Well structure opened for the Indians.⁵⁶

Textile mills were numerous in the city and were the harbingers of Kanpur's industrial development. Leather industry too was flourishing (as shoes belts and other accessories for army were being made) but it was not the agent of change. The Maxwell family was the pioneer in the field of textile and can be said to be the father of city's industrial growth. Their Elgin Mill (estd. In 1861) can be said to be the forerunner of all cotton textile mills of the city. Many employees of this company later opened their factories by

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 27.

⁵⁶Ibid.

seeing the profits it was generating and the art of work Maxwells had perfected. After Elgin, Muir Mill was the second oldest textile mill of the city (opened in 1874) and Gavin Jones an English businessman was its first managing director. He became city's biggest cotton textile manufacturer. Through his guidance only Kanpur Woollen Mills was established in 1876 by Dr. Croyden. Later it became famous by the name of 'Lal Imli' and for a period was country's biggest woolen mill. For many years its management was in the hands of Alexander MacRobert (who was later bestowed with the titles of Sir and Baronet). And he was famous as *King Without The Crown* (of Kanpur). These mills and their robust functioning were to later add Kanpur the epithet as '*Manchester of India*'.⁵⁷

By the late nineteenth century the civil areas with fine houses clearly overshadowed the cantonment, which looked dilapidated and forsaken in contrast.

These changes in Kanpur were linked to broader processes within North Indian economy and society. What other towns were losing by the late nineteenth century- with the decline of old regional chieftains shifts in centres of local power, changes in routes, patterns and composition of commerce- Kanpur was gaining. From a

⁵⁷Ramdev Morolia & Balkrishna Maheshwari, op, cit., pp. 77-79.

cantonment it became a big ganj (market) and trading mart, and later an important industrial city with a substantial labouring population.⁵⁸

The growth of Hindu consciousness was an important phenomena in the city. The Arya Samaj first made its appearance in Kanpur in the year 1879 when a society of 18 members was formed under the Presidency of Rai Madho Ram Bahadur, a merchant. The growth of the sect was stupendous and it acquired a plot of land in the year 1891, the total number of adherents being 620; but it was not until 1894, that the Samaj acquired a plot of land in Kanpur, opposite the present commercial buildings and there erected a fairly substantial house at a cost of some rupees 8000.⁵⁹

Although Arya Samaj was a movement against the monopoly of the Brahmanism and superficial rituals yet it had among its members some of the enlightened and liberal Brahmins of the city. However caste wise Brahmins and Khattris were closer to the Sanatan Dharma Movement while Kayasthas preferred to be associated with the Arya Samaj. Most of the literature and proceedings of the Arya Samaj were conducted in Urdu and it appealed to the professional

⁵⁸Chitra Joshi, op.cit., p. 29.

⁵⁹H.R. Nevill, op. cit., p. 123.

elite of the service communities.⁶⁰ By this time Hindi-Urdu controversy had not yet started.

Surendranath Banerjee a towering leader of the time was on a whirlwind tour of north India in the year 1884 to awaken the masses about the famous Ilbert Bill introduced by Lord Ripon which sought to abolish at once and completely every judicial disqualification based merely on race distinctions. It sought to give a parity to Indian judges along with the English ones. Banerjee also visited Kanpur and delivered a brilliant lecture at city's station theatre. Thousands of people had assembled to hear Banerjee. It had such a lasting impact that people started taking interests in the issues and problems which the country as a whole was facing. It is said that it was Kanpur's first brush with political awakening.⁶¹

The formation of the Indian national Congress in December 1885 was greeted with much enthusiasm in the city and before the fourth session of Congress took place in Allahabad in 1888, a famous lawyer of Kanpur Pt. Prithvinath Chak had inaugurated a local branch of the party in the city. A highly talented and a man of deep conscience Prithvinath Chak had come to city from Unnao and was a Kashmiri Brahmin. He had a flourishing practice and some of

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 124.

