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## **The Great Indian Revolt: A Short Deliberation**

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### Abstract

A group of Indian Historians described the Revolt of 1857 as people's revolt and regarded its leaders as national Hero's. Further, some Indian and British Historians have termed the Revolt of 1857 as the 'Mutiny of the Sepoys'. Opinion differs among the Historians as to the nature of the Great Revolt of 1857. I am trying to continue my brief discussion from this background in this essay.

A group of Indian Historians described the Revolt of 1857 as people's revolt and regarded its leaders as national Hero's. Further, some Indian and British Historians have termed the Revolt of 1857 as the "Mutiny of the Sepoys". Opinion differs among the Historians as to the nature of the Great Revolt of 1857.

At the outset we must keep it in mind that if a rebellion when successful is described as a War of liberation. A War of independence when unsuccessful is dubbed as a rebellion. The Indians regard the heroic uprising of 1857 as the Indian first war of Independence, but the British dubbed it as a sepoy Mutiny in which they only found that the sepoys fought for their narrow interest.

It appears that more than two hundred thousand gallant sons of Mother India gave their blood in the rebellion.

Historians observed that the movement was marked by absence of cohesion and unity of purpose among different sections of rebels. There was also absence of rules of civilized warfare on both sides and both sides fought with peculiar savagery. If the mutineers were guilty of terrible enormities the British troops were also on occasions tarnished the fair name of their Country by a severity that was hardly tempered by good sense or moderation.

"Meri Jhansi Nahi Dungi"-  
"I shall not surrender my Jhansi."  
- was the call of Rani Laxmi Bai, a widow queen of Jhansi, gave a spontaneous expression of her patriotic feelings. What was

Jhansi? It was a small state in Bundelkhand, a part of present Uttar Pradesh. Annual Revenue of the state was Rupees Twenty Lakhs only. After the Annexation of Jhansi British Empire sanctioned a monthly pension of rupees five thousand to Rani. But Rani was not ready to bend her head before the British for her personal welfare. She could realize that British would gradually grab the entire India in future. She was firm in her decision not to surrender to the enemy whatever mighty they may be. She possessed an iron will and refused to surrender.

We observe that Rani Laxmi Bai lastly got fatal hurt while fighting riding on a horse in 'mans' dress with a sword in her hand and ultimately died. Her heroic death was only a sacrifice of life in the aspiration for freedom for motherland.

It reveals from the proclamations issued by the leaders of great Indian Revolts that they wanted earnestly to unite all classes of Indian people specially Hindus and Muslims against the British. Records speaks that both the Hindus and Muslims unitedly fought against the British with a view to oust them from India. Attempts were made to satisfy the poor's by giving higher honor, post and position. There was no sign of communalism. The rebels gave greatest importance for the national safety. Their

slogan was "Delhi Cholo". They declared Bahadur Shah-II, the last Mughal Emperor as their leader.

The British rulers tried to divide the Hindus and Muslims to their level best. The Lieutenant Governor Russel Colvil said in grief, "...at the time of revolt...the benefit of division between the Hindus and Muslims could not be gained up..."

The principal Secretary of Bahadur Shah-II was one Mukundaram. Azimullan Khan was the principal advisor of rebel leader Nana Sahib. Afgan Soldiers were among the main bodyguards of Rani Laxmi Bai of Jhansi.

Captain Gowan secretly proposed to the Thakur Community of Bareilly to give them Rs. 50,000 as bribe to create a division in the unity of Hindus and Muslims. But the "Thakurs" rejected that abhorred proposal.

James outram a contemporary observed that the revolt was not a thoroughly organized national movement, nor "a war of independence". British Historians like J.W. Keye, G.B. Malleon, G.M. Trevelyan, Lawrance have termed the revolte of 1857 as the "Mutiny of the Sepoys", "Religious war against the Christians", "War between Black and White", "A struggle between Oriental and Occidental", "A Hindu Muslim conspiracy against the British" etc.

The famous Indian Historians namely Dr. Sukumar

Ch. Sen and Ramesh Ch. Mazumder tried to evaluate the Great Revolt of the 1857. They however, differ in their interpretation of the events of the Mutiny. Dr. Sukumar Sen believed and regarded the Revolt as a “War of Independence”, while Dr. R.C. Mazumder found that the Revolt of 1857 was neither first, nor National nor a “War of Independence”. Infact, the Revolt of the Sepoys gradually developed in the areas Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Delhi etc. as a general revolt in which sections of Civil population of all types of classes who were discontented due to tyranny of the British took part and which was the first great and direct challenge to the British Rule in India on an extensive scale. Dr. R.C. Mazumder observed “...it was nothing but a mutiny, of sepoy only since some sepoy revolted for their self-interest. So it cannot be termed as a national war or struggle for independence. There was no sign of rising of nationality in the heart of rebels”.

