CHAPTER XVIII

BEFORE THE 1857 REVOLUTION

LORD CANNING

In 1856 Lord Canning succeeded Lord Dalhousie as Governor-General of India. His regime was marked by the countrywide conflagration of 1857 which, at one time, appeared likely to reduce to ashes the edifice of the British "Empire" in India, built up by the English over a period of a hundred years by the use of every artifice they could lay their hands on.

PLASSEY

As a matter of fact, the fire had been lighted on the battlefield of Plassey. "We will avenge Plassey" was one of the war-cries most frequently used by the 1857 revolutionaries. Some Delhi newspapers prominently published a prophecy in May/June 1857 to the effect that 23rd of June, 1857, the centenary-day of the Battle of Plassey, would see the end of the English domination of India.

FROM PLASSEY TO VELLORE

We have already narrated at some length the story of the British rule in India from Clive to Dalhousie. Throughout this period the discontent and the indignation of the suffering people of India, from prince to pauper, had kept the fire smouldering underground. There were some sporadic outbursts, like the bitter and unrelenting fight for freedom put up by Nana Fadnavis and Haider Ali, and the attempts made by both to win the help of the Mughal Emperor and other Indian rulers for their cause. The 1806 Mutiny at Vellore, by the Indian troops of the East India Company, was an indication that the cauldron of revolt was still simmering, although it took another 50 years to boil over and result in the most devastating catastrophe that ever befell the British Empire in India.
FUEL TO FIRE

But for the events in the Dalhousie regime, the fire would have possibly died out. The East India Company’s Empire-hunger dictated the policy followed by Lord Dalhousie. The policy initiated by the Company had the backing of the British Secretary of State for India too. Neither, apparently, realised that they were blowing the dying embers into a conflagration which did consume the East India Company.

In the preceding chapters we have narrated how some of the Indian States’ territories were usurped or acquired by force and coercion, how tens of thousands of the landed aristocracy and gentry were reduced to penury. Earlier, we have also described the deliberate, planned and systematic ruination of India’s external and internal trade and commerce, its industries, and handicrafts, and even its national system of education.

Added to all these was the recently-developed haughty behaviour of Englishmen generally towards Indians, high or low. Any Indian riding within sight of an Englishman was forced to get down and walk. The English officials of the Company made it a rule publicly to ride rough-shod over the religious susceptibilities of the “natives” and their religious or social customs. A beginning was also made with the extinction of the Indian system of medicine by the promulgation of an order (in Saharanpur) prohibiting the practice of medicine by Ayurvedic or Unani physicians. Even a pardanashin woman had to go to the public hospital set up by the Company.

IMMEDIATE CAUSES OF THE 1857 UPHEAVAL

At least five causes can be enumerated whose cumulative effect was the rising-up in arms of the people of India under the flag of Bahadur Shah, the last Mughal Emperor.

(1) The humiliating treatment to which the Mughal Emperor was subjected by the English, and progressive usurpation by them of all his authority even to the extent of nominating his heir-apparent, without the slightest previous reference to him.

(2) The unlawful deposition and deportation in captivity of the Nawab Wazir of Oudh, followed by the annexation
of Oudh and the confiscation of thousands of *Jagirs* and Estates in Oudh and elsewhere.

(3) The usurpation by legal chicanery of a number of Indian States.

(4) The rancour against the English which rankled in the heart of Nana Dhundopant, the adopted son of the last deposed Peshwa Bajirao, and,

(5) English objective of wholesale conversion of the "natives" to Christianity, and their persistent efforts to propagate it, by fair means and foul, particularly in the Indian army employed by them.

We shall now proceed to deal with each of these causes in some detail.

**Mughal Emperor and the English**

The turning-point in English relations with the Mughal Emperor was reached during the reign of the Emperor Shah Alam, who had in 1765 granted to Clive the *Diwani* of the Bengal and Bihar Provinces, and had later, granted *Jagirs* to the Company to set up its factories and commercial houses in Calcutta, Madras, Surat, etc., for which the Company paid to the Emperor the usual money tributes. It was also during Shah Alam's reign that the struggle between the Marathas and the English for the control over the Mughal Emperor, his Court and capital, started and was continued. The Marathas and Mahadji Sindhia succeeded, and took all the three under their wing together with some territory adjoining Delhi. Then General Lake, presented to Shah Alam a signed Memorandum of Agreement containing the promises and undertakings given by the Company. This was done to lead the Emperor up the garden path, and to secure his assent and help for the expulsion of the Marathas from Delhi. Arrangements were also made to pay to the Emperor Rs. 12 lacs per year for his personal use and an increment at a later date was also promised in the Memorandum. The old Emperor succumbed and, countenanced by him, the English drove the Marathas out of Delhi. The English then took over the responsibility of the security of the Emperor, his capital and his territory adjoining Delhi. For some time the English kept up the outward show of
deference and subservience. The Company’s coinage was inscribed with the Emperor’s name and title, and the seal over which the Governor-General affixed his signatures on all communications addressed to the Emperor read Badshah-La-Fidwi-i-Khas (the Emperor’s own faithful servant). But after expelling the Marathas from Delhi in 1804, the English threw off the mask, and Lord Wellesley suggested that the Emperor and his Court should leave the Red Fort and Delhi and shift to the Company’s Fort at Monghyr. The Emperor, his Court and the people of Delhi became so furious at the suggestion that Wellesley thought it prudent to drop the proposal. But the seeds of suspicion and distrust of the English and of their real intentions were irrevocably sown in the minds of all the three and bore fruit in 1856-57. Shah Alam died in 1806 a disillusioned old man.

Shah Alam was succeeded by Emperor Akbar Shah. It was during his reign that Sir Charles Metcalfe, the Company’s Resident at the Delhi Court, changed, in obedience to instructions, the customary ceremonial respects till then paid by his predecessors to the Emperor, and adopted an overbearing attitude highly derogatory to the dignity of the Emperor.

Akbar Shah desired to nominate one of his sons, Mirza Saleem, as his heir-apparent. It was, however, said that Mirza Saleem was hostile to the English, and so the latter found an excuse for sending him to Allahabad and kept him there under strict surveillance. As none of the promises and undertakings contained in General Lake’s Memorandum had till then been honoured, Akbar Shah sent Raja Ram Mohan Roy as his Envoy Extraordinary to London to obtain the implementation of the Agreement. But the authorities there treated the Company’s signed and sealed Memorandum of Agreement as no better than a mere scrap of paper. When the news reached Delhi, the Emperor’s well-wishers and the people of Delhi generally became very gravely suspicious about the honesty and good faith of the English, and were greatly perturbed about the future of the Royal Family and Delhi, if the English continued to be the arbiters of the destiny of both. Their hostility to the English grew in intensity and bitterness proportionately. Akbar Shah died in 1837 to be succeeded by Bahadur Shah, the last of the Mughal Emperors, who was fated to die an English prisoner.
Bahadur Shah tried to get an implementation of one of the terms of the Memorandum of Agreement which provided an increment in the annual payment of Rs. 12 lacs and asked for the increment. He was told that an increment could be given if he formally surrendered to the Company all of his own remaining rights, as also those of his family members and descendants. Bahadur Shah did not agree. Some years later, Ellenborough, immediately after taking over, forbade the presentation of Nazars, which according to the Delhi Court etiquette, had all along been presented to the Emperor either personally by the Governor-General and the Company's Commander-in-Chief or through the Resident, on the Emperor's birthday, and on the festivals of Id and Nowroz. In 1839 the heir-apparent to the Mughal throne died, and Bahadur Shah wanted to declare another son of his, Prince Jawan Bakht, as the heir-apparent. Jawan Bakht was a very promising and self-respecting young man, the son of his gifted mother Zeenat Mahal. She later proved to be an uncommonly capable organiser in the 1857 Revolution. The English did not approve of Bahadur Shah's choice, and so the Governor-General entered into a secret pact with another son of Bahadur Shah, Mirza Farukh. The latter agreed in writing that immediately after ascending the throne, he would leave the Red Fort and Delhi, and go to live wherever the English directed him. Lord Dalhousie then had Mirza Farukh formally proclaimed in Delhi as the heir-apparent against the express wishes of Bahadur Shah. Then Mirza Farukh too died in 1854. Bahadur Shah had nine sons then living and he still wanted Jawan Bakht, the most promising amongst them, to be the heir-apparent. All the other eight sons agreed with their father's choice and supported it in a written declaration signed by all of them. The declaration was personally handed over to the Resident by Bahadur Shah himself. But the English had other plans, as they had decided to abolish the title of Emperor and to do away with every single symbol or token pertaining to the status of an Emperor of India. They made overtures to Mirza Quoyash, one of the nine sons of Bahadur Shah, and when he (Quoyash) agreed to their terms in writing, the English publicly recognised him as the heir-apparent. No prior reference at all was made to Bahadur Shah, who was officially informed in 1856 that Mirza Quoyash had agreed to the
following terms and had been nominated heir-apparent by them. The terms as communicated to Bahadur Shah were:

(i) That after succeeding to the throne, Mirza Quoyash will not bear the title of "Emperor" and will be called "Prince",
(ii) That Mirza Quoyash will have to vacate the Red Fort at Delhi, and
(iii) That instead of a lac of rupees per month which are being paid to Bahadur Shah, Mirza Quoyash will receive only Rs. 15,000/-

This was the last straw and the smouldering fires of revolt burst into furious flames shortly afterwards, when the Emperor, his Court and capital became the rallying-point of the revolutionaries of 1857 who fought under his flag.

