CONCLUSION

The rebellion of 1857 was nothing less than a cataclysm which shook the calm and placid life of Delhi to its very roots. It marks a violent break from the past which dealt a bloody blow to the values, traditions, and cultural ethos which had evolved over the centuries and had come to be identified as the distinctive quality of Delhi's life. The magnitude of the destruction, killings, tortures, and uprooting of the people from their hearth and home defies description. In this thesis, an attempt has been made to trace and delineate an outline of tragic events of 1857, its progress and possibilities, the failings and betrayals which turned this heroic struggle into an unmitigated catastrophe. For the proper understanding of the tragedy, the setting in which it took place and its consequences also need to be worked out and properly understood. Immediately prior to the events of 1857, inspite of the decline and erosion of Mughal power, people in Delhi were leading a kind of life which was marked with great cultural and intellectual pursuits of a very high quality. Though Mughal rule was limited to the Red Fort (Exalted Fort or Qila-i-Mualla) but its prestige among the people was still very high. The powerless Mughal king, who was living on the doles of the English and was totally bereft of political authority, was still held in highest esteem and was providing leadership to the people in the field of intellectual and cultural activities. This was one area where he could give full expression to his inner urges without incurring the ire of English. As a result, the Mughal Court became a veritable centre of great intellectual activity. Bahadur Shah II, the last Mughal King, himself was a poet of some eminence and encouraged poets, poetry, and other literary, pursuits. Due to his
encouragement and under his patronage, Urdu poetry reached its highest watermark and produced literary giants like Ghalib and others. In such a situation while Delhi lost its status as the political capital of India, it emerged as the capital of poetry, literature, learning and other intellectual pursuits. Despite his meagre resources, Bahadur Shah continued to extend all possible support to the intellectuals and the learned in Delhi.

During this period, Delhi also emerged as a very important centre of education; there were a number of renowned madrasas in Delhi catering to educational needs of the people. Some of the most outstanding Ulema like Shah Abdul Aziz, Shah Abdul Qadir, Shah Rafiuddin and other members of the family of Shah Waliullah were attracting students from all corners of the country. They were not only disseminating education to those who came to learn at their feet but were also making earnest efforts to revive the pristine purity of Islam and cleanse it from many innovations, which had crept into it over the long period of their association with other communities.

Delhi College, established in 1825, played an important role in spreading Western education and sciences. Both English and vernacular languages served as the medium of instruction in the college. In spite of public apathy towards Western education, this college succeeded in attracting a large number of students. Besides imparting instructions in western subjects and English language, this College also undertook the translation of standard works from English into vernacular languages and thereby making it possible even for those who did not know English to have access to western sciences and learning. It was also the good fortune of the college
that it succeeded in securing the services of some very good teachers. This was greatly helpful in popularizing the objectives of the College among the people of Delhi. Due to the English administration of Delhi and large concentration of Englishmen there, people naturally developed contacts with them and became increasingly familiar with the English language. For jobs under the English, the knowledge of English language was very helpful. As a result, many people started learning the language and its knowledge, slowly but definitely gained momentum. This made it possible for them to have direct access to the new avenues of knowledge which were unknown to the majority of their countrymen.

While rapid progress was being made in these various fields and apparently it seemed that the English rule was now firmly established, and there was no challenge to the authority of the English, all was not well. Beneath the apparent calm and quite, deep resentment and discontent was simmering. The majority of the Indian people had not taken the English occupation of Indian states with equanimity and nursed a deep sense of injury and bitterness in their hearts. The haughty and arrogant attitude of the English officers added insult to injury. This was more true in the case of Sepoys who were mainly instrumental in the establishment of English hegemony and who had remained staunchly loyal to them. To their dismay and chagrin, they found that they were not being given their due which they thoroughly deserved in view of their services. They were discriminated and slighted and paid much less than their European Counterparts for the same kind of work. This naturally caused much heart burning and bred deep rooted bitterness and resentment.
A number of factors were responsible for the outbreak of the rebellion of 1857. The rebellion though started from Meerut, but the very next day on 11th May the Sepoys reached Delhi. The calm and quite life of Delhi was suddenly turned upside down and the people were confronted with a totally new situation as the city became the head quarter of the rebellion. Rebel Sepoys from different parts of Northern India began to gather at Delhi. It was primarily because Bahadur Shah as the heir and repository of a great dynasty and a glorious tradition, was still held in great respect by the people. They naturally looked to him for providing leadership at this crucial juncture in the history of the country. In the beginning Bahadur Shah hesitated to assume leadership of the new dispensation. But he was persuaded to lead the rebels in their endeavour to expel the English from the country. He tried his best to give some content and shape to the rebellion. He established a Court of Administration for filling the vacuum that was created due to the expulsion of the English from the city. The establishment of law and order in the city was the first priority of the King and in this endeavour he naturally sought the help of the Princes. They were given important administrative responsibilities. But the Princes betrayed his confidence and utterly failed in their mission which they never took seriously. They seem to have been possessed of a suicidal instinct. They failed to realise the gravity of the situation as well as the enormous opportunity that it offered. Their basic instincts came to the fore. They were divided into factions that worked making at cross purposes. They utilized this opportunity to amass wealth by every possible means.

