Chapter - 8

COLLAPSE AND CONCLUSION

The process of collapse of the rebels' rule may be traced from the second week of August 1857 when Brigadier Nicholson reached Delhi with his forces and joined the English camp on 7th August, 1857. The entire army of Nicholson arrived at Delhi on 14th August\(^1\). The arrival of Nicholson was a moral booster to the English army. Followed by Nicholson, the English Artillery also moved from Punjab. The rebels in Delhi resolved to stop joining of the Artillery with Nicholson's army and marched with a strong contingent of artillery and army, determined to check the incoming English Artillery. Nicholson quickly acted, intercepted the rebel forces near village Bhaprole and attacked them but he could not succeed very much\(^3\). On 26th August the rebels attacked Nicholson's camp but could not achieve any success\(^4\).

By 6th September, 1857 the position of the English became very comfortable as they had received all the support from outside which they expected\(^5\). The English position had become very formidable as they received a large quantity of ammunition\(^6\). The English army was fully aware of the condition of the rebel forces in Delhi which was leaderless. It also knew that they were divided into several smaller

\(^{1}\) H.W. Norman, *Delhi 1857*, London, 1902, p. 183. (Hereafter cited as *Delhi 1857*).
\(^{2}\) Ibid. P. 201.
\(^{4}\) *Delhi 1857*, p. 241.
\(^{5}\) Roberts, *Fortyone Years in India*, London, 1908, p. 116 (Hereafter cited as Roberts).
groups and also lacked a coordinated united and planned action. The English army also knew that the rebels suffered from an acute lack of arms and ammunition and possessed no wealth. It therefore correctly presumed that any English attack would shatter the rebel forces.¹

From the very beginning of September, the English engineers had begun to prepare fortifications for making an assault on Delhi. On 7th September they prepared their first battery near Mori Gate (about seven hundred yards away from Mori Gate). The rebel forces made an attempt to stop constructions but they were not successful due to their negligence. This proved to be very costly. Next morning the English army not only constructed a fortification but also raised a gun over it. A surprise rebel force carried out an artillery attack on the English fortification upsetting their plan. However after completing their batteries, they began to fire the city wall and destroyed the Mori Gate².

The English forces captured Ludlow Castle and set up a battery on it which was hardly 500 yards away from Kashmiri Gate³. The English set up another battery on 10th September at the customs Kothi and on the same day they raised another battery at the Qudsia Garden. From 11th September the English artillery attack became regular. The rebels tried to counter fire from Kashmiri Gate but they could not continue for long. The English artillery fire damaged the tower and city wall. On 12th September the 3rd and 4th batteries intermittently

emitted fire. The English firing continued day and night. The rebels brought their guns in the open against the English batteries and drilling the city walls placed their guns against each battery and made a quick attack on them. The rebels' artillery fire caused great damage to the English positions and their soldiers were also killed in large numbers. Unfortunately, at this crucial the supplies to the rebels in Delhi where stopped. They were deeply disappointed but continued to fight against great odds for the sake of independence.

Unlike 12th September, 13th September was relatively a calm day. It appears that the English kept on planning and making necessary preparations for next days attack. On 14th September, in the early morning the English forces assembled at Ludlow Castle. The army under Reed was not there as it had been deputed to make onslaught in Kishengunj area. This change of plan was necessitated due to the plugging of damaged wall which was to be used for English entry into the city. The English therefore gave fresh orders for Artillery fire. The rebels also retaliated with gun fire. The English forces advanced as per their plan. The rebels began to fire upon them but they could not stop the advance of the English army. The English suffered heavy losses of life on account of rebels' firing. However, some of the English soldiers, including Nicholson, succeeded in climbing over the city wall. A wing of the English forces captured the Kashmiri Gate with great difficulty. The English army which was marching towards Kishangunj, was resisted strongly by the rebel