OUDH

The rape of Oudh has been described by us in the preceding chapter. It has been recorded in more than one book of history that hundreds of thousands of people of thousands of villages in Oudh were deeply moved by the calamities that had overtaken their ruler, their Taluqdars and Zamindars, who were reduced to pitiful straits by the forcible annexation. The villagers suffered too under the Company's administration, which closely followed the pattern described by J. S. Sullivan, a Member of the Madras Council, as follows:

"Upon the extermination of a native state, an Englishman takes the place of the sovereign under the name of Commissioner; three or four of his associates displace as many dozens of the native official aristocracy, while some hundreds of our troops take the place of the many thousands that every native chief supports. The little court disappears, trade languishes, the capital decays, the people are impoverished, the Englishman flourishes, and acts like a sponge drawing up riches from the banks of the Ganges, and squeezing them down upon the banks of the Thames" (Italics ours) (A Plea for the Princes of India p. 67).

The reason why the people of Oudh were amongst the leading and most active revolutionaries was the fact that most of those
who had enlisted in the Company's army hailed from Oudh, and the atrocities committed on the sepoys' kith and kin in the villages under the Company's rule had become unbearable, inflaming the sepoys to an open revolt against the Company.

**USURPATIONS AND FRAUDULANT ACQUISITIONS**

The annexations and acquisitions, one after another, of Satarâ, the Punjab, Sambalpur, Jetpur, Pegu, Sikkim, Nagpur, Jhansi, etc., have already been narrated. Their effects on the people of India have thus been characterised by the historian Ludlow:

"Surely, the natives of India must be less than human if their feelings could not be moved under such circumstances in favour of the victims of annexation, and against the annexer. Surely there was not a woman whom such annexation did not tend to make our enemy, not a child whom they did not tend to train up in hatred to the Firangee rule." *(Thoughts on the Policy of the Crown', pp. 35, 36)*

**DENIAL OF NANA DHUNDOPANT'S JUST CLAIM**

In 1818, the Company's Government had agreed to give to the last Peshwa, Bajirao, an annual pension of Rs. 8 lacs for his own maintenance, and "the support and maintenance of his family-members and dependants". He was also granted the Bithoor Jagir (near Kanpur), to which he was externed from his capital. He lived at Bithoor thereafter with some 8,000 souls, who had accompanied him in his exile, and who were supported by Bajirao out of the pension. In 1827, Bajirao had adopted Nana Dhundopant, then a child of three, as his son. Bajirao died when Nana was about 27. He was, in the words of Sir John Kaye, a

"...quiet, unostentatious young man, not at all addicted to any extravagant habits, and invariably showing a ready disposition to attend to the advice of the British Commissioner" *(History of the Sepoy War, Vol. I, p. 101)*

On the death of Bajirao, the pension was stopped and even the payment of its arrears was refused. When Nana protested he was told that in addition to the stoppage of the pension, the
Bithoor Jagir too was liable to be retaken by the Company if it so desired. Nana submitted a memorial to Lord Dalhousie founding his claim on previous treaties and engagements by the Company, and prayed that the pension be continued. The prayer was rejected. Nana then sent to England a competent representative of his, Azeemullah Khan, to appeal to the British Government. The latter too turned a deaf ear to the appeal. Sir John Kaye, Sir G. O. Trevelyan, Charles Bowle and R. M. Martin, the noted historians, have all of them declared that Nana’s claim was just and fair. Its rejection embittered Nana and from then onwards he devoted himself to plans for delivering himself and his countrymen from the English clutches. Ultimately he became one of the top leaders of the 1857 Revolution.

PROPAGATION OF CHRISTIANITY

Some sixty years before 1857, the front-rank politicians in England had arrived at the conclusion that the only way to secure the permanence of English rule over India was the wholesale conversion to Christianity of all Indians, civil as well as military. Thereafter, steps had been continuously taken to reach that goal. As related earlier, a beginning was made in Madras which offered the most promising field for the propagation of Christianity. But when efforts were made and various ways and means adopted to convert the Indian soldiers in the Company’s army too, the result was the Vellore Mutiny described in Chapter XXVII.

Not only political exigency but also religious fanaticism inspired the English ambition to proselytise the whole of India. Rev. Kennedy, the English divine wrote:

"Whatever misfortunes come on us, as long as our Empire in India continues, so long let us not forget that our chief work is the propagation of Christianity in the land until Hindustan, from Cape Comorin to the Himalayas, embraces the religion of Christ and until it condemns the Hindoo and the Moslem religions, our efforts must continue persistently. For this work, we must make all efforts we can and use all power and all the authority in our hands......" (Italics ours)

Even so responsible a person as Mr. Mangles, the Chairman
of the Directors of the East India Company, said in the House of Commons:

"Providence has entrusted the extensive Empire of Hindustan to England in order that the banner of Christ should wave triumphant from one end of India to the other. Everyone must exert all his strength that there may be no dilatoriness on any account in continuing in the country the grand work of making all India Christian."

Similar ideas were expressed by Lord Macaulay in his writings and, to a certain extent, shaped the educational policy and the system of education followed by the English rulers of India.

The enthusiasm for the conversion of the Indian military personnel cooled down considerably after the Vellore Mutiny. Other ways were, however, adopted to intensify the propagation of Christianity amongst the people generally and to facilitate their conversion.

Under the Hindu Law, a convert from Hinduism, ipso facto lost all his rights to property vested in him by the mandatory provisions of Hindu Law. In 1832, a law was enacted to abrogate this provision in cases of Hindus converted to Christianity. Soon after the establishment of the Company's rule over India, the ancient rent-free Jagirs granted to thousands of temples and mosques were forfeited to the Company. It was made impossible for the prisoners in jails to observe their religious rites of prayers, etc. As mentioned before, the Hindu Law relating to adoption was nullified. Lord Canning supplemented these ways and means by spending lakhs of rupees from the Indian Exchequer in paying munificent salaries to archbishops, bishops and clergymen. In the Company's offices, its officers started pressure-tactics to convert their Indian employees. The missionaries and other preachers of Christianity took to public revilement of Hindu and Muslim faiths and to the use of abusive language in their references to the revered religious leaders of both. Captain T. Macan, in his evidence before the Commons Committee (22nd March, 1832), testified on his personal knowledge that a clergyman speaking at a street corner gathering told his Muslim audience that Mohammed, through whom they hoped that their sins would be forgiven, "was himself in hell", and that they too would be there, if they followed his teachings and principles.
Christian Missionary Zeal in the Punjab

The Punjab was annexed in 1849, and thereafter, vigorous and special efforts were made by Sir Henry Lawrence, Sir John Lawrence, Sir Robert Montgomery, Donald McLeod, Col. Edwardes and others to convert the Punjab into a model Christian Province. Several of them advocated the handing over of the educational department and its entire work to the missionaries and the giving of all financial help to the mission schools, as also the closing down of all other schools run by the Government. The Company’s Directors held similar views with which Lord Dalhousie had to agree. Some Englishmen in authority went even further and wanted that:

(i) The Bible be taught and instruction in the Christian faith be made a “must” in all Government schools and colleges,

(ii) The Hindu and Muslim religious beliefs should in no way be encouraged or even tolerated by the Government,

(iii) No holidays for Hindu or Muslim festivals be observed in any Government department or office.

