CHAPTER EIGHT

CONCLUSION: EPILOGUE
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With the end of the Commission Enquiry of Major Hazlewood the storm seemed to have passed over. The Vellore Mutiny afforded abundant materials for speculation as to future. The safety of the empire demanded that the bond of connection between the native army and their British officers should be confirmed and strengthened. The most remarkable yet lamentable circumstance brought to light by the Vellore incident was the want of cordiality and confidence between the British and the Native officers. The Mutiny was the outcome of a deep-rooted hatred of Mohammandans and Hindus to the rule of a Christian nation. It was such a hatred always lurking in the heart of the Natives, that was ready to erupt at the slightest encouragement or provocation, and made every outbreak of the natives against the Europeans a "War of Extermination".

The primary causes of the Mutiny have been classified under three different theories, namely, Administrative Theory, Muslim Conspiracy Theory and Religious Theory. Lord William Bentinck considered that the primary cause of the Mutiny and unrest in the army stations was the New Turban and the interference with the caste marks, which roused the sepoys a fear about the contamination of their religion. The
conspiracy led by the Mysore princes and the local poygars was secondary. In the opinion of Sir John Cradock, the Commander-in-Chief of the army, "the condition of the people is not so happy as it was" and that this had been the real trouble. The arrangements and institutions of the natives were considered better than the British regulations. The new judicial reforms and revenue reforms were considered as preparatory steps to "greater innovations".

The striking feature about the Vellore Mutiny and other unrests in the army stations was that in almost all Court enquiries the Indian witnesses were largely silent. Against dozens of the British voices, angry, troubled or cocksure, the Indian witnesses were calm and silent. Not even the slightest insight could be recovered from them regarding the formation of the conspiracy and the real instigators or supporters of the same. At best the British could hear from four Indian Officers of high caste — two Hindus and two Muslims — who, when the Mutiny was still two months off, gave evidence before the Court Martial that the New Turban did not violate religious prejudices. The Vellore incidents, showed that the British could not foretell what might happen in the depths of the Indian sea and could not afterwards know for sure why it had happened.
The second theory, namely, the Muslim conspiracy theory, had also been accepted as the cause of unrest in the South. Evidence put forward prove that the Mutiny was purely political in character and arose out of a conspiracy to replace a Mohammedan dynasty on the throne of Mysore. This was aided and supported powerfully by the Southern Polygars and the French. But Sir Thomas Munro wrote that the restoration of the Muslim Power alone never could have been the motive for such a conspiracy. Such an event could have been desirable to none of the Hindus who formed the bulk of the Native Troops while it was acceptable only to a part of the Mohammadians.

The general opinion of the most "intelligent Natives" was that it was intended to make the sepoys Christians. This was also the view taken by the Home authorities, who recalled Lord William Bentinck and Sir John Crawfurd. All the above theories were closely interwoven and the conspiracy was the ultimate point towards which all the course of action was directed. The despatched emissaries and agents of sedition who struck terror into the hearts of the British rulers were the real founders of unrest. These ingredients hidden into the "silent Ocean" could not be understood by the British officers as they had politically, socially and economically stood aloof. They knew little or nothing of
the customs and manners of the natives. They could not move freely nor had they any social bondage with them. They could not associate or could see them in their houses, and could not understand their feelings. Thus the British were the "strangers" in the land. Regarding the religious theory, the very safety of the British rule rested upon this. The natives of India were not a "political" but a "religious" people. If the religious innovations set in, as in the case of the Vellore Mutiny, indignation would spread from one end of Hindustan to the other and finally the whole population would try to drive away the "aliens" from this portion of the globe. That is why, the British, considering the imminent danger, allowed the natives to follow their own religious practices after the Vellore Mutiny which lulled the national feeling and liberty for some time. But the lessons learnt in 1806 were forgotten in 1857. The "Turbans" were substituted by the "Greasèd Cartridges" in 1857. The same religious prejudices caused the Great Mutiny once again in 1857. But it must be accepted that the sepoys at Vellore had greater cause of offence than they of latter years.