⁶¹Lakshmikant Tripathi (ed.), *Abhinandan Granth: Narayan Prasad Arora*, Kanpur, 1950, Section IV, p.3.

the leading lawyers who were to later shot into glory had worked under him like

Pt. Motilal Nehru, Kailash Nath Katju, Pt. Iqbal Narayan etc. Election of the representatives to be selected from Kanpur (for the coming Allahabad session of the Congress) took place successfully largely due to the efforts of Prithvinath Chak.⁶² Pt. Ayodhyanath Kunzru (father of Pt Hridayanath Kunzru) had arrived in Kanpur to collect funds for the session and also to invite the various delegates from the city.⁶³

The role of Pratap Narayan Mishra was no less important. He formed a 'Congress Samiti' and enlisted hundreds of Congress members. He also went to attend the third session of the Congress held at Madras under the President ship of Badruddin Tyabji in the year 1887. A gifted writer, he tried to espouse and impart nationalist feelings and political understanding of country's problems.

Political and social awakening had began to manifest itself amongst the city's Muslim population and the educated in the community had started establishing societies, a famous one being the *Anjuman-i-Tahzeeb* or 'Society for the Propagation of Enlightenment'. Established in 1875 its task was to make aware the Muslims of their

⁶²Arvind Arora, *Kanpur Ka Itihaas*, Vol.III, Kanpur, 2003 pp. 2-3.

⁶³Virendra Nath Dixit, op.cit., p. 5.

social and economic problems. The members of the society included not only the Muslims of Kanpur but also those from distant and far off areas most famous one being Prince consort of Bhopal. The influence of the organization could be ascertained from the fact that of the delegates selected to the fourth session of the Congress being held at Allahabad (1888) 12 were Muslims and were the members of the Anjuman.⁶⁴

The fifteenth session of the Congress was held in Lucknow in the year 1899 under the presidentship of Romesh Chandra Dutt. Many people from Kanpur went to participate in the session. Students like Basant Kumar Bose and Abdul Haque of Christ Church College worked as Congress volunteers. The reception committee was headed by Bansilal Singh, a resident of Kanpur, who made free arrangements for the lodging and boarding of the delegates. The session was more interesting as arrangements for an entertainment programme were also made. These included the plays and exhibitions managed by the New Alfred Theatre Company.⁶⁵

An infamous incident always recalled in the city was the 'Plague Riot' that broke out in the year 1900 as the disease spread rapidly and the arrangements made by the administration were not up

⁶⁴Lakshmikant Tripathi, op.cit., p. 5.

⁶⁵B. Pattabhi Sitaramayya, *The History of the Indian National Congress (1885-1935)*, Allahabad, 1935, p. 296.

to the mark. Hindus and Muslims joined hands and for a week (from April 11 to April 18) there was a severe disruption of governmental activities. To restore calm the government of United Provinces decided to organize a meeting between the Governor of the province and leaders of the Hindu and Muslim communities. Pt. Prithvinath Chak and Shaikh Sanauddin represented their respective communities. It was a brilliant display of Hindu-Muslim unity and the authorities decided to make a course correction. The Plague Riot (also known as *Taoon Danga*) was the second major nationalist upheaval in the city since the revolt of 1857.⁶⁶

Kanpur was turning into a restless city during the opening decade of the twentieth century. The partition of Bengal in the year 1905 had its repercussions in the city and the year also saw the rise of Pt. Narayan Prasad Arora (then 25) who became synonymous with the independence struggle in the city.⁶⁷

The twenty first session of the Congress was held in the year 1905 only at Benares under the presidentship of Gopal Krishna Gokhale. Numerous students from city's famous Christ Church College under the leadership of Narayan Prasad Arora (who was

⁶⁶Arvind Arora, op.cit., pp. 6-7.

⁶⁷Ibid., pp. 7-8.

himself a student) had went to participate in the session and hundreds of volunteers were also enrolled from the city.⁶⁸

He along with Maulana Hasrat Mohani the famous poet and nationalist, and Ganesh Shankar Vidhyarthi (editor of the influential newspaper, *Pratap*) were the three leading lights of the freedom struggle associated with the city.