(iv) The Hindu and Muslim religious and secular laws should find no place in the Company’s courts of law, and

(v) The celebration of Hindu and Muslim religious festivals be banned. (The Memorandum on the Elimination of all un-Christian Principles from the Government of British India by Sir Herbert Edwards)

The programme in implementation of the above policy could not openly be carried out in its entirety in view of the then peculiar conditions prevailing in the country.

Propagation of Christianity in the Indian Army

The propagation had never been allowed to be at a complete stand-still. According to the historian Nolan, the Company’s Government progressively ignored and even ran counter to the religious sentiments, beliefs and prejudices of the Indian soldiery. English officers took to proselytising the sepoys as part of their work. An English Commander of the Bengal Infantry has
written in his official report that for 28 years he has been continuously putting into practice the policy of converting the sepoys to Christianity, and that the saving of the un-Christian souls from the Devil has been an important part of his military duties. More informative light on this aspect of the Christian missionary propaganda is thrown by “A Hindoo of Bengal” in his contribution to the Journal *Causes of the Indian Revolt* (Published from London, by Edward Stanford, 6 Charing Cross) dated Calcutta, 18th August, 1858, from which we quote some extracts below:

“At the beginning of the present year (1857) a great many colonels in the Indian army were detected in a task not less monstrous and arduous than that of Christianising it. It has afterwards transpired that some of these earnest...worthies...entered the army...solely and wholly for the purpose of conversion. The army was specially selected, as in times of peace it affords the utmost leisure to both soldiers and commanders. And as there the heathens may be found in great abundance...without the trouble and expense and...scampering from village to village...They began preaching and distributing tracts and translations among the Hindoo and Mohammedan officers and soldiers. In the beginning these were tolerated, sometimes with disgust, and sometimes with indifference. When, however, the thing continued, when the evangelizing endeavours became more serious and troublesome, the sepoys of either persuasion felt alarmed...The ‘Missionary Colonels’ and ‘Padre Lieutenants’ as these curious militaries were called, emboldened by the toleration of the sepoys...grew more violent...and louder in their denunciation of Hinduism and Islam...Mohammed and Rama, hitherto mere so-so beings turned sublime impostors and unmitigated blackguards...By and by the proselytising Colonels tempted the sepoys to Christianity with bribes and offered promotions and other rewards to converts. The sepoys protested, and their European officers promised to make every sepoy that forsook his religion a Havildar, every Havildar a Subedar Major, and so on! Great discontent was the consequence.”

It is over 72 years today (1929) since the above was published; during all these years the truth of the above statements has not
been challenged by any writer English or European. On the contrary, the English editor of the journal, Malcolm Lewin, who had been at one time a judge of the Madras Supreme Court and later a Member of the Madras Council, contributed a preface to the *Causes of Indian Revolt* in which he made comments, based on his own experience, which we quote below:

"We are ignorant of each other, as members of society; the bond of union has been that of Spartan and Helot... we have insulted their caste; we have abrogated their laws of inheritance; we have changed their marriage institutions; we have ignored the most sacred rites of their religion; we delivered up their pagoda-property to confiscation; we have branded them in official records as 'heathens'; we have seized the possessions of their native princes, and confiscated the estates of their nobles; we have unsettled the country by our exactions, and collected the revenue by means of torture; we have sought to uproot the most ancient aristocracy of the world, and to degrade it to the condition of pariahs...if a tree be known by its fruits, if the morals of England and India are to be held as tests of their respective creeds, India would not lose by comparison."

Another factor which contributed to the sum-total of the Indian soldiers' deep discontent was the persistent indifference with which their real grievances about pay, living conditions and want of ordinary necessary amenities of human life were treated by their English officers.

**Explosive Material**

The five causes enumerated above had the cumulative effect of filling their cup of woe to the brim; the hearts of the entire Indian people in all walks of life were filled with distrust, anger and hatred of the English. The explosive material had been piling up during the hundred years of English rule. All that was needed was the emergence of a leader capable of igniting it into a country-wide conflagration, regardless of consequences.

**True Picture of Revolution**

Very probably because the Indian soldiers took the lead in it, the revolution has been called the "Sepoy Mutiny" or the
"Sepoy War". In reality, it was much more than that. It was a war desperately waged by the princes and people of India, Hindus and Muslims, civil and military, for the emancipation of their country from foreign rule. In the words of Sir William Howard Russell:

"...We had a war of religion, a war of race, and a war of revenge, of hope, of national determination to shake off the yoke of a stranger and to re-establish the full power of native Chiefs and the full sway of native religions." (My Diary in India in the year 1858-59)

Envoys of Nana Dhundopant and the ex-Raja of Satara in London

Nana Sahib's envoy, Azimullah Khan, and Rango Bapooji, whom the deposed Raja of Satara had sent to England as his envoy at about the same time, got together in London. Both had been sent by their respective masters on the mission of appealing to the British Government against the injustice done to them by the Government of India. The rejection of their appeals by the British Government embittered both and brought them very close to each other. They discussed and evolved the outline of the next desperate step of armed rebellion. Thereafter, Rango Bapooji returned to India for securing the co-operation of the South Indian rulers in the projected rebellion. Azimullah Khan went on a tour of Europe for an assessment of England's status and influence on the continent and for securing the sympathy and, if possible, active help of at least some of the European powers for India's contemplated fight for freedom.

Azimullah Khan's European Tour

Azimullah Khan, who later became the second most prominent leader of the revolution, was a very able politician and spoke both English and French fluently. He invariably put on the Indian dress, and was a presentable man of attractive manners readily welcomed in the high social circles of London. Russell, the famous correspondent of the London Times, who met Azimullah Khan in Russia, relates an incident indicative of the latter's high personal courage. Russia was at war with England at that time.
and Azimullah Khan had gone to Russia to explore the possibility of an alliance between Nana Sahib and Russia against the English. One day when he and Russell were interestedly watching an artillery duel between the English and the Russians, a shell fell and exploded almost at Azimullah Khan's feet. Azimullah Khan did not move an inch according to Russell.

Azimullah Khan went to Italy, Turkey and Egypt too, but he does not appear to have met with much success in his mission. Lord Roberts has mentioned in his *Forty Years in India* that he had come across some letters written by Azimullah Khan to the Sultan of Turkey and to Omar Pasha about the English atrocities in India. Whilst the revolution was on, there were two reports widely current in the revolutionary circles. One was to the effect that some understanding had been arrived at between the Czar of Russia and Nana Sahib. The other was that the famous Italian patriot Garibaldi was about to sail from Italy with a contingent for the help of the Indian revolutionaries. It is said that he could not do so in time, on account of his own preoccupations with disturbances in Italy, and that later when he was on the point of sailing for India, he heard that the revolution in India was over.

**Finalisation of Plans at Bithoor**

Whilst Rango Bapooji was secretly carrying on from Satara an intensive propaganda for the revolution amongst the rulers and the people of Southern India, Azimullah Khan, on his return from Europe, got busy, in consultation with Nana Sahib, with the finalization of their plans for the revolution.

The main objective of the planners was first to rally the Hindus and the Muslims under Bahadur Shah's flag and fight the English till they were driven out of India, and then to establish afresh a proper Government under the Emperor for the administration of the country.

It was rightly realised that the revolution could succeed only if it caught the English napping and suddenly broke out on the same day all over the country. To ensure this a far-flung, secret and efficient organisation was the prime necessity and the planners set about it,
Bithoor was the centre from where the agents of the underground movement spread out into the country. It was so well-planned and comprehensive and progressed so secretly that even the ever-alert Englishmen had no inkling of what was a-foot. The competence and the capacity of those who inspired and led the movement and later led the revolution itself have elicited the unstinted admiration of several English writers. We quote from one of them:

“But it is difficult to describe the wonderful secrecy with which the whole conspiracy was conducted and the forethought supplying the schemes, and the caution with which each group of conspirators worked apart, concealing the connecting links, and instructing them with just sufficient information for the purpose in view. And all was equalled only by the fidelity with which they adhered to each other.”

(Western India by Sir George Le Grand Jacob, K.C.S.I.)

Sometime before 1856, Nana Sahib had sent out from Bithoor his special emissaries to the durbars of all the Indian rulers from Delhi to Mysore and his secret agents went out in all directions to win over the Indian soldiers in the Company’s armies and the people generally, and to secure the active cooperation and help of both in the projected revolution. In his letters to the rulers, Nana Sahib drew pointed attention to the way in which the English had swallowed up one Indian State after another for the achievement of their ambition to rule over the whole of India. “From one native court to another, from one extremity to another of the great continent of India, the agents of Nana Sahib had passed with overtures and invitations discreetly, perhaps mysteriously, worded to princes and chiefs of different races and religions.”