It was about this time that the first English Missionaries had entered in Bengal on the work which St. Francis Xavier had begun and the Protestant Swart had continued in Southern India. The Company's servants looked on the new
movement with dread as a likely danger to public peace and
the labours of Cary, Ward and Marshman of the Christian
Missionary had to be carried on from the Danish settlement
of Serampore on Hugli. As a result, the report of a set
design on the part of the English against the creeds and cus-
toms of the natives spread throughout the South. The
spirit of discontent and distrust thus engendered among the
sepoys was carefully formed by the Mohammedans with the
active support of the Southern Polygar people when Tipu's
families were allowed to dwell at no great distance from the
Mysore frontier. In 1805 the fifth report from the select
committee stated that "rumours have prevailed, that our
government is extremely unpopular in the ceded and conquered
Provinces. The country has been, during some time, in a
state of much commotions and disorder."

The political condition was disastrous. The non-
interference policy of George Barlow, the Governor-General,
had only two alternatives, either to impose authority on all
states of India or to secure immunity from attack by leaving
the Indian kings free to quarrel among themselves. The
later policy, truly described as a policy of "disgrace
without tranquillity" was the one he actually adopted. It
was even believed by many Indians that the British were
deliberately plotting the destruction of the old religions
in order to convert the Indians forcibly to Christianity. It is difficult to determine to what extent this belief was genuine or how much of it was fostered by propagandist agitators for their own purposes. Undoubtedly, it was a mixture of both. Missionaries of all Christian denominations had been hard at work in each annexed territory from the first moment of its inclusion under the British rule. In actual fact the British authorities had, for many years, erred on the side of undue caution in all matters concerning the Sepoy's religion and any customs connected with it. This careful attitude was followed from 1806 after the lessons learnt from the Vellore Mutiny.

The Indian peasantry was pressed on all directions, political, social and economical. They were impoverished under the long pressure of grievous oppressions. For, such tremendous explosives like the insurrections of Bengal, the insurrections at Mysore and the Polygar revolts of South India cannot be traced by any stretch of imagination to the grievances only of a particular class of individuals, namely the zamindars or the Polygars. The dislike of the British system had been so deeply engrained in the hearts of the people that it would have been surprising were it otherwise. Even the British officials repeatedly warned the authorities that the hostility and aversion to the
British rule in India had nothing in the circumstances of the English being conquered or foreigners. The real cause was in their own short sighted policy and cupidity, and consequent extortion and misgovernment which they had practiced. Such was the political condition of the period and but for the prompt and vigorous measures taken the whole country would have been "one scene of rebellion and outrage".

Lord William Bentinck writes to Lord Minto, the Governor General:

"I must say that my confidence is as strong as ever — all that has happened is owing solely our own misconduct and mismanagement. It may appear extraordinary that the native officers took not the part of the Government but made common cause as it were with the sepoys. This was a natural combination where the determination to invade their religious prejudices was supposed to exist on the part of their superiors. The severity of our discipline is considered and connected with the firmness and energy of the European character so often observed by them in the field. The general ignorance of the Native languages on the part of the European officers is a great bar to communication and to the establishment of that confidence which should exist between the Natives and European officers. There seems to be a great error in policy among the European officers of the army in this respect."

Lord William Bentinck agrees with Lord Minto the new Governor General that there had been a notable failure
of communication and trust. The British mismanagement had allowed the soldiers to imagine that their religion was under threat. The British officers had failed to learn the languages of the natives or to give native officers a respectable place in the service. The "two nations" were cut off in many respects. In 1804, Lord Bentinck wrote a phrase in his Minute "founding the British greatness on the Indian happiness". The sense of responsibility and feelings of cordiality, which would lead the English to its greatness and the Indians to its happiness, lay buried in that phrase. It was altogether a new conception with which the Indian mind was not conversant.