Significantly *Pratap* was launched as the beacon of nationalism in the city. Its first issue came on November 9, 1913. On 26 October 1916, the newspaper press was asked to deposit rupees 1,000 as security fee for publishing a book entitled *Kulipratha*. Another security deposit of the same amount was asked for publishing a poem entitled *Fida-i-Watan*.⁶⁹

Kanpur was not standing alone from the rest of the country during the Swadeshi movement. Huge demonstrations used to take place in support of the extremist trio of the Congress- Bal-Lal-Pal (viz. Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Lala Lajpat Rai and Bipin Chandra Pal). 16 October 1905 was celebrated as *Rakshabandhan Day* to show solidarity with the people of Bengal and as a mark of protest against the partition. By the end of the year 1908, Aurobindo Ghosh's firebrand journal *Bande Mataram* had started coming in the city. In

⁶⁸Virendra Nath Dixit, op.cit., p. 6.

⁶⁹Sarvesh Kumar 'Suyash', *Kanpur Ka Gandhi: Ganesh Shankar Vidhyarthi*, Kanpur, 1997, p. 14.

1907 Lala Hardayal visited the city and he established the first revolutionary organization in the city. It started running libraries (both secret and open ones). When the publication of *Bande Mataram* was stopped another nationalist and social journal *Karmyogi* started coming in the city.⁷⁰

People of Kanpur started using local made sugar and cloth and various sweet houses too started using local made sugar as swadeshi had given a clarion call for it. Pt Surya Prasad Mishra was the main man behind this act. He himself was a gifted orator and used to extol youth in making this thing a success. He had written many tracts in Hindi to popularise this feature of the movement.⁷¹ In the year 1906 Gopal Krishna Gokhale visited the city and addressed a meeting held under the presidentship of Prithvinath Chak in Rai Purshottam Chandra Theatre Hall. Some people having a leaning towards the extremist group in the Congress started shouting '*Talwar ke zor se Angrezon ko maar nikalo*' (The English should be driven away with the help of swords). They were asked to calm down.⁷²

Some young men like Nalin Kumar Mukherjee and Surya Prasad Mishra along with Narayan Prasad Arora formed a secret society and diffused as they were with the revolutionary fervor took

⁷⁰Shiv Kumar Mishra, *Kranti Ka Agrdoot, Kanpur*, Kanpur, 1988, pp. 5-6.

⁷¹*Abhinandan Granth*, op.cit., Section IV, p. 10.

⁷²Virendra Nath Dixit, op.cit., pp. 6-7.

oath to lay down their lives for their country. The organization had set up a secret library in a house behind Christ Church College and used to subscribe magazines and journals with a militant tone like *Indian Sociologist*, *Talwar*, and *Ghadar*.⁷³

In May 1913 the police raided the houses of Narayan Prasad Arora and Ganesh Shankar Vidhyarthi to search for revolutionary literature which was proscribed by the government. Krishna Arora, wife of Narayan Prasad Arora had very cleverly set the household in an order that the police was not able to find anything. These searches continued to be a talk of the town for many days.⁷⁴

The Kanpur Mosque Incident (1913)

The infamous Machchli Bazaar Mosque incident of 1913 has left its impact on the modern history of Kanpur city. The mosque had a lavatory which extended to the vicinity of road and the district authorities objected to it. Cawnpore Municipality was determined to remove it in order to widen out the road as a part of the city improvement plan. On 1 July, 1913, the portion was demolished. The local *mutawallis* (those who managed the mosque) were satisfied with the authorities' offer to rebuild the structure at a different part of the mosque. But for the politically aware Muslims it was an another

⁷³Shiv Kumar Mishra, op.cit., p. 6.

