Chapter 6

IDEOLOGICAL AND POLITICAL DIMENSIONS OF THE REBELLION, 1857

The revolt of 1857 which began from Meerut, soon spread to different parts of the country like a wild fire. Within a week entire Northern India revolted and the English rule disappeared.1 Delhi, as discussed earlier, became the centre of rebel activities, particularly because it was the capital of the Mughal Empire. There was a King on the throne of Delhi whose forefathers had built an Empire and introduced such a policy of toleration that despite the weakening of the political authority of the Mughals, the Mughal King continued to enjoy reverence and high regard from the people. The rebels probably expected that by raising Bahadur Shah, the last Mughal King, as their leader, they could bring a revolutionary change. The neighbouring zamindars, ruling classes and the distant chieftains would respond to the call of the Mughal Emperor and fight against the English. This inference is particularly strengthened by the rebels proclamations issued from time to time, addressed to the Hindus and Muslims as well as Rajas and zamindars, seeking their help in expelling the English from India. Delhi Proclamation of May 1857 refers to the English attempts to christianise Indians. Consequently the Sepoys working at Delhi and Meerut revolted to defend their religion. The Proclamation

thus urged upon the people — both Hindus and Mussalmans to remain united and asked people to enlist themselves in the forces to be raised against the English. The next Proclamation issued in the name of Bahadur Shah by the rebels in Delhi is more interesting. It appeals to all Rajas appreciating them for their virtues, noble qualities, liberality and calling them the protector of not only their own faith but also the faith of others. The Proclamation further appeals to them not to support the English and urges the addressees to destroy them. In this Proclamation the necessity for protecting the religion has been emphasized in the following words: "The English are the people who overthrow all religions. You should understand well that with the object of destroying the religions of Hindustan, they have for a long time been writing books to be circulated throughout the country by the hands of their clergymen." This Proclamation further refers to the English attempts to prohibit Sati, disallow smooth succession, particularly discontinuing the age old practice of adoption and so on. The Proclamation also lays emphasis that the slaughter of kine and cows has been banned by the rebel leaders and that they were determined to kill the English wherever they were found. The most detailed and elaborate Proclamation issued by Bahadur Shah on 25th August 1857 represents the actual sentiments of the rebels who revolted against the English. Briefly, the Hindus and Muslims of India were being ruined under the tyranny and oppression of the infidel and

2. Ibid. pp. 442-44.
treacherous English. It, therefore, urged the wealthy people of India, specially of those who have any sort of connection with any of the Muslim royal families and were considered the protectors and masters of their people, to stake their lives and properties, for the well being of the public. This Proclamation was issued probably in an optimistic mood as some princes were reported to have been sent outside India for seeking help from different countries, and, generate anger of the Hindus and Muslim against the English for their bad work. That is why the Muslims and Hindus raised green and Mahaviri flags respectively to destroy the English.

The most interesting part of this Proclamation has been divided into five sections which by and large covers all sections of Indian population. Referring to the Zamindars the proclamation says that the English government in making Zamindari settlements had imposed exorbitant Jama, and had disgraced and ruined several Zamindars by putting up their states to public auction for arrears of rent. This section has also a conservative outlook as it says that the English laws were such that any suit filed by a common royts, maid servant or a slave against a Zamindar could lead to their summoning in the court, putting in jail and disgrace. Further, the stamp duties, other unnecessary expenses of the Civil courts and all sorts of crooked dealings, and delay in the settlement of cases were all calculated to impoverish the litigants. It also criticises that every year the Zamindars were also taxed for schools, hospitals and roads etc. Then
the Proclamation says that if the Bahadur Shahi government was reestablished such extortions would be stopped, the Jama would be light, the dignity and honour of the Zamindars would be saved and maintained and the Zamindari disputes would be decided in the light of Shariat and Shastras without any expense.