The King did not possess means to pay the Sepoys. They resorted to loot
and plunder to raise necessary resources to maintain themselves. Taking advantage of the situation, ruffians masqueraded as the Sepoys and wrought havoc on the people. This created not only a serious law and order problem but also led to much hardship to the people as the commercial class pulled down the shutters and economic activity came to a grinding halt. Best efforts of Bahadur Shah and even his personal intervention did not succeed to reverse the situation.

This situation somewhat changed after the arrival of Bakht Khan at Delhi. Bahadur Shah wanted to utilize his services as best as he could to restore at least some semblance of order in the chaotic conditions prevailing at Delhi. All earlier administrative appointments were cancelled. Bakht Khan was made Commander-in-Chief of the rebel forces and was given sweeping powers to deal with the situation. Bahadur Shah seems to have great faith in Bakht Khan and wanted to use him as an instrument to establish at least a semblance of order in Delhi. The extent of King's faith in the ability of Bakht Khan can be gauged from the fact that he was given authority even over the Princes whom he could punish if they were found indulging in unlawful activities. In retrospect, however, it would appear to have proved counterproductive. In spite of many acts of omission and commission and grave offences on the part of the Princes, Bakht Khan could not punish them. But the Princes became extremely jealous of Bakht Khan and all their energies were now directed against Bakht Khan whom they considered to be the greatest stumbling block in their way. They constantly conspired against him and did all that they could to frustrate his efforts to restore law and order in Delhi. Even personal appeals of Bahadur Shah did not have any effect on them. Working against
such odds, Bakht Khan, inspite of his administrative acumen and military ability could not be expected to succeed.

While Delhi was reeling under the impact of the rebellion and it was becoming increasingly difficult to restore normalcy there due to a host of factors, there were a number of other serious problems to contend with. In the wake of the rebellion, several neighbouring principalities had also rebelled. But while the rulers of some of these states fully supported the rebels' cause, there were others, who acted as black sheep. Apparently, they were with the rebels but they also maintained secret contacts with the English and provided them crucial information about the position of the rebels. There were a number of people at the Court itself who enjoyed the confidence of Bahadur Shah but they were in league with the English. Besides them, there were many number of people in Delhi who, due to one reason or the other, had their sympathies with the English. All these elements were working overtime to defeat the objectives of the rebels and to cause dissensions among them.

The Sepoys came from different regiments and military cantonments. Their Commanders had ego problems and were not ready to accept the supremacy of anybody outside their own regiment. This factionalism within the Sepoys was further accentuated by the selfish designs of the Princes. With a view to push their own agenda and derive maximum advantage from the situation, they not only became instrumental in further widening their differences, but also compelled Bakht Khan, through intrigues to divide the army into three divisions. The consequence was that they could not put up a joint and united front against the English. That was
definitely one of the major reasons for the failure of the Sepoys against the English. The shortage of gunpowder and ammunition, so crucial in such an encounter, also played a very important role in the final collapse of the rebellion.

The upshot of all this was that the rebels were routed and Delhi was occupied without much difficulty. Bahadur Shah was taken as prisoner and many of the Princes were brutally slaughtered. One shudders to imagine the nightmare through which Delhi passed after the English re-occupation. The magnitude of destruction in Delhi and the brutalities which were perpetrated on the people of Delhi defy imagination.

There were many reasons responsible for the collapse of the rebels. The failure of the Princes to rise to the occasion, and their abject lack of sincerity, maturity and vision to visualize the horrifying consequences of the collapse of the rebellion, was, undoubtedly, a major cause. In many cases the Sepoys, who were in the forefront of the struggle, could not shed their personal interests making a joint stand against the English well nigh impossible. Besides these grave drawbacks, the existence of the black sheep not only in the city but also in the Court and the royal household was a misfortune of unmitigated magnitude. Thanks to the nefarious activities of these fifth columnists, the minutest details of the rebels' activities and planning was known to the English and they revised and adjusted their plans accordingly. Severe resource crunch was a great handicap and gravely affected the capability of the rebels. The principalities gave priority to what they conceived to be their own interests rather then keeping in view the larger interests of the country. Bakht khan, a capable and sincere commander and administrator, could
not secure the cooperation and support of the Princes, who were blinded by their selfish interests and who in their short sightedness even did not spare the venerable King from their machinations. But for these grave shortcoming on the part of the Indians, the situation might have been different.

No doubt the rebellion, which was in fact the first war of independence against foreign rule, failed and claimed a very heavy cost in terms of untold suffering for the people of India. But it left a great impact on the minds of the people. The urge for independence that it had kindled in the hearts of the people never died and they continued to cherish this dream. The urge became stronger with the passage of time and ultimately it took the shape of a great national movement which even the mighty British Empire could not stop and India achieved its the freedom in 1947. No doubt it took 90 long years but surely in the life of a great nation it is not a long time.