The Delhi Emperor’s Court at the Red Fort, Delhi, proved to be the most fertile soil for the seeds of the armed revolution to grow and flourish. The reasons for it have been mentioned already. Bahadur Shah, his capable wife Begum Zeenat Mahal and his counsellors unanimously decided to espouse the cause for which Nana Sahib and his followers were going to risk everything, namely, the country’s freedom from foreign rule.
The people of Delhi too did not lag behind and enthusiastically held secret meetings to form plans for joining the revolutionaries.

**Oudh and the Revolution**

According to Sir John Kaye, the last annexation (of Oudh) by the English had the most disquieting effect on the people, who began to ask themselves and each other, "Who can be safe and secure now?" and "What is the use of loyalty to the English who have unlawfully seized the State of a loyal friend and a faithful ally like the Nawab, who had invariably helped them when they most needed help?" He (Kaye) also states that the other Rajas and Nawabs who had been hesitating till then made up their minds and responded to Nana Sahib's appeals with promises of full co-operation and help.

Not only Wajid Ali Shah, the deposed and exiled Nawab and his shrewd Minister Alinaqi Khan, but all the Taluqdars, Zamindars and the whole population of Oudh were now ready for all the sacrifices which the success of the revolution was likely to demand. Begum Hazrat Mahal, Wajid Ali Shah's talented wife, and Alinaqi Khan were amongst the prominent moving spirits of the revolution. The latter, in exile at Calcutta with Wajid Ali Shah, sent out (from Calcutta) his emissaries disguised as Muslim Faqirs or Hindu sadhus, to wherever the Indian soldiers of the Company were stationed, and carried out secret correspondence with their Indian officers. Begum Hazrat Mahal did propaganda work amongst the aristocracy and the civil population by correspondence carried on under cover. Kaye has stated that inspired by the efforts and the messages of Alinaqi Khan, thousands of Indian soldiers and their officers, Hindus and Muslims, took the most sacred oaths—the Hindus with water from the Ganges and the Muslims with the Holy Quran in their hands—to join the fight to drive the English out of the country.

**Scope and Effects of Propaganda**

There were five principal centres which organised and directed the propaganda throughout the country from Barrackpur to Peshawar and from Lucknow to Satara. These were located at
Delhi, Bithoor, Lucknow, Calcutta and Satara. Later, more centres were established at other places too. All of them kept in touch and corresponded secretly with one another in code language and script. Religious preachers, Maulvis and Pandits, Faqirs and sadhus also carried on the propaganda enthusiastically and prayers for the extinction of the English domination over India were openly offered. At sacred places like Kashi (Benares), Prayag (Allahabad) and Hardwar, the pilgrims joined in the prayers and expressed their resolve to take part in the coming revolution. Thousands of nationalist Faqirs and sannyasis went about from village to village and from battalion to battalion exhorting the people and the soldiers to make common cause with those who were aiming at a revolution.

In most of the stations under the Company’s rule, the police, many Indian officials and even the Indian domestic servants of the English joined in the propaganda and carried it on.

The “political” Faqirs and sadhus carrying on the good work were provided with transport—sometimes an elephant—and a disguised armed guard for their personal protection.

The organisers of the propaganda and later the revolutionaries got all the money that was needed from the rich, the bankers and others, who placed heavy purses at the disposal of the protagonists of the national uprising.

The propaganda was by no means carried on only by the civilian population. The soldiers on their own carried it on amongst themselves. The regiments corresponded with each other to co-ordinate their efforts. One of the letters seized by the English contained an appeal which, translated into English, read:

"Brothers, the dagger is no doubt English, but no other hand except our own is stabbing us with it. If we rise then success is certain, and we are bound to be victorious from Calcutta to Peshawar."

In a number of places the country’s determination to rise against the English in a revolution was announced by posters which appealed to every Indian to sacrifice everything, even life, for country and religion. One such poster was found in Madras early in 1857. Secret meetings attended by thousands of people
were held everywhere. Even puppet-shows, open-air theatricals and folk-songs were used as the medium of propaganda.

**Emblems of the Projected Revolution**

The red "lotus" flower and the *Chapati* (bread) were the emblems which the revolution's organisers adopted for circulation amongst the military and the civilian population, respectively.

The soldiers of a regiment circulated the lotus amongst themselves from hand to hand and the last recipient took it to another regiment in token of his own regiment's readiness and determination to fight in the revolution. Thousands of "lotus" flowers were thus circulated in the various Indian regiments from Peshawar to Barrackpore.

The *Chapati* (bread) was circulated in a different way. The *Chowkidar* of a village received a *Chapati* from the *Chowkidar* of a nearby village. He broke off and ate a piece himself, and mixed the rest of it with some flour to make more "*Chapatis"* which the villagers also ate in token of their willingness to join the revolutionaries. The last *Chapati* was taken over to the *Chowkidar* of the next village to be used similarly. Miraculous as it might appear, yet within a few months the *Chapatis* had been circulated in hundreds of thousands of villages.

**Nana Sahib goes on a 'Pilgrimage'**

The time was now ripe for unifying the scattered propaganda organisations into a single organisation for starting and carrying on the revolution according to plan. An agreed date had also to be fixed for the simultaneous outbreak all over the country. A simultaneous outbreak was of course essential for the success of the revolution.

Nana Sahib undertook both the tasks and early in March, 1857, he left Bithoor on what was called a "pilgrimage". Azimulla Khan accompanied him. They went to Delhi first and held secret consultations with Bahadur Shah, Begum Zeenat Mahal and other prominent leaders of Delhi. Then they went to Ambala and after visiting many other places reached Lucknow on 18th April. At Lucknow Nana Sahib was very enthusiastically received by the people who took him out in a grand proces-
sion. They returned to Bithoor, via Kalpi, at the end of April, 1857. According to the author Russell, they made it a point, throughout their tour, of visiting all the Company's cantonments that lay along their route. Wherever Nana Sahib went, he invariably visited the local English officials and did his best to disarm any suspicions that might have arisen in their minds about his activities.

'D-Day' for Revolution

Before Nana Sahib returned to Bithoor, he appears to have fixed, in consultation with the other leaders, 31st of May, 1857, as the day on which the revolution was to break out all over the country. "From the available evidence I am quite convinced that the 31st of May, 1857, had been decided on as the date for simultaneous rising." (J.C. Wilson's Official Narrative). The decision was conveyed only to the principal leaders and organisers of the revolution in each locality, and to no more than three Indian officers of each regiment.
CHAPTER — XIX

GREASED CARTRIDGES — 'FAT IN THE FIRE'

Greased Cartridges

Were the cartridges, in fact, lubricated with cow's fat and lard? If so, were they the sole or even the main cause of the 1857 Revolution? To what extent, if any, did the greased cartridges reduce the chances of the success of the Revolution? These are the questions which we now proceed to deal with.

Nearly all writers, English and Indian, who have compiled history books prescribed for students in Indian Government schools, have stated that the cartridges were not lubricated, that the report about the said lubrication was false and that the sepoys were crazy enough to believe it. During the revolution, every English officer in India, from Lord Canning downwards, solemnly declared and tried to convince the sepoys that the story of the lubrication was utterly false and had been concocted by mischief-mongers to undermine the Indian Army's loyalty to the Company and so to ruin the Army.

On the other hand, Sir John Kaye, who is acknowledged to be the most authentic chronicler of the 1857 upheaval, has stated:

"There is no question that beef fat was used in the composition of this tallow." (Indian Mutiny, Vol. I, p. 581)

Kaye has stated, too, that Col. Tucker had in 1853 expressly written that the new cartridges were lubricated with cow's fat and lard. The agreement with the contractor for supplies to the Dum Dum Cartridge Factory, which manufactured the new cartridges, contained a clause whereby the contractor undertook to supply "cow's fat at four annas a seer". Lord Roberts, who was in India during the revolution, has stated:

"The recent researches of Mr. Forrest in the records of the Government of India prove that the lubricating mixture used in preparing the cartridges was actually composed of the objectionable ingredients, cow's fat and lard, and that
incredible disregard of the soldiers' religious prejudices was displayed in the manufacture of these cartridges.” (Forty-one Years in India by Lord Roberts, p. 421)

The comments of the well-known historian, W. E. H. Lecky, read:

“It is a shameful and terrible truth that as far as the fact was concerned, the sepoys were perfectly right in their belief... but in looking back upon it, English writers must acknowledge with humiliation that, if mutiny is ever justifiable, no stronger justification could be given than that of the sepoy troops” (italics ours) (The Map of Life, pp. 103, 104)

Lecky, too, like some other English historians, appears to have held the greased cartridges to be the sole or the chief cause of what he has called the “Sepoy Mutiny” (vide the italicised portion in the preceding quotation). A different view is expressed by Justin McCarthy:

“The fact was that throughout the greater part of the northern and north-western provinces of the Indian peninsula, there was a rebellion of the native races against the English power... The quarrel about the greased cartridges was but the chance spark flung in among all the combustible material... a national and religious war” (italics ours) (History of Our Own Times, Vol. III)

Medley has stated:

“But, in fact, the greased cartridge was merely the match that exploded the mine which had, owing to a variety of causes, been for a long time preparing (A Year’s Campaigning in India, from March 1857 to March 1858).