The second section of the Proclamation refers to the state of merchants and traders. It says that the English monopolised the trade of all the fine and valuable merchandise such as indigo, cloth, and other articles of exports, leaving only the trifles to the people and even in this they are not without their share of the profits, which they secure by means of customs and stamp fees. Despite this the merchants were liable to imprisonment and disgrace on the complaint of a worthlessman. The Proclamation thus assures that when the King's government would be established, such fraudulent practices would be dispensed with and trade of every article, both by land and water, would be opened to the native merchants of India who would have the benefit of the government steam vessels and steam carriages for conveyance of their merchandise. Thus the Proclamation urged upon the merchants to support the war against the English.

The Proclamation further refers to the plight of educated community of India who were in the Civil and military services on a very low salary and enjoyed little respect from their masters, and commanded no influence. It also accused the English government of keeping all the keyposts of dignity and high salary in civil and
military for the Englishmen. The Indians were not allowed any promotion except a petty position of subedar in military or a Sadr-i-'Aala in Civil services without any influence, jagir and rewards. The Proclamation assured Indians that after the restoration of the Badshahi rule, the old system of grant of mansabs, jagirs with all dignity and prestige in their appointments to various higher civil and military positions would be made.

The Proclamation is also addressed to the artisans' problems. Needless to say that with the coming of the English, Indian weavers, the cotton dressers, the carpenters, blacksmiths and the shoemakers etc. had suffered heavily due to heavy imports from England. A large number of them had been rendered unemployed and every description of Indian artisan had been reduced to beggary. The Proclamation assured the artisans and others that the Badshahi government would take care of them and ensure their prosperity.

The Proclamation also took care of the learned like the Pandits and Ulema, the Faqirs and other persons. It also assured them a better future under the Badshahi government as it would work for their welfare.

This proclamation is of vital importance for understanding the nature of the rebellion as it covers larger section of Indian society which suffered at the hands of English conquerors. This Proclamation was followed by other proclamations in Delhi which invariably
denounced the English rule in India and urged upon the people to get united in the war against the English and ensure their ouster from the Indian subcontinent. Indeed, the proclamation represented the sentiments of sensible and dynamic Indian sections of population, which was fully conscious of the nature of the English rule and its exploitative nature which were ruining the Indian economy and society and endangering religions of Hindus and Muslims. Unfortunately, in this struggle of freedom, this section of Indian population could not receive the expected support from the upper and ruling classes which were still possessing considerable strength in men, material and money. Bahadur Shah's appeal to them bore no result in the face of English diplomatic manoeuvring and the selfish nature of Indian ruling classes. The English diplomacy was to prevent by hook or crook the land owning classes as well as the ruling classes from joining the rebel camp. The rebels during the progress of the rebellion had also begun to target the loyal Talukadars, their agents and pro-English elements for not supporting their cause. This situation alarmed the English diplomats who feared that if the land owning classes including the ruling classes joined hands with the rebels, the English would have to pack up and leave the country. The concern of the English can be understood from the letters of the English officers sent to Governor General from time to time. Henry Tucker wrote to the Governor General describing the situation thus, "All the large land holders and auction purchasers are paralysed and dispossessed,
their agents being frequently murdered and their property destroyed."¹

The rebels targeting the loyalists, plundering their houses, destroying their account books and other material of luxury, made them to fear the consequences of the victory of the rebels. To quote Joyce: "Most of them were shrewd enough to perceive that it would not answer their purpose to join the rebel court."² Outram's statement is also significant. He says that "a large and influential class in Awadh .......... among the most powerful and most of the middle classes of chiefs and Zamindars desired the establishment of English rule."³

Another English officer's statement that most of the Zamindars' participation in the mutiny had been more nominal than real.⁴ Some of these Zamindars also maintained armed neutrality and sent to the rebel camp only such contingents as were demanded and personally remained passive.⁵ Some of the rulers and Zamindars kept the English authorities informed of the movements of the mutineers and their want of ammunitions.⁶ The Delhi rebels also faced such a situation as they did not receive expected supports from the neighbouring Zamindars, Rajas and Nawabs. In chapter three we have already discussed that how the Nawabs of Jhajjhjar, Pataudi, the Raja of Ballabhgarh, Tula Ram of Rewari and others remained passive towards the call of Bahadur Shah. Not