1. Rotton, pp. 249-256; Delhi 1857, pp. 271-272; Roberts pp. 119-120; Hope Grant pp. 118-119.
forces and made the English army suffer heavily. Nicholson was commanding the forces now launched a general assault on Delhi. He sent an army from Ajmeri Gate and another from Kabuli Gate while directing Campbell to march into the city with an army towards Jama Masjid. The English forces which were moving form Kabuli Gate towards the city had to fight a grim battle for every inch and had to decide to retreat. Nicholson had also reached there for support but he received a gun shot and was injured causing the English army to retreat. Campbell with the help of Metcalfe succeeded in reaching Jama Masjid without much resistance. But he had to bring his forces back to a church as other forces could not come to his support. The English had to suffer at every point. Wilson, the Commander - in - Chief, was disappointed to see the situation and was considering to retire to the hills. Some of the ambitious an courageous officers strongly opposed Wilson's views. Nicholson, who was at the death bed, also strongly opposed this proposal. The battle on 14th September is considered to be very fierce and the English had to suffer heavy losses. The 6 hours battle took the toll of 66 officer's and 1104 soldiers. The condition of the besieged rebels in Delhi worsened by 14th September. The civilians were extremely terrified with the rapid entry of the English into the city and they were fleeing with all the property they could carry off and burying the rest. Kaye suggests that the fleeing citizens of Delhi left large stock of wine.

3. Ibid.
which fell into the hands of invading English forces. Kaye says that the result of getting intoxicating weakness by the English sepoys was terrible. To quote his words, "The Europeans fell upon the liquid treasure with an avidity which they could not restrain. And if the insurgents had then seized the opportunity as cunningly as they have made it, it is hard to say what calamity might have befallen us".

From 15th September to 18th September the English army captured important areas like Kishengunj, Chandni Chowk, Lahori Gate despite fierce fighting. On 19th September the English forces moved ahead of Kabuli Gate despite fierce resistance by the rebels who were by now much reduced in their ranks and support with the exit of majority of the rebel forces. On 20th September Brigadier Jones captured the Lahori Gate. The English army looted the people mercilessly and shamelessly. Brigadier Jones received orders to divide his army into two parts by sending one part of it to Chandni Chowk and occupy Jama Masjid which he did. He also requested the general to allow him to capture the fort. In the meantime Jones entered the Ajmeri Gate. An English army was sent towards Eidgah and it was learned that the camp of the rebels outside Delhi Gate was vacant. Lt. Hudson took possession of the Gate capturing a number of people who were executed. According to Bred's request, General Wilson was planning to attack the Fort. The Fort of Delhi where the descendants of Timur lived for long now presented a deserted look. They had fled away

to places of safety. The Sepoys, who were injured and had been kept in the fort were put to death. The princes had also disappeared from the scene leaving their houses. Where only infirm, weak and old people remained. They were also killed by the English army. The English army also blew away the bridge which linked Salimgarh with the main fort. The English forces occupied both Jama Masjid and Salimgarh Fort.

The invading English army did not show any mercy on the vanquished. Kaye admits that the English attitude was rather harsh upon the people of Delhi. To quote his words, "Many who had never struck a blow against us- who had tried to follow their peaceful pursuits- and who had been plundered and buffeted by their own armed countrymen, were pierced by our bayonets or cloven by our sabres, or brained by our muskets or rifles." The English hatred and intolerance for Indians was immense. Again to quote Kaye," The very sight of a dark man stimulated our national enthusiasm almost to the point of frenzy. We tolerated those who wore our uniforms and bore our arms, but all else were, in our eyes, the enemies and persecutors of our race. So it sometimes happened that during the first days of our occupation of Delhi, many innocent men were shot down or otherwise massacred." Delhi was made the slaughter ground by the English army. Poor Bahadur Shah who had successfully faced the English diplomacy in combating their nefarious designs and maintaining communal harmony, was now totally helpless. He had

3 Ibid. p. 636.
been exhorting the rebels in Delhi continuously to maintain communal harmony. His reprimand to the rebels throughout the period was aimed at arousing their national sentiments. Its demoralising effects on the English forces prior to Nicholson's arrival in Delhi may be judged from the fact that during the progress of the war (1857) two English Generals were killed, one had resigned and went away and the fourth one was always anxious and worried. In that situation if some time Bahadur Shah appeared to be dejected and sad in his old age or became disappointed, he should not be accused. He had full confidence in God and believed that he was fighting for a right cause. In that state of mind he used to cry for help from God.¹

Bahadur Shah appears to have had great faith in Bakht Khan's ability. Though old in age, weak in resources, infirm in leading an army, he possessed an alert mind and very well understood the English strength and rebels' weaknesses. This may be well understood from his conversation with Bakht Khan that took place on 5th September when the latter informed him of the arrival of English artillery and attack on Kashmiri Gate. The Emperor's question was: "what arrangements you are making to fight the English. If you are unable to fight them open the Gates of the city immediately." The General replied." I am taking the magazine out of the city. I will face the English artillery fire with forty guns for which I am preparing batteries." He further told the King that he was organising a special squad consisting of two thousand horses to cut the supply line of the English."