The overthrow of Tipu and the Transfer of the Arcot Nawab's territory to the Company excited the hatred of the Mussalmen population towards the British Government. The Muslim priests represented that their religion was in danger. The negotiations for the transfer of the Carnatic was conducted throughout with the most cold, studied and contemptuous neglect of the feelings and sufferings of the adherents of the Arcot family. As soon as the Nawab acceded to the transfer, a set of native revenue servants were let loose upon the country. Many of the old servants of the Nawab were left to perish for want while the Board of Revenue was leisurely discussing the merits of their petition for a subsistence. Active agents were not wanting
to increase the discontent excited by their proceedings and to encourage a spirit of revenge. It was reported that the police officers at Vellore are in league with the conspirators or wholly neglected their duty. When these remote causes were strong in the minds of the natives a trifling cause was sufficient to produce the Mutiny at Vellore.

Of all the earlier mutinies from Plassey, the Vellore Mutiny is specially worthy of study because in many respects the lessons which it taught were relevant to the great mutiny of 1857. The Vellore outbreak might easily have set Southern India ablaze had it not been crushed at the very start by the resolute action of Col. Gillespie. The danger to the independence of India was a first perceived by Nana Farnavis of Poona and Hyder Sahib of Mysore. From that day onwards the presence of this danger began to be seen, faintly at least, by the princes of India and its effect was markedly seen in the Mutiny of Vellore. This rising at Vellore was a rehearsal of the great Mutiny of 1857. In this rising the sepoys had been won over by the Princes and people. At markets, preachers distinguished as Fakirs were preaching to indicate the time of rising. Hindus and Mohammedans together had risen in the name of religion and liberty. But unknowingly through this being the first rehearsal in the "War of Independence" they fell even as they were rising.
By the political biographies and other records of the early years of the 19th century the Indian Empire was generally supposed to be in imminent peril through the discontents of the native forces. The condition of 1806 threw a strong light of illustration and interest on the incidents of various Indian Mutinies from the enlistment of the first sepoys to the reign of Lord Wellesley's successor, George Burlow, supposed at the time to be probably the last Governor General of India. The panic once over, the statesmen began to be ashamed of it, and to see or to say that there were dangers greater even than Mutiny.

In the case of Vellore Mutiny two extremes of Sepoy conduct were witnessed. When one body of the Native sepoys killed their officers, another (Gillespie's native cavalry) put them to death for doing it. During the whole period 1760-1809 there were occasional disclosures which made prudent men and especially officers who knew the sepoys best, warn their rulers and the officers that the British Indian Empire was under the condition of radical insecurity. In all the Presidencies the fidelity of the sepoys depended too much on personal predilection and on hazardous chances, to be considered safe and certain at any time and under any circumstances. The most startling of these disclosures took place on the 10th July, 1806 at Vellore.
Regarding the new dress regulations, unmerciful floggings were inflicted on account of the New Turbans and every stripe alienated a native heart. Writes H. Martineau:

"Traditions let nothing drop among the imaginative and credulous Asiatic peoples. While our British Public of the present generation needs to be instructed in the narrative of the Vellore massacre, every descendant of the Mutineers is full of stories of signs and portents and of deeds or heroism and self sacrifice for an ancient faithful also, no doubt, of impulse to Mutiny again under the remembrance of that old time: and the example of the new. If the Bengal Mutiny extends to Madras, there will be a grand revival of the traditions of Vellore."

Many historians have compared both the mutinies of 1806 and 1857 and have expressed the opinion that both may be attributed to the same causes — religious fanaticism and caste prejudices acted upon by agents of a political conspiracy. In both the Mutinies the British officers displayed most culpable ignorance of the habits of thought and prejudices of the troops they commanded, outrages were offered to the religious feelings of the sepoys sufficient to provoke revolt. Hence most of the writers point out that the Vellore Mutiny was the model of Great Mutiny of 1857 and so it is considered as the "First war of Independence."