⁷⁴*Abhinandan Granth*, op.cit., Section IV, pp. 18-19.

example of government's sheer disregard towards Muslim interests, and this feeling was enhanced by the fact that a realignment had been made to miss a Hindu temple but not to avoid the mosque. Mohammad Ali wrote a letter to James Meston, the Lt. Governor of UP, urging him to have the decision of the municipality reversed. It was however rejected. In May a memorial was presented on behalf of the Raja of Mahmudabad. It too was rejected.⁷⁵

Meston however agreed to visit Kanpur and receive a delegation of local Muslims dignitaries on August 9. Maulana Azad Subhani an influential cleric of the city thereupon organized a mass meeting of Muslims on August 3 to ensure that emotions brewing in the community didn't calm down before Meston's visit.⁷⁶ Some ten to fifteen thousand people turned out for the meeting, many carrying black banners, as symbols of mourning. Azad Subhani's speech was very moving and brought tears to people's eyes. A gifted orator he let the people believe that the coming out of the faithful in such large numbers was a reminder to Meston that what he considered to

⁷⁵Francis Robinson, *Separatism Among Indian Muslims: The Politics of The United Provinces 1860-1923*, Cambridge, 1974, pp. 212-213.

⁷⁶Maulana Azad Subhani (b. 1882) was a Sufi *alim* (scholar) of Naqshbandiyya order and politician and head of *Madrasa al Haya* , Kanpur. He was also one of the founding members of Jam'iyyatu'l Ulama He had presided over the *ulema* session of the All India Khilafat Conference at Bombay in 1910. Later he also became Vice President of UPCC.

be a trivial issue was not so. It had genuine Muslim attachment, that Islam was in danger and if the need arose they will lay down their lives for it.⁷⁷

Finally in August the weavers or *julahas* considered to be a very fanatic committee was brought into the city (on their free day) and a riot occurred which could only be curbed with the guns of the police. This incident was widely covered by the Urdu press. A 'Kanpur Mosque Fund' was set up. On 16 August Raja of Mahmudabad led a second delegation of esteemed leaders. But it also proved of no avail (It had demanded the restoration of demolished portion). Muslim lawyers young and old led by Mazhar-ul-Haq⁷⁸ of the Bankipur Bar arrived in Kanpur to fight for the accused and also to carry a message that Muslim community is not helpless. Agitation developed throughout the province and firebrand leaders like Ali Brothers and others were fully supported by the *ulemas* and the campaign got immense momentum due to the press coverings. It

⁷⁷ Gail Minault, *The Khilafat Movement: Religious Symbolism and Political Mobilization in India*, Delhi, 1982, p. 47.

⁷⁸ Mazhar-ul-Haq was the Vice-President of the Bihar Provincial Congress Committee in 1909, and he was elected the President of its third session held at Gaya on 6 November 1911. He also became one of the founder secretaries of the Muslim League and was therefore serving in both the organizations. He had stated, "I am a Muslim Leaguer as well, because I believe in the unity of India. I believe that it is the duty of every Mohammedan to join the League as well as Congress."- Hassan Imam, *Indian National Movement*, Delhi, 1999, p. 38.

pervaded the mosques. It insinuated itself into the *zananas*. It embraced Muslims of all shades of opinion.⁷⁹

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad who was a young and a dynamic journalist had forcefully taken up the issue and in fact said that, “Indian Muslims had offered their co-religionists the gift of our split blood, the blood which had flown in Libya in the Balkan Peninsula and in Persia. The earth has demanded our blood and the blood split in Kanpur has saturated the dust in India.” In fact he believed that the Muslims had forfeited their loyalty to the British. He also held the notion that the casualty of the bullets in Kanpur were not Muslims but British justice. He draw a comparison of the massacre at Kanpur with the massacre of Karbala when Prophet Muhammad’s grandson Imam Hussain was martyred.⁸⁰

The incident had a very profound effect on the Muslims all over the country. An Urdu leaflet written by one Munshi Taj Muhammad, Secretary to the Anjuman Zia – Ul – Islam, Karachi was circulated on Eid day and it appealed to all Muslims of the city to earnestly help their fellow religionists and their relations with money who either had been killed or injured in Kanpur Mosque incident. In Sholapur also on 16 September one Abdus Samad, collected Rupees

⁷⁹Francis Robinson, op.cit., p. 214.