Charles Ball, in his narrative of 1857, relates the fact that Disraeli, who later became the British Prime Minister, used to assert that no one believed the greased cartridges to have been the real cause of the Indian revolution of 1857.

A significant fact, vouched for by another English writer, would appear to be that the very same cartridges were unhesitatingly used by the Indian sepoys when fighting the English during the revolution.

It is an undisputed fact that the cartridges did infuriate the sepoys and led to a premature outburst at places as far apart as
Barrackpore and Meerut. Consequently, the plan for the sudden and simultaneous outbreak of the revolution all over India on 31st May, 1857, miscarried, and so reduced to a minimum the chances of its success. Three historians, Malleson, White and Wilson, are unanimous in declaring that the premature outbreak was as much a piece of good luck for the English as it proved to be disastrous for the revolutionaries. Malleson asserts, in plain words, that had the revolution started simultaneously all over India on the appointed date and according to plan, English rule over India would have collapsed forever.

We now proceed to relate briefly the incidents at Barrackpore and Meerut which stemmed from the greased cartridges.

**Introduction of Greased Cartridges**

Prior to 1853, the ends of the cartridges were broken off by hand by the soldiers immediately before use. In that year, however, new cartridges, whose ends had to be bitten off, were issued to the sepoys. Factories for their manufacture had been set up at a number of places. At first the new cartridges were issued to only two battalions. The sepoys did not know, for a considerable time, that the cartridges were lubricated with cow’s fat and lard, and so unquestioningly bit off their ends before using them. Gradually, the supply of similar cartridges was extended to other battalions.

**Barrackpore—Mangal Pandey**

A trifling incident near the Dum Dum sepoys barracks disclosed the nature of the components of the lubricating mixture. A sweeper of the untouchable caste asked a passing Brahmin sepoy for the latter’s water-filled lota (goblet) to drink some water from. The sepoy treated the request with contempt. “Do not be so proud of your Hindu high caste,” retorted the sweeper, “now that you bite off the end of your cow-fat-smeared cartridges”. “Do you know,” went on the irate sweeper, “that fat-smeared cartridges are made at the factory near Barrackpore?” The Brahmin sepoy was taken aback, and carried the news to his battalion. The sepoys of the battalion were enraged at what they thought to be a surreptitious English attempt to defile them
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religiously. The sepoys had been unswervingly loyal to the English even against their own countrymen, and the English, so the sepoys thought, had repaid the loyalty by the utterly contemptuous disregard of the Hindu and Mussalman sepoys’ religious sentiments and prejudices. They asked their English officers and were told that the report was quite false. Not quite satisfied, the sepoys made searching inquiries at the nearby factory itself, and discovered it for a fact that cow-fat and lard were being used as lubricants in the manufacture of cartridges. The sepoys were furious at the English deception practised on the entire Indian Army and broadcast it all over India. Within a couple of months, thousands of letters about the foul attempt to defile the Hindu and Mussalman sepoys reached all the English cantonments in the country, from Barrackpore to Peshawar and Maharashtra. The infuriated sepoys were keen on immediate reprisals, but their leaders managed to restrain them, at least for the time being.

Shortly after the beginning of this unrest amongst the sepoys, the Company’s Government issued a mendacious proclamation, declaring that not a single cartridge of that kind had been issued to any army unit anywhere in India. The fact, however, was that only a short while earlier, 22,500 cartridges from the Ambala depot, and 14,000 cartridges from the Sialkot depot had been dispatched to the Indian Army units. That was not all. “The English officers had attempted to enforce the use, by the sepoys, of the new cartridges. At one or two places, the sepoys had persisted in their refusal to use them, and the entire regiment had been severely punished.

In February, 1857, the XIX Indian Infantry sepoys at Barrackpore were given the new cartridges. The sepoys refused to use them. At that time, there was not a single white soldier anywhere in Bengal. So the English officers did not press the matter for the moment. They asked, however, that a contingent of white soldiers be immediately sent to Barrackpore. When the contingent arrived from Burma, the officers decided to disarm and disband the XIX Indian Infantry. The latter was ordered out on parade on 29th March, 1857. It had hardly fallen in, when a youthful sepoy, Mangal Pandey, broke the ranks and rushed to the front with his loaded gun to the shoulder and
shouted to the men to join him in starting the religious war against the Feringhees. Serjeant-Major Hewson ordered the arrest of Mangal Pandey; but no one came forward to carry out the order. Mangal Pandey fired and shot Hewson dead. Lt. Waugh then rode out to the front. Mangal Pandey fired again and Lt. Waugh's horse rolled on the ground with its rider. Before Mangal Pandey could fire again, Lt. Waugh got up and fired his pistol at Mangal Pandey. The latter was unscathed, drew his sword and cut Lt. Waugh down. Then Colonel Wheeler came up and ordered the men to take Mangal Pandey into custody; but they refused point-blank. Col. Wheeler lost his nerve and rushed; to the General's residence. The General then went to the scene with some white soldiers who advanced towards Mangal Pandey. To avoid arrest Pandey shot himself but he did not die. He lay wounded on the ground as the white soldiers came forward to arrest him. He was court-martialled and sentenced to death. The execution was fixed for 8th April, 1857. No executioner willing to hang Mangal Pandey could be found locally, and so four men had to be brought from Calcutta and Mangal Pandey was duly hanged.

The unrest that followed Mangal Pandey's execution was not confined to the XIX Indian Infantry. It spread to the XXXIV also. Secret meetings were held by the sepoys of both to formulate plans for a revolution against the English. The latter got scent of this state of affairs and took some steps. They hanged a Subedar of the XXXIV on the charge that secret meetings to engineer a revolt were being held in his quarters. Ultimately, both the infantries were disarmed and disbanded. The news soon spread throughout northern India.

Northern India

Numerous bungalows of Englishmen and the barracks of white soldiers at Lucknow, Meerut and Ambala were set on fire and burnt down during the month of April, 1857, according to the revolutionaries' plans. The English did their best to trace the incendiaries but could not, as their investigating Indian police had already made common cause with the revolutionaries.
Meerut

On 6th May, 1857, a Company of Indian Cavalry posted at Meerut was summoned to a parade. The men were handed the new cartridges and were ordered to bite off their ends. This was done as an experiment to test the strength of the English office’s hold on the men. Eighty-five of the ninety men composing the Company refused to obey the order. They were court-martialled for disobeying orders and convicted; but sentence was not pronounced. On 9th May, all the Indian troops in Meerut, including the 85 cavalrymen were summoned to a parade, at which a detachment of white soldiers and an artillery corps manned by Englishmen were stationed facing the Indian troops. A sentence of 10 years’ rigorous imprisonment for each of the 85 cavalrymen was announced. The uniforms in which they had attended the parade were stripped off. They were hand-cuffed and fettered and marched off to the jail direct from the parade. The thousands of sepoys who had been summoned to the parade only because the English wanted them to watch this demonstration of the English might were infuriated. But they had orders from their leaders to do nothing for another three weeks—till 31st of May—and so they controlled their feelings and marched back to their barracks.

All this happened in the morning. Towards evening some sepoys went to the city. They were jeered at wherever they went. Women hurled opprobriums at them. “Fie on you,” some women called out, “your brethren are in jail and you are idling about in the bazars......your existence is a disgrace to manhood,” etc. The barbed taunts went home. That very night the sepoys held secret meetings and decided to wait no longer for 31st of May. There and then they sent word to the revolutionary leaders at Delhi, apprising the latter of their intention to start for Delhi the very next day. J.C. Wilson has declared in his Official Narrative that as a matter of fact, the real saviours of the English Raj in India were the women of Meerut, who had incited the sepoys to a premature revolt.