only that, as we have already discussed in chapter three the Raja of Ballabhgarh, the Nawab of Jajhjhar, Rao Tula Ram were double dealing. On the one hand, they were giving all oral assurances or sending a small contingent to Delhi, they themselves remained within their territories on the pretext of maintaining law and order. Bahadur Shah did not considered such as situation to be favourable. Sick of getting no active support, at one stage, he desired to relinquish the imperial power in the favour of the rulers of Jaipur, Jodhpur, Bikaner and Alwar as he could not rely on the extant situation.\(^1\) While Bahadur Shah was shattered and his life was rendered miserable as Cave Brown writes, ".........to the amazement of the few admitted into the secret, at the very time when the rebel force seemed the strongest, and our position of most perilous, Shah Bahadoor Shah, Emperor of Hindostan, sent in to camp to treat for terms."\(^2\) It may be imagined that Bahdur Shah was in such a state of mind at a time when the rebels were apparently in a commanding position in Delhi. But Bahadur Shah understood the consequences of the infighting of the princes, the Sepoys and other interested groups which was bound to bring disgrace to the aspiration of freedom. It is not surprising that the zamindars, the rulers and money lenders also found their interest in supporting the English and not the rebels to protect their own interest in India. We find that to prevent the continuous inroads by the so called plundering Sepoys in Delhi, they decided, "to buy up a regiment by monthly payment and later on raise a private police

force to protect themselves from plunder and violence." However, this arrangement could not last long in Delhi and on 20th August 1857 they decided to resist jointly further exaction by the Sepoys. In fact the relationship of the Sepoys with the bankers and other prosperous classes in and around Delhi had entered a vicious circle. The Sepoys were starving as they lacked state patronage due to a vacant imperial treasury. Hence, they targeted the affluent classes in and around Delhi. Resistance from the affluent classes made the Sepoys more desperate and they began to indulge in unrestrained plunder. Scores of bankers, nobles, merchants and princes were threatened by the Sepoys in a daily bid to extort money from them. This situation resulted in the abandonment of propertied classes to support the rebels. This followed by the refusal of all supplies to the sepoys in Delhi for want of payment. By the end of August, due to the abandonment of all supplies, the rebels in Delhi were not getting rations and regular supplies of sulphur to manufacture gunpowder. In Delhi the well to do classes believed that the sepoys were full of money as looted wealth was with them and they would hardly endeavour to protect the city. Thus in Delhi, if people like Hakim Ahsanullah Khan, Mirza Ilahi Baksh and Begum Zeenat Mahal were prepared to make up with the English government, it is not surprising. They desired as Cooper says, ".........the mercy of the

1. Metacalfe, pp. 59, 93.
2. Ibid. pp. 20-23.
3. Ibid. p. 216.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid. p. 214.
7. Ibid. p. 214.
Government is particularly asked for the 'King, the nobles and the citizens of Delhi who are innocent and helpless.'

While in Delhi pro-English elements were raising obstacles to the rebels' cause, in the villages and towns around Delhi shrewd and avaricious moneylenders, who had prospered under the English land and legal system, helped the English government to suppress the rebellion. The trading community was also interested in the restoration of the English rule and thus, one way or the other, supported the English. In this regard the statement of Cooper and Holmes are illuminating, as the claimed that the Baniyas ... and native contractors, never lost their confidence in the power of the Company's government. They believed that the English would recapture power in three months time. Holmes also recorded, ".... the mercantile and shopkeeping classes .... who knew that their position and prosperity were staked upon the continuance of ordinary rule, and would be liable to ruin, amid the anarchy which would be sure to follow after its subversion, were steady, if not loyal supporters of the government ...." Naturally such feelings among the various classes of people who enjoyed influences through their money and muscle powers paid little attention to the call of the rebels. Contrarily they vied with each other in loyalty of their addresses and offers of services. Here a reference to Talmeez Khaldoon's conclusion to the whole attitude