¹. Sadiq-ul-Akhbar and Delhi Urdu Akhbar, 17th August, 1857.
Thereafter the King questioned, "What is the position of gunpowder?"
"He sent an immediate letter to the Nawab of Farrukhabad to send
two thousand mounds of sulphur to him immediately." Here it may
be seen that Bahadur Shah was keeping an eye on the minutest detail
of war machinery. Sulphur played a very important role in the warfare
in those days and one of the reasons of the collapse of the rebel
forces in Delhi was its shortage.

In view of the gravity of situation due to the penetration of
the English army in Delhi, the rebel leaders were making every effort
to enlist support of Hindus and Muslims to fight them.²

Even at this stage when the enemy's danger was looming large,
the conspirators in the Fort were engaged in their hateful designs.
Begum Zeenut Mehal was a playdoll in the hand of Hakim Ahsanullah
Khan and Ilahi Baksh. On 20th July a proposal was sent to the Lt.
Governor of North-West provinces for peace. But the Lt. Governor
understood the real objective of this proposal. On 21st August Begam
Zeenat Mahal sent a message to Mr. Grid that if the English gave
guarantee for the safety of the women and children then she would
exercise her influence. The reply was that no negotiation could be
made with the ladies of the Palace³. Zeenat Mahal however got a
responsive ally to satisfy her scheming mind. He was Hudson. Begum
Zeenat Mahal bribed him and secured assurance from him for her
own safety as well as of the King, her own son and her father. By

1. Metcalfe, p. 222.
2. Press List of Mutiny Papers, 16 No. 20; Metcalfe, p. 229.
3. Letter of General Neal to Governor General, Kanpur dated 4th September 1857; Parliamentry
   Paper, No. 4 p. 194.
doing this she put Bahadur Shah to shame. After that whatever Hudson did was simply a drama of bravery. On the English entry into the city the Fort conspirators adversely influenced the mind of Bahadur Shah. Ilahi Baksh was an ally of the English in the Fort and a traitor. He very well understood that the English were to succeed. He dissuaded the King not to join the rebels. This advice came at a time when Bakht Khan was endeavouring to consolidate his position and continue the war. He met Bahadur Shah and the Princes at the Humayun's tomb. To quote Kaye, "It was thought that amidst this crowd of people, the King and his family, swayed by later counsels, might escape." Hudson saved the opportunity, obtained permission from the General and captured the King along with other princes. The King surrendered to Hudson on the latter's personal verbal assurances. Hudson partly kept his words but he executed a number of Princes. The capture of Bahadur Shah ended the rebels activities in Delhi.

A word may be said here about the atrocities committed by the English after they occupied the city of Delhi in 1857. Earlier we have noted the attitude of the English towards Indians and their indiscreet killings. The houses of the people were burnt. The city was vacant as most of the people had gone out of the city. A large number of princes had also escaped with the army. However, the

4. Details may be seen in Kaye's vol. III, pp 647-51.
princes found around Delhi were killed.

In Delhi while Bahadur Shah had surrendered, Hudson succeeded in capturing a large number of Princes who had also taken shelter in the tomb of Humayun. The princes had a strong number of supporters whom Kaye refers to be the Mohammadies without mentioning the word. The detailed account of negotiation between the princes and Hudson recorded in the 'Twelve years of a Soldiers Life in India' by G.H. Hudson gives ample proof of the former's hostility towards the Mughal House. But he was also apprehensive of a blood shed if he used force to capture the princes. He moved with caution and secured once again the services of Rajab Ali who according to Kaye, "was the very life a Hudson's intelligence department, and the loyal member of the Delhi family, willing to betray his kinsmen for his own ends." Hudson was determined not to grant any concessions to any Princes. The Princes who apparently had been vaguely promised a safe exit, came out in bullock carts surrounded by Hudson's men. Kaye on the basis of a report gives the following account, "Meerza Elahee Buksh had a principal hand in this. At night, he says, "when I went to Hudson Sahib he told me to bring to him the Meerza Khazar Sooltan, Meerza Mogal and Meerza Aboo-Bakr. I answered that I had already made arrangements for that. He might find them any