The rest of the night of 9th of May was spent by the sepoys in hectic preparations for the morrow, which was a Sunday. During that day, thousands of armed men from the adjoining villages
kept pouring into Meerut. The outbreak started in the cantonment. Some cavalrymen went to the jails. The jailors had already been won over. The walls of the jails were demolished and the fetters of all the prisoners were cut away. Then pandemonium ensued. Hindus and Mussalmans, infantry sepoys and cavalrymen, as also the Indian personnel of the artillery rushed out to wipe out all the English in Meerut. Many Englishmen were killed. The bungalows, offices and hotels were set on fire. The battle cries of “Deen-Deen”, “Har-Har Mahadeva” and “Kill the Feringhees” filled the air. Telegraph wires were cut and the railway line was taken under their control by the revolutionaries, according to plan. Some of the Englishmen escaped death by taking refuge in hospitals, in drains and in the homes of their Indian servants. As disorder spread in the town and the cantonment, the small body of English soldiers was demoralised and they did not know what to do. Many Englishwomen and children perished in the flames of their houses. As night fell the sepoys started for Delhi.

DELHI

Some 2,000 fully armed horsemen from Meerut reached the outskirts of Delhi on 11th May. The English at Delhi were completely taken by surprise when they got the news. Col. Ripley, an officer of the Company's army at Delhi, was directed to take necessary action. He immediately called to arms the LIV Indian Infantry and led it out to check the advance of the force from Meerut. When the two Indian forces faced each other, the one from Meerut raised the slogans, “Down with the English Raj”, “Victory for the Emperor Bahadur Shah”. The sepoys of the LIV heard the slogans and immediately went over and hugged their brethren from Meerut. Col. Ripley and all the English officers of the LIV were killed. The combined forces then entered Delhi through the Kashmir Gate, set fire to the English bungalows in Daryaganj and took possession of the Red Fort. The Emperor, Bahadur Shah, and Begum Zeenat Mahal both thought it imprudent to wait till 31st of May. By then, the infantry and the artillery from Meerut had also arrived. The artillery, on entering the Red Fort, fired a salute of 21 guns for the Emperor. Charles Ball relates that a deputation of the Indian
military officers, Hindus and Mussalmans, waited on the Emperor Bahadur Shah, tendered their homage and begged for his leadership of the revolution. According to Metcalf, the Emperor told them that he had no money and so could not pay the salaries of the deputationists and their men. The deputationists' reply was that they would get hold of all the money that would be needed from the English treasuries in India and would "pour it at the Emperor's feet". The old Emperor Bahadur Shah accepted the leadership of the revolution and the Red Fort echoed with the repeated acclamations raised in his honour. The gold and green flag of the emperor was hoisted on the Red Fort and it was under this flag that the revolutionaries later fought all over the country. The citizens of Delhi very warmly and hospitably welcomed the revolutionaries, and co-operated with them to the fullest possible extent.

The English bank at Delhi was taken into possession by the revolutionaries and English buildings were demolished. No white troops were then stationed in Delhi, but there was a big magazine stored with huge stocks of gunpowder, shots and shells, besides some 10,000 muskets and 900,000 cartridges. The guard on the magazine was composed of only nine men—Lt. Willoughby and eight English soldiers. The revolutionaries called upon Lt. Willoughby, in the name of the Emperor Bahadur Shah, to surrender the magazine. Lt. Willoughby refused, and, hopelessly outnumbered though they were, the nine Englishmen fought every inch of the ground, and, when further resistance became useless, they deliberately blew themselves up along with the magazine. All honour to them for preferring death to surrender.

The explosion sounded like the simultaneous firing of a thousand guns, and shook houses all over Delhi. Some 300 Indians in nearby streets were blown to pieces. All the English officers in the Delhi Cantonment were killed. The general massacre of the English by the revolutionaries in Delhi lasted from 11th to 15th May. Some hundreds of the English in Delhi did succeed in getting away through one ruse or another. Quite a number painted their faces black or disguised themselves as Faqirs. But most of them died of heat or fatigue, or were killed by the villagers. A few were given asylum by some kind-hearted villagers, who hid them in their homes at no small risk to themselves. When passions are roused in men, the lust to kill
very often dominates them and they are turned into ferocious beasts; the revolutionaries hunted down and killed every Englishman they could find in and around Meerut and Delhi. But no Englishwoman appears to have met with any violence at the hands of the revolutionaries.

"However much of cruelty and bloodshed there was, the tales which gained currency, of dishonour to ladies, so far as my observation and inquiries went were devoid of any satisfactory proof"—Hon. Sir William Muir, K.C.S.I, Head of the Intelligence Deptt.

On 16th May, 1857, Delhi, the ancient capital of India, again became free under the proclaimed rule of the Mughal Emperor. The event electrified the whole country. Nana Sahib and other leaders of the revolution could now legitimately, in the Emperor's name, call upon the princes and the people of India to rally under the Emperor's flag, and fight the English till the latter were driven into the sea. The call was issued immediately, and was responded to by risings in a number of places before 31st May.

**Aligarh, Etawah and Mainpuri**

The IX Indian Infantry of the Company's Army had its headquarters at Aligarh with three contingents stationed at Bulandshahr, Etawah and Mainpuri.

About the middle of May, 1857, a Brahmin revolutionary preacher arrived at the Bulandshahr lines to do propaganda amongst the sepoys. He was informed against, arrested, sentenced to death and brought to Aligarh for execution. On 20th May, the sepoys at Aligarh were drawn up in a parade and the Brahmin was hanged in front of them. The sight of a Brahmin swinging from the gallows inflamed the sepoys, one of whom rushed out and, pointing his drawn sword at the dead body, shouted: "Brethren, this martyr is having a bath in his own blood for the sake of us all." The infuriated sepoys could not restrain themselves and wait till 31st May. The IX Infantry immediately rose up in arms to a man. The English officers were, however, allowed to go away in peace with their women and children and by midnight the green flag was fluttering over Aligarh. The sepoys marched to Delhi with the money and arms taken from the Company's treasury and armoury.
The news reached Mainpuri on 22nd May, and the sepoys there revolted too, and acted like the sepoys at Aligarh. They gave the English a chance to go away peacefully, took the money, the arms and ammunition from the Company's treasury and armoury, and loading the same on camels started for Delhi on 23rd May. The green flag flew over Mainpuri.

At Etawah, the English tried to offer some resistance and Mr. Hume, the Collector, appealed to the armed police and to some other people for help, but they all sided with the revolutionaries. Some fighting ensued in which the Assistant Magistrate Daniels was killed. On 23rd May, the revolutionaries took possession of the Company's treasury and demolished the jail. But they too allowed the English, men, women and children, to depart unmolested. Mr. Hume, it has been said, thought it more prudent to disguise himself as an Indian woman. (*The Red Pamphlet* by G.B. Malleson, Part II, p.70). The liberation of the town was proclaimed by beat of drum and the green flag was hoisted.

The administration of all the three towns liberated by the IX Infantry was entrusted to the inhabitants of each of them and the liberators, having spared the lives of non-combatant Englishmen, marched, as stated above, to Delhi, equipped with arms, ammunition, money and provisions taken from the Company's possession.

**Nasirabad**

Nasirabad was an important English cantonment near Ajmere. A battalion of Indian infantry, a company of English soldiers and an artillery corps were stationed there. The sepoys of Meerut had spread out far and wide, and some of them reached Nasirabad. On 28th May, the Indian infantry at Nasirabad revolted. The English soldiers fought them, lost some lives and then ran away. The leaders of the sepoys took over the administration of the town in the name of the Emperor and then left for Delhi with thousands of Indian soldiers, the money in the Company's treasury and the arms and ammunition seized from the Company's armoury.

**Rohilkhand (Bareilly, Shahjehanpur, Moradabad, Budaun)**

The Rohilkhand province had been, at one time, under the
independent rule of the Rohila Pathans, who had established their capital at Bareilly. The English had ousted them and were ruling the Province. In 1857, Khan Bahadur Khan, a descendant of the last Rohila Nawab, was the incumbent of the judge’s office under the Company. Later, he became the chief revolutionary leader of Rohilkhand.

The Company’s troops stationed at Bareilly were commanded by General Sibbald and consisted of the VIII Indian Cavalry, the XVIII Indian Infantry and the LXVIII Indian Infantry and some Artillery.

Immediately after the revolt at Meerut, the Company’s Commander-in-Chief in India had issued a proclamation to all the Company’s military units in the country. It announced that the use of the new cartridges had been given up, and that, in future, only the old-type cartridge would be issued to the sepoys. It could not, however, influence the course of the revolution in any way.