⁸⁰Quoted in Ayesha Jalal, *Partisans of Allah: Jihad in South Asia*, Ranikhet, 2008, p. 198.

25 from about 500 Muslims for the injured and families of the deceased. Donations were also made by the Muslims of Ratnagiri and Broach.⁸¹

Finally the Viceroy, Lord Hardinge, arrived in Kanpur, invited Mazhar-ul-Haq and Raja of Mahmudabad to a lunch and engineered a compromise in which the demolished portion was restored in a manner that Muslims were satisfied. He also agreed to drop charges against the prisoners.⁸²

Events were unfolding at a fast pace. The Lucknow session of the Congress in December 1916 under the presidentship of Ambika Charan Majumdar saw the coming together of Moderate and Extremist sections of the Indian National Congress. After a gap of nine years the two groups were united. (They had split in the Surat session of 1907). Gandhi and Tilak both attended it.⁸³

Annie Besant (who along with Bal Gangadhar Tilak) was the chief organizer of the Home Rule movement in the country had greatly impressed Ganesh Shankar Vidhyarthi. The Home Rule League was established in the city on 1 January 1916 and its office was opened at Meston road. Meetings used to take place here on every

⁸¹Home Poll. A, October 1913, No. 100-118, NAI.

⁸²Francis Robinson, op.cit., p. 214. For a complete and comprehensive study of the Kanpur Mosque Incident of 1913 see Shan Muhammad (ed.), *The Indian Muslims: A Documentary Record*, Vol.IV, Meerut, 1980.

⁸³Arvind Arora, op.cit., p. 11.

Tuesday and various problems were discussed. Home Rule delegates from the city had went to attend the Lucknow session. It was in Lucknow session only that Ganesh Shankar Vidhyarthi first met Gandhi.⁸⁴

The arrest of Mrs. Besant on 1 July 1917 drew hundreds of people in protest in the city. An open meeting was held to show solidarity with Mrs. Besant and the day was celebrated as '*Swarajya Diwas*' (Independence Day).⁸⁵

Bal Gangadhar Tilak, perhaps the tallest leader of the time had stopped at Kanpur while returning from the Lucknow session. As the repression of the government was in full swing no organization was willing to make arrangements for firebrand leader's speech but the city was not so docile also. Pt. Vishwambhar Nath Shukla (a retired headmaster) made arrangements for a mass meeting at city's historic Parade ground. Only Narayan Prasad Arora and Ganesh Shankar Vidhyarthi went to the station to receive him.⁸⁶

A prominent stalwart of the city was Jawaharlal Rohatgi, a doctor by profession who had made Kanpur his home. He was also active in various social activities and his bungalow in city's Civil

⁸⁴Virendra Nath Dixit, op.cit., pp. 7-9.

⁸⁵Ibid., p. 9.

⁸⁶Arvind Arora, op.cit., p. 12.

Lines area had almost become a guest house for Congress leaders. Jawaharlal Rohatgi nurtured this thing throughout his life.⁸⁷

Mahatma Gandhi had also first visited the city while returning from the Lucknow Session in 1916. He met the local Congress volunteers in the office of the *Pratap* press. Those present in the meeting included Murari Lal Rohatgi, elder brother of Jawaharlal Rohatgi and like him was also a doctor. A devout Arya Samajist, he had also established *Vidhwashram Kanya Vidhyalaya* for imparting education to women who had become widows in their childhood.

Gandhi was impressed by Murari Lal and asked him to guide or take the mantle of leading the youth of the city in the freedom struggle. He humbly accepted Gandhi's offer and along with Ganesh Shankar Vidhyarthi involved himself in the activities of the Congress. Very soon he was elevated to the position of President of the city Congress committee. He remained on the same until 1922 when it was later bequeathed to Narayan Prasad Arora.⁸⁸

⁸⁷Ibid., pp. 12-13.

⁸⁸Arvind Arora, *Beesween Sadi ke Kanpur ke Prassidh Purush avem Mahilayen*, Kanpur, 1947, p. 35.