Thompson and Garret regarded the mutineers as “murderers of European Woman and Children.” They call it a mutiny or revolt. Dr. R.C. Mazumder further observed that “...the sepoy mutiny inspired the national movement for the freedom of India from British yoke which started half a century later”.

Many prominent historians found patriotic favour in the Great Revolt of 1857. Rajani Kanti Gupta in his “Sepahi Juddher Itihas” admitted and showed with details facts that “the sepoy and their associates wanted the end of British rule in India being enlightened with the ideal of Nationalism. Prominent Historian V.D. Savarkar in his book “The Indian War Of Independence” described the great revolt as “...well planned National struggle for Independence”. He termed revolt as “the first war of independence”. Historian Sashi Bhusan Choudhury in his “Civil Rebellion in the Indian Mutinies”, not only titled the revolt as a national war against imperialism but also pointed out that it was a “General Rebellion”. He followed that during the year 1857-58 the Civil people in many parts of India became hostile against the tyranny of the British Empire.

Most carefully, historian Dr. Sushobhan Chandra Sarkar observed that general people got united with a view to end the British Rule. They may not have any idea of “National Country” but they must have the sense of nationality and that is why the revolt should be termed as “National Struggle”.

Karl Marx wrote that the rebellion which the British termed as a military uprising was actually a national movement.

Mr. Disraeli, a leader of British Empire proclaimed in the British Parliament that the revolt was not a mere uprising of the sepoys. He told that the revolt was a national movement in India, where the sepoys were an instrument only.

Discussing the nature of various movements of the world like Carbonary movement of Italy, Movement of Poland against Bonaparte etc, it is followed that there were lack of various reasons in the nature of the movements yet, those were recognized as national movements in the History of national agitation.

We see that Bengal, Punjab, Maharashtra, Madras and most of states of South India remained unaffected. But in Assam some of the sepoys mutinied. Maniram Dewan tried to organize an armed revolt by the sepoys to drive away the British from Assam. But his attempt failed and the mutiny was suppressed.

It is observed that all most all historians have admitted the fact that the rebellion of Oudh got a whole shape of national movement. Begum Hazrat Mahal of Oudh led the rebellion there. Md. Hassan of Gorakpur, Mehendi Hassan of Sultanpur, Beni Madho of Sankarpur, Udit Narayan and Madho Prasad of Birhur, Debi Box Singh of Dhorua etc – these all regional leaders took active part in the rebellion.

As per deed dated 13-09-1857, East India Company, the Government found it difficult to detect the participants of the rebellion as a large number of general public took part in it. According to Gen. Homes – only at Oudh 1,50,000 numbers of armed rebels were assassinated by the British to suppress to revolt there out of which only 35,000 were the sepoys.

Nationality is a state of mind in which the supreme loyalty of the individual is due to the nations states. In Nationalism we observe a call to sacrifice life for the nation. The character of the Great Revolt show that certainly there was a feeling of nationalism in the mind of the rebels though they had no idea of a National Country. In his recent book „Argumentative Indians“ Dr. Amartya Sen shows that the Indians were always “Argumentative”. This query mentality of Indians practically gave birth of the Great Revolt of 1857. So it cannot be started that the revolt of 1857 was mere an temporary uprising of some conservative, superstitious, arrogant native Indians

It is obvious that the actual cause of the revolt was the tyranny of the British throughout a century upon the Indians. It would be a foolish task to evaluate the Great Revolt as a “Mutiny” ignoring this vital cause. The British could have

realized more or less, the actual cause of mutiny as it appears. We carefully observe that after the end of the Great Revolt the control of Indian Government was assumed finally by the British Crown. East India Company ceased to exist. The army was thoroughly organized and the idea of division and counterpoise dominated British Military Policy in India. British Empire took up certain changes in their administration in India.

The sacrifice of life of the real heroes of the first war of Independence remained dishonoured and unsung for a long time but their supreme

sacrifice kindled in the hearts of millions of Indians the flame of patriotism which would never be extinguished. Practically all the Indians were influenced and inspired by it and within a short period of next 50 years entire India became hostile against the British Rule and thus Mother India got her freedom in the birth of a new Nation, new Nationality and a new Unity in diversity. The supreme sacrifice of the Heroes of the Great Revolt of 1857 had become thus successful in 1947 which the Nation would always remember with greatest regard.

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