The Indian officers of the troops at Bareilly and Moradabad were pressed by the commander of the revolutionary troops at Delhi to march to Delhi immediately. Khan Bahadur Khan, however, decided to take no overt action till 31st May, the date fixed for the outbreak. In the meantime he saw to it that his own behaviour and that of the Indian troops did not give rise to any doubts about their loyalty to the English.

Exactly at 11 a.m., on 31st May, a gun was fired. It was the signal for the starting of the revolution. The sepoys had been well organised by the revolutionary leaders, and the LXVIII Indian Infantry began by killing the English and burning their bungalows. Capt. Brownlow’s home was the first to be burnt down. General Sibbald and numerous English officers were killed and only 32 Englishmen succeeded in escaping to Naini Tal. Within six hours the Union Jack was hauled down and the green flag went up in its place. Subedar Bakht Khan of the Company’s artillery took over his supreme command of the revolution sepoys. He enjoined the men under the command to be just and peaceful in all their dealings after full independence had been achieved. The people acclaimed Khan Bahadur Khan as the Emperor’s Subedar of Rohilkhand. By sunset a messenger was sent by the Subedar to Delhi to apprise the Emperor of Rohilkhand’s
liberation from English rule.

Some 47 miles away from Bareilly, the XXVIII Indian Infantry was stationed at Shahjahanpur. On 31st of May, it rose up in arms and liberated Shahjahanpur.

On the other side of Bareilly, the Indian Infantry was stationed at Moradabad. On 18th May, its English officers came to know that some revolutionary sepoys from Delhi had arrived near Moradabad. They ordered the Infantry to attack and drive away the Delhi sepoys. A fight was faked and it was reported to the English officers that the Delhi sepoys, all except one, had run away. It was later discovered that they all had, in fact, stayed the night in the Infantry barracks as guests. On the morning of 31st May the sepoys of the Infantry assembled on the parade ground and notified their English officers: “The Company’s rule is at an end. If you want to save your lives, leave Moradabad within twenty-four hours.” The police and the people of Moradabad sided with the revolutionaries. Some Englishmen, including the Collector, the Judge and the Civil Surgeon left the town with their families. Mr. Powell, the Commissioner of Moradabad, and some other Englishmen became converts to Islam. Their lives were spared. The Company’s treasury was seized by the sepoys as well as all its property. Before sunset the green flag was up at Moradabad too.

At Budaun, the fourth important town of Rohilkhand, the revolution started on the morning of 1st June. The sepoys, the police and the prominent citizens of the town proclaimed the end of English rule, by beat of drum, and its replacement by the administration of the Emperor’s Subedar, Khan Bahadur Khan. The English in Budaun fled to the jungles where many of them perished.

Thus it was that within two days the whole of the Rohilkhand province was freed from the Company’s rule. Khan Bahadur Khan recruited and organised a fresh army and established law and order throughout the province. Most of the Indian employees in the Company’s administration were retained. The land revenue was, thereafter, collected in the name of Emperor Bahadur Shah, to whom Khan Bahadur Khan submitted a report written in his own hand about the recent events in Rohilkhand.
Khan Bahadur Khan's Proclamation

It was addressed to the “People of India” and its copies were distributed throughout Rohilkhand. We give below a close English rendering of some extracts from it:

“The auspicious day of our freedom has dawned...Will you, Hindus and Mussalmans of Hindostan, seize this glorious opportunity for your and your country’s benefit or will you let it slip through your fingers?...If the English continue in Hindostan, it would mean the end not only of the religious faith of us all, but also of our existence as free and self-respecting human beings...Up till now the people of Hindostan have been taken in and deceived by the English, and have been cutting, in the latter's carefully concealed interests, their own throats. We sold our country and have expiated the sin. The English will again resort to deceit. They will try their hardest to incite the Hindus against the Mussalmans and vice versa. Hindu brethren beware of the machinations in which the English are experts. Is it necessary to point out to you that the English never perform what they promise? Have they not forcibly deprived adopted children of their lawful rights? Have they not swallowed up the territories of our Rajas? Who usurped the Nagpur Raja and the Kingdom of Lucknow? Who has trampled under foot both the Hindus and Mussalmans? Mussalmans, if you revere the Holy Quran, and Hindus, if you venerate the cow-mother, sink your petty differences and join hands in this holy war. Rush to the battle-field, fight under one flag and with the free flow of your blood wash away the stigma of the English domination over Hindostan. Those who personally fight in the holy war and those who help with money will both be blessed, and will achieve salvation in this world and the next. But if anyone opposes his country, he will be hurting only his own self and committing suicide as a Hindostani.”

Bakht Khan Marches on Delhi

Bakht Khan, the supreme commander of all the Rohilkhand revolutionary forces, led them to Delhi with the arms, heavy
guns, ammunition and the money seized from the Company’s possession in Rohilkhand.

Bakht Khan and Khan Bahadur Khan were two of the ablest leaders of the revolution.

AZAMGARH

On 3rd June, Rs. 7 lacs were in transit, from the Company’s treasuries at Azamgarh and Gorakhpur to Banaras. The Indian Infantry stationed at Azamgarh revolted that very night. The sepoys, however, not only spared the lives of all but two of the Englishmen residing there, but also arranged for carriages to take them and their families to Banaras. The revolutionaries, with the full co-operation of the armed police, also seized the above-mentioned money and the Company’s store of arms and ammunition. They took possession of the jail and the Company’s offices and hoisted the green flag over the town that very night.

BANARAS

About the time of the revolution’s outbreak, no white troops of the Company were stationed anywhere between Agra and Calcutta, except a single regiment at Dinapore. On receiving reports of the events at Meerut and Delhi, Governor-General Lord Canning began to collect in Bengal white troops from Bombay, Madras and Rangoon. The war with Iran had ended just then, and a large English force relieved from that theatre was on its way to China for the invasion of that country. But the Indian revolution compelled the English to abandon the invasion of China, and the English troops from Iran were diverted to India. A large contingent of these troops was forthwith led by the famous General Neill to Banaras, where the Indian Infantry, a battalion of Ludhiana Sikhs, a regiment of Cavalry and an Artillery corps (manned by white soldiers exclusively) were already stationed.

The military barracks at Banaras had been fired on on 31st May, but the arrival of Gen. Neill with his force heartened the English there very much. The news about Azamgarh reached them on 4th June. That very afternoon the English officers decided to disarm their Indian soldiers, who were summoned to
a parade. When the soldiers had formed up on the parade ground, they were ordered to lay down their arms.

The sepoys instead of laying down their arms, forthwith attacked their English officers and the Company's magazine. The Sikh battalion advanced to oppose the sepoys. The artillery came up just as the fighting had started and went into action. But the English artillery officers who were directing the fire were unable, in the melee, to distinguish the Sikhs from the Mussalman and Hindu sepoys, and all the three were shelled indiscriminately. The Sikhs thought it would be safer to desert and did so.

The people of Banaras were, one and all, for the revolutionaries. But the Sikhs, the wealthy citizens of Banaras, and the titular "Raja" of Banaras (a descendant of Raja Chet Singh) co-operated with the English to the fullest possible extent, and helped them retain the city of Banaras.

Most of the Banaras region was, however, taken by the revolutionaries who removed a number of Zamindars recently appointed by the English and re-instated the old hereditary Zamindars. In numerous places English courts, jails and offices ceased to exist. Telegraph wires were cut and railways were disrupted by the tearing up of rails.

**JAUNPUR**

In Jaunpur the revolution started on 5th June. Some Englishmen were killed but a good many who surrendered were allowed to leave in boats for Banaras. The revolutionaries took possession of the Company's treasury. The green flag was hoisted over the town, and the sepoys, like the sepoys of Azamgarh, proceeded towards Fyzabad.

**THE IMPORTANCE OF ALLAHABAD**

For the English as also for the revolutionaries, Allahabad was of far greater importance than Banaras. All the trains from Calcutta to north-west India had to go through Allahabad. The Fort there was one of the strongest in the country and huge quantities of arms and ammunition were stored therein.

It has been stated that the Pandas (Hindu priests) of Prayag (the Hindu name for Allahabad) had been busy for some time in
doing propaganda work for the "war of independence". The Mussalmans were even more enthusiastic about it. According to Charles Ball, all the Indian officials of the Company, from the highest to the lowest, had joined the revolutionary organisation.