The prolonged struggle for Independence started with
the Battle of Plassey and after hundred years, ended with the outbreak of the Mutiny of 1857. It passed through many stages, underwent different phases of development, but as a whole, the Plassey epoch presented a singular unity in its fundamentals, the rise of the British Rule in India, and the consequent change, one of tremendous significance, in the economic and political structure of the country. As Toynbee writes, "the reception of a foreign culture is painful as well as a hazardous undertaking." Every conquest and rule of a foreign power whether imperial or colonial has in it a stain of evil. It wounds the spirit of the conquered country. It destroys the national character and extinguishes the national spirit. The foreign to the soil encroaching on its customs and institutions and also on the very means of subsistence of the people, builds up stresses and stain. An alien rule cannot but be disliked. The British rule followed the policy of unscrupulous defiance of moral principles and the reckless exploitation of the masses that characterised the early activities of the traders, made the company rule odious and hateful to the people. In one aspect Muslim rule in India on the eve of the British ascendency was considered alien but they were the Asians, who came and settled for many years and thousands of the Indians were converted to their faith. In such a condition the Muslims in league with the brother Indians
stood against the Europeans for which the common cause demanded an united effort in 1806. There is no wonder that the commotion and disturbances were always round the corner during the beginning of the company rule. Under such circumstances even an ordinary civil disturbance arising from some local grievances took a political complexion which obliges the foreign Government to suppress the popular revolts which followed. Very seldom the years from 1757 to 1857 were free from either civil or military disturbances.

The Vellore Mutiny came as a great shock for the British. It was a regular Mutiny which broke out in 1806. It was one of the traumatic experiences that punctured the British stay in India. Though the Bombay Government, in the previous year had discovered a conspiracy among the Indian troops at Goa, no one had seen Vellore coming. The result among the British in South India was panic. As Hume pointed out, "like men affrighted in the dark", the British, "took every shadow for a spectre". For many nights the British officers, after the Vellore Mutiny, went to bed in the uncertainty of rising alive. They believed that Vellore incidents had been only a beginning of a wide conspiracy which would spread throughout the army. On 3rd August, 1806, Lord William Bentinck wrote to the Governor of Ceylon that "no dependence can be placed upon any of our native troops". From October to December 1806, the
British officers at various outlying army stations had, on no evidence, taken to locking themselves in or to arresting or disarming their Indian Troops. When the news of the Vellore Mutiny reached England it caused a great sensation and the Vellore incidents were considered as the most alarming symptoms. Through the spate of private letters revealed the news of the French emissaries at work and the Indians were widely disaffected even six months after the Vellore incidents Edward Parry, the Chairman of the Court of Directors still thought Madras looked very gloomy. But the British were also trying to domesticate a happening in itself terrible and potentially catastrophic, into something they could understand, hence something they could remedy. This was the greatest diplomatic skill of the British rulers. When Major Hazlewood came forward to prove the existence of the Southern Conspiracy and the French Emissaries at work in the South, so daring and a bold step to come forward, the Enquiry Commission simply ignored every thing telling that his evidences were not considerable. But in reality, after learning all the dangers before the ruling party they were capable of managing the situation tactfully but not openly. The British authorities were aware of all the dangers of Mutiny in the South but they took all firm measures to console and claim the situation if not permanently only temporarily.
Thus the Vellore Mutiny ended giving way for further revolutions. Polygar disturbances in Chittoor from 1801 to 1805 and Southern districts advanted the rise of a conspiracy in the South. The fallen powers of the local polygars, Carnatic Nawabs and Tipu of Mysore, and other native rulers stood as the instigators and supporters of the conspiracy. The disbanded soldiers of the Native rulers and friends were active members of the conspiracy. The secret agents despatched in the disguise of religious mendicants were the messengers of the conspiracy. The native officers were the leaders of the conspiracy. The military stations of the British in the South were the places of attack. It was thought that the weakening of the military power of the British would be an easy way to put an end to foreign rule. All attempts of an open rebellion and open war proved to be futile.