1 Kaye, Vol III, p 648 (With them were some thousands of followers, including a number of Mussalman fanatics, who called upon them in the name of the Prophet to resist the infidel intruders, but they thought it better to sue for terms - hoping at least that their lives would be spared.).
2 Ibid pp 648-49 fn
3 Ibid pp 648-49
time he liked. ............then (22nd September) according to the order of Hudson Sahib, I brought those three above-mentioned from the sepulchre to him. Having taken them with the King's property with him, he returned, and was very pleased with me. 1 After the Princes, Hudson asked the People hiding in Humayun's tomb to come out and surrender their arms. After the surrender of the King and the Princes, the people followed suit. Moving towards Delhi with the caravan of the Princes, Hudson uncovered his real face and asked the princes to come down from their carts, stripped them and shot those unfortunate, unarmed and unresisting princes, 2 Their dead bodies were thrown to public view in front of Kotwali where "they remained, till the bodies rotted and stank, and it was necessary for health's sake, to bury them." 3

The English army entered the city and let loose a reign of terror. Whoever came in their way was put to death, and houses set on fire. The city was plundered for three days. Thereafter the department of prize agency was established. Its work was to collect the plundered goods at one place and auction them at throw away prices. After the exit of the rebels from Delhi, a large number of people had buried their valuable things in the ground or in the walls. The English army began to dig out such wealth. Temples and Mosques suffered heavily. Jama Masjid was made the barracks of the Sikh regiment where pork was cooked. It was also proposed that Jama Masjid should

2. Ibid. p. 651.
3. Ibid.
be razed to the ground. While some debated for converting it to a church.¹ The life of Lord Lawrence gives a detailed account of the brutal activity of English army from September to December 1857. However Lawrence in the end put his foot down to protect Delhi from plunder.²

Bahadur Shah was now the prisoner of the British. He was being ridiculed in different ways by the English soldiers. He was put under trial for sedition against the English government. The proceeding of trial started on 27th January 1858.³ Zakullah gives a graphic account of this proceeding. He says that, "The Commission of trial against Bahadur Shah held its court in the Diwan-i-Khas where Bahadur Shah used to be brought as a prisoner. Sometimes he used to sit on a small charpai and lay on it. The place from where he had ruled for years, now some peons and mace bearer used to come and call him as prisoner".⁴ It is true that Bahadur Shah was at the fag-end of his life and had little concern for his own future. But it is unfortunate that he was still under the influence of the same people who had prevented him to go with Bakht Khan and made him hopeful. He was uttering the words which they asked him to say. He was held guilty for conspiracy against the English and was sent to Burma along with his two wives Zeenat Mahal and Taj Mahal and two Princes Jawan Bakht and Abbas Shah. He died on 7th November 1862 at

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² Zakullah, pp. 723-24.
³ Garret, p.2.
⁴ Zakullah. p. 731.
the age of 81, and was buried there. Bahadur Shah as a man and as a ruler, despite all his limitations, had a great love for India and its people. In Delhi whenever a Mussalman oppressed a Hindu and he went to Bahadur Shah for justice, he used to order the Muslims not to harass Hindus saying that, "As you are my one eye the Hindus are the other eye."

The collapse of the struggle in Delhi paved the way for the reestablishment of the British rule in India. The medieval order came to an end and the modern establishment replaced it. The consequences of the collapse were far reaching. The bloody struggle launched by the rebels of 1857 against the English regime for liberation of the motherland, however, did not go waste. It kindled the spirit of freedom in the heart of the Indians which never fully extinguished. And the post-rebellion period witnessed a series of struggles led by small group, of people from middle and lower middle classes until an all India organisation was formed in 1885 and thus a new era began in the history of India.