2. Holmes, pp. 45, 163, 188.
4. Cooper, p. 16.
of the Indian middle class especially the Zamindars, moneylenders, merchants, educated middle class and the native officials is revealing: "...all sided with the British are observed sullen neutrality as demanded by the circumstances in which they were caught. All looked to the British as saviours at a time when the Indian peasantry was fighting desperately to free itself of foreign as well as feudal bondage." It would thus be seen that the beginning of the rebellion was made by the sepoys and joined by the peasantry enmasse — a class which was already prepared and desperately hoped for the betterment of their lot. But other classes, especially the Zamindars and merchants, the small and big rulers remained indifferent and observed sullen neutrality to the cause of the rebels. Consequently, the burden of struggle against the mightiest empire of the time, fell on the shoulders of poor peasantry and the poor sepoys who lacked resources to keep their struggle alive.

Apart from the syndrome of the ruling classes and their attitude to the rebels of 1857, which had weakened their position greatly, there were some other reasons which contributed to the failure of the struggle. Besides betrayal by the propertied classes, contributing to the defeat of the rebels in their fight for political and economic freedom, probably the most important reason for the collapse of the rebellion was the lack of a central military leadership. This becomes very clear when we compare it with the military organisation of the

1. P.C. Joshi, p. 52.
English. At all centres of rebellion such as Delhi, Jhansi, Gawaliar, Bareilly and Lucknow this weakness was noted by Sir John Lawrence, "..... had a single leader of ability arisen among them (rebels) .... we must have been lost beyond redemption." ¹

The rebels in Delhi also suffered from perpetual financial stringency. They were also short of equipments. ² This position is explained by the rebels' attitude in plundering some of the wealthy persons in Delhi or pressurising the mahajans to pay money as we have already discussed in chapter four. It would therefore be very unfair to accuse the rebels for plunder and loot of the people. Moreover, after the outbreak of the rebellion, Delhi had become the centre of rebel Sepoys, who without considering the financial implications had assembled there. It is noted that except Bakht Khan who had brought a treasure of 4 lakh rupees, no other rebel leader had brought money. The financial position of Bahadur Shah was also not very sound as he was himself on a meagre pension of rupees 3 lakhs per annum. Without adequate financial support no war could be fought. Thus one of the reasons of the collapse of 1857 rebellion was the non availability of the funds. Further the rebels were totally a disjointed lot. Within Delhi they were torn in factionalism. Their disunity was their main weakness. That is why despite their numerical superiority they were out classed by a united English force. Further, they lacked ammunition. There is no doubt that they had acquired considerable

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¹ Anderson and Subedar, *The Expansion of British India*, New Delhi, 1987, p. 114
² Metcalfe, p. 214.
number of ammunition in Delhi from the magazine but it was insufficient to carry on a war. Moreover, the induction of Enfield rifles — the most sophisticated weapon at that time weakened their position. In addition to this the invention of telegraph and its introduction in India also caused havoc to the rebel struggle. Here Russell may be quoted to prove this point ".... never since its discovery has the electric telegraph played so important and daring role as it now does in India. Without it the Commander-in-Chief would lose the effect of half his forces. It has served him better than its right arm."\(^1\)

The rebellion of 1857 was suppressed with an iron hand by the English. In her Proclamation Queen Victoria, the Empress of India, declared, "We hereby announce to the native princes of India, that all treaties and engagements made with them by or under the authority of the Hon. East India Company are by us accepted, and will be scrupulously maintained; and we look for the like observance on their part....... we shall respect the rights, dignity and honour of native princes as our own......."\(^2\). This Proclamation thus assured the loyal princes of preservation of their position, rights, dignity and honour by way of reward. But this may also be understood that this assurance to this loyalist class came from the new regime i.e. the British Government after the sacrifices made by the peasantry and the freedom seeking sepoys and the learned. Further, as a sequel to the rebellion, the English fully recognised the usefulness of the Indian zamindars and moneylenders who had rendered exemplary

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services to the English cause during 1857. Hence the English made an alliance with these classes on the consideration that it would be difficult to rule permanently if they adopted polices to alienate these classes.¹ Queen's Proclamation also assured the peasantry to protect their rights in land and to frame such laws with due regard to the ancient rights, usage and customs of India.² But it remained on paper and the zamindars became more powerful afterwards.