There were favourable chances for the conspirators to succeed in their attempts. The introduction of Western Administration had already given rise to a general feeling of discontent and dissatisfaction. The active propagation of Christian religion and the zeal of missionary activities had already created a strong fear into the minds of the sepoys. The British Government, without knowing the real condition
stations and also there was a threat of foreign attack.
The French under Napoleon had a plan of attack over India and actively tried to get the help of the Marathas and other local rulers. The British were much startled by the activity of the French agents in India. The court enquiries at all the places proved that a conspiracy was very active in the South and the Fakir emissaries were travelling all over the army stations. The plan of the conspirators was to instigate the sepoys in all army stations and it was thought of taking a chance to drive the English which was an easy task for 50,000 native sepoys against 13,000 European officers. This aim directed the conspirators to make a general rise against the British, but miserably failed mostly due to the premature attempt at Vellore. The British Government did not show any sign of the knowledge but secretly domesticated all the incidents. Because they wanted to establish an internal peace and at the same time to check the foreign attack. The court enquiries were purposely delayed and in many cases the enquiries were just a formality.

The British Government came to the conclusion that the unrest and dissatisfaction were the result of maladministration. The defects in army administration such as differences in status and salary, poor chances of promotion, illtreatment of the European officers generally created
discontent and dissatisfaction. The company learnt a lesson from the general discontent in all the army stations among the native sepoys that such conditions would end in a revolution. Lord William Bentinck agreed that there had been a notable failure of communication and trust between the Europeans and the Native sepoys. The British had failed to learn the languages or to give Indian officers a respectable place. The Government passed orders to all European officers to study the local languages and have close connections with the sepoys. They also decided to introduce new innovations if any only after a careful study and scrutiny. But the British authorities failed to understand the sentiments and feelings of the natives. The unrest and discouragement among the British officers themselves, the fear of external attack, lack of better understanding with the Native Rulers etc., prevented the authorities from understanding the social habits and customs of the people.

It was thought that the number of European officers and soldiers should be increased to prevent future unrest. "They are few" and "we are many" were the popular cries of the sepoys. So the British officers recommended to enlist more British men in the Native Army. Accordingly, in the following years the number of Europeans was increased in the army. But Malcolm, after many years of study of the Native force, expressed the opinion that the changes which improved
the discipline of the sepoys by the introduction of more Europeans and more English discipline among them (sepoys) did far more mischief than good by impairing the original spirit of military loyalty which distinguished Lord Clive's soldiery in the first crisis. 23

A series of Polygar rebellion started from the fall of Tipu (1800 to 1806). The political disturbances of those years were of a very serious nature. Shone who had seen the official correspondence from most of the districts of U.P. of that period was forced to observe that but for the prompt and vigorous measures taken, the whole country would have been "one scene of rebellion". But as expected by the British authorities, the suppressed unrest was not permanent. In 1809 a revolution broke out under the leadership of Thalavai Veluthambl. 24 In 1812, after the suppression of the rebellion of 1809, another revolution erupted in the same place in which the Dewan of Travancore aimed at the overthrow of British authority. The brave defence of Mysore, and the heroic death of Tipu, martyrdom of the Vellore mutineers had set noble examples of national exertion and served as an inspiration to other spirits.

Another mutiny broke out in 1809 which was of a different character. It was the mutiny among the European officers themselves. This was known as the "White Mutiny". 25
Many British officers were either arrested or suspended. The immediate steps taken by the British to dispose the prisoners and severe punishments meted out to all those who took active part in the conspiracy seemed to put an end to all unrest and revolutions in India. But very seldom in the years from 1757 to 1857 was the country free from either civil or military disturbances. Before the catastrophe of 1857 many dangers were averted and suppressed by the British. The rule of a foreign power, and encroachment upon its customs and institutions carried with it a stain of evil and it wounded the spirit of the natives, built up stresses and strains which no Bentinck or Ripon could palliate.