The English considered that the Muslims and the army were the chief instigators of the revolt. The British administrators thus paid special attention to it. A commission of enquiry was set up under Sir John Peel which recommended that reduction of native army and the ratio was to be fixed between the native and European/British men. After few years another commission recommended the artillery should be controlled exclusively by the British or the Europeans. Several reformatory measures were introduced in the army by the British government.

The Muslims felt wrath of the British government as may be noticed from such remarks by the English officers, "..... a Mohammedan was another word for a rebel". Another important step was also taken by Mr. Mont Gomery about this time who declared that, "the mutiny was essentially of Hindostanee and Mohammedan origin: the Mohammedan, they regarded, as the instigators, and the Hindus

¹ Gubbins, p. 98.
as the dupes." Sir William Muir refers to the attitude of the British towards the Muslims, "To teach these rascally Mussalmans a lesson the Nawab of Jhajjhar, Farrukh Nagar, Ballabhgarh and 24 Shahzadas were hanged." There was a whole sale massacre of the Muslims. 27 thousand Muslims were hanged in Delhi alone. On the restoration of order in Delhi, the English discriminative policy may be judged from the punitive fine imposed on the people of Delhi. Muslims were to pay 35% of their immovable property while the Hindus were let of on only 10% as punitive fines. This repression led to the decay of Delhi which never recovered to its old glory.

The repressive attitude of the British towards the Muslims made the latter extremely unhappy. They began to hate the British culture, civilization, philosophy, education and everything which was associated with the foreign rulers. This antagonism of the Muslims may be considered to be mainly responsible for their strong resistance in acquiring modern education or joining the institutions set up by the British to impart modern education especially the English language. The Muslim community began to set up their own educational institutions apprehending that the British educational system and the British government would destroy their culture and religion.

2 Indian Mutiny, North Western Province Intelligence Records (1902), Vol 1, p 273
3 Bipin Chandra, Modern India, New Delhi, 1988, p. 249
4 P C Joshi, p 56; Zakaullah, pp. 715-16
5 Andrews, pp. 38-39 Interestingly in the twentieth century The British reversed the policy. A musalman could become a voter if his annual income was rupees 3000/- per annum. The Hindus could only exercise their votes if their annual income was Rs. 3 lakhs per annum. This policy was in accord to the British policy of divide and rule.
Thus, it is not surprising that in the post rebellion period, a large number of madrasas were established throughout the length and breadth of North India. To crown all these institutions was *Dar-ul-Uloom* Deoband where the founder of this institution preached for religious stability and an ideology which was in confirmity of Syed Ahmed Bareilvi. It also preached for a struggle against the British who had been responsible for enslaving the motherland. Contrary to this, in the post rebellion period, a section of Hindus, "inspired by the arts and sciences of Europe, were experiencing an intellectual and moral renaissance, the Muslims all over India were falling into a state of material indulgence and intellectual decay."\(^1\) The plight of the Muslims in the post rebellion period has also been discribed by W.W. Hunter,\(^2\) which is however beyond the scope of this thesis to dilate upon. Sir Syed realizing this situation made an attempt to extricate the Muslims from the agony of 1857 and persuade them to go for modern education. But it was too late. The uneven development of the Hindu and Muslim communities in India in the post rebellion period raised the Hindu-Muslim problem. The British took full advantage of it.

The impact of the rebellion of 1857 on the Indian people were of far reaching consequences. It led to the rise of various problems. Hindi-Urdu controversy gained momentum, Hindu-Muslim problem grew apace, thanks to activities of the Christian Missionaries and their holding of religious discourses under the supervision of district

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authorities mostly the English, activities of Arya Samaj and its instance leading to division of Hindus and Muslims in North India, the promotion of the Ahmedya in Punjab and Shia-Sunni controversy, and Bareilvi-Wahabi divide. It naturally weakened the unity of India that was seen during the crucial phase of the rebellion of 1857. The post rebellion scenario largely helped the British to consolidate their position in India and to perpetuate the exploitative nature of their rule.