Allahabad (Town) Occupied by the Revolutionaries

When the news of the Meerut uprising reached Allahabad, not a single English soldier was stationed there. The Fort was garrisoned by the VI Indian Infantry, some 200 Sikh soldiers, and a handful of English officers. A regiment of Indian cavalry later arrived from Oudh as a re-inforcement. The sepoys of the VI had led their English officers up the garden path successfully and, when the news of the liberation of Delhi came, they asked to be sent to Delhi "to cut down the mutineers 40 pieces". The night of 6th June had been fixed for the outbreak at Allahabad. The sepoys saw to it that their relations with their English officers became even more cordial during the day. The sepoys' barracks were situated outside the Fort. When night fell and the English officers were at dinner, a bugle call was sounded by the sepoys as the signal for starting the revolution.

Some Englishmen were killed and those who could escaped and took refuge in the Fort. The Indian cavalry from Oudh was then called to arms to help the English. But the cavalry too joined the sepoys. Fighting ensued in which English officers of both the VI Infantry and the Oudh Cavalry were killed. The revolutionaries could not, however, take the Fort, mainly because the Sikh contingent quartered in it sided with the English and fought for them. Had the Sikhs remained even neutral, the Union Jack over the Fort would have been hauled down within half an hour of the outbreak.

The town, however, had a different story to tell: Prisoners were released from jails, the Company's treasury with Rs 30 lacs was seized, telegraph wires were cut and railway lines were disrupted. On the evening of 7th June, the green flag was taken out in procession through the town and the Cantonment, and was hoisted over the Central Police Station, after which the townspeople and the sepoys saluted it. In hundreds
of adjoining villages, Hindus and Mussalmans, Ryots and Zamindars proclaimed the end of the English Raj and hoisted the green flag.

"...Not only in the districts beyond the Ganges but in those lying between the two rivers, the rural population had risen...and soon there was scarcely a man of either faith who was not arrayed against us." (Kaye's Indian Mutiny, Vol. II, p. 195)

Within a few days, law and order was restored. The townspeople and some neighbouring Zamindars unanimously appointed Moulvi Liaqat Ali as the Emperor's Subedar of the Allahabad region. He was a man of exceptional ability and probity, and was universally respected. He established the headquarters of his administration at Khusro Bagh and maintained peace and the rule of law in the town and throughout the territory under his administration. He submitted periodical reports to the Emperor. He even tried to occupy the Fort, and appealed to the Sikh soldiers inside it to come out and join the revolutionaries but the appeal fell on deaf ears.

At this stage the English started their campaign of reprisals, which we propose to describe in the next chapter.
CHAPTER — XX

REPRISALS

GENERAL NEILL’S PLAN

Lord Canning had despatched a large force to Banaras under the command of General Neill. It was composed mostly of white soldiers, Sikhs and Madrasis. When Gen. Neill arrived, the city of Banaras was still in the hands of the English. His arrival was followed by wholesale arrests throughout the town. He sent out several detachments composed of white soldiers and Sikhs to re-conquer the countryside. The “exploits” of these detachments have been described by more than one English writer of history.

HANGINGS IN DIVERSE WAYS

Gen. Neill’s soldiers cut down, shot dead or hanged indiscriminately every man that they came across, whilst going from one village to another. Gallows were set up at a number of places and were kept busy round the clock. Even so, they could not cope with the hangings and branches of trees were used as improvised gallows. The victim was brought on an elephant under an overhanging branch. The noose tied to the branch was put round his neck and the elephant was moved away, leaving him dangling in mid-air. (Narrative of the Indian Revolt, p. 69)

“Volunteer hanging-parties went out into the districts, and amateur executioners were not wanting........the victims of this wild justice being strung up, as though for pastime, in the form of the figure of 8 (eight)” (Kaye and Malleson’s History of the Indian Mutiny, Vol. II, p. 177)

INCENDIARISM

When in the opinion of the English officers commanding the detachments, the above methods did not fully meet the situation
they resorted to setting on fire whole villages, one after the other. We quote below from the private letters written by some of these officers to their friends. One officer wrote:

"We set fire to a large village which was full of them (men, women, children and cattle). We surrounded them, and when they came rushing out of the flames, we shot them." (Charles Ball's Indian Mutiny, Vol. I, p. 244)

Another officer writing to his friend said that the latter would be glad to know that the writer had, in a single day, razed to the ground twenty villages. The total number of villages destroyed in the countryside can thus be estimated.

It is just possible that the English officers commanding the detachments had acted on their own without any instructions from Gen. Neill. But the following incident at Banaras, where Gen. Neill himself was personally in command, tends to reduce that possibility to an improbability:

"On one occasion, some young boys, who, perhaps in mere sport had flaunted rebel colours and gone about beating tomtoms, were tried and sentenced to death." (History of the Sepoy War in India, 1857 by J.W. Kaye, Vol. II, p. 236)

From Banaras, General Neill marched to Allahabad with his "conquering" army. On the way, he reduced to ashes thousands of villages with all their inhabitants and the latter's belongings.

**At Allahabad**

General Neill reached Allahabad on 11th June. It has been stated that when he got within sight of the Allahabad Fort, he was pleasantly surprised to see the Union Jack still flying over it. Apparently, he had expected that the Sikh soldiers in the Fort would join the revolutionaries and would hand over to the latter the Fort with its huge stock of arms and ammunition.

Had that happened, it would have become extremely difficult, if not impossible, for General Neill to retake Allahabad.

But even though the Sikhs had remained loyal to their foreign masters, General Neill would not trust them enough to let them be in the Fort, which he intended to garrison with white
troops exclusively. He, therefore, sent all the Sikh soldiers out of the Fort, with orders to plunder the town and to pillage and set fire to the neighbouring villages. The Sikhs gladly carried out the orders.

As mentioned above Allahabad city was then under the administration of Moulvi Liaqat Ali. The latter's headquarters at Khusro Bagh were attacked by Gen. Neill's force on 17th June and a fierce battle raged the whole day. The revolutionaries fought desperately against fearful odds. At the end of the day, however, Liaqat Ali saw clearly that resistance could not last much longer. He had Rs. 30 lacs in cash in his treasury, which he wanted to save from the English. So during the night he slipped away with the money and his men and proceeded towards Kanpur.

On 18th June, Gen. Neill helped chiefly by the Sikh soldiers entered the town of Allahabad. What followed was a veritable reign of terror for the townspeople. Says Sir George Campbell:

"...And I know that at Allahabad there were far too many wholesale executions...And afterwards Neill did things almost more than the massacre, putting to death with deliberate torture in a way that has never been proved against the natives." (Sir George Campbell, Provisional Civil Commissioner in the Mutiny, as quoted in The Other Side of the Medal by Edward Thompson, p. 81)

In the Chowk Bazar of Allahabad can be seen today (1930) three of the seven neem trees whose branches were used, it has been stated, as gallows for hanging some 800 innocent men within three days. Some people tried to escape death by getting away in boats which, however, had to pass the English troops stationed on the river bank. The boats were fired upon and sunk.

One English officer has described his doings on a single day in the following words:

"One trip I enjoyed amazingly; we got on board a steamer with a gun, while the Sikhs and the fusiliers marched up to the city. We steamed up throwing shots right and left till we got up to the bad places, when we went on the shore and peppered away with our guns, my old double-barrel bringing down several niggers. So thirsty for vengeance I was.
We fired the places right and left and the flames shot up to the heavens as they spread, fanned by the breeze, showing that the day of vengeance had fallen on the treacherous villains. Every day we had expeditions to burn and destroy disaffected villages and we have taken our revenge...We have the power of life in our hands and, I assure you, we spare not...The condemned culprits placed under a tree, with a rope round his neck, on the top of a carriage and when it is pulled off, he swings.” (Charles Ball’s *Indian Mutiny*, Vol. I, p. 257)

Commander-in-Chief Sir Collin Campbell is stated to have told Sir William Russell, the correspondent of the London *Times*, that in those days a certain English merchant was appointed the Special Commissioner in Allahabad to ferret out the rebels. The merchant owed money to several Indians in the city, and about the first thing which he did after his appointment was to hang every one of his creditors. (Sir W.H. Russell’s private letter to John Delane, Editor of the London *Times*, written from Lucknow)

Sir John Kaye, in his *History of the Sepoy War* (Vol. II), has written:

“Soldiers and civilians alike were holding bloody assizes, or slaying Natives without any assize at all, regardless of sex or age. Afterwards the thirst for blood grew stronger still. It is on the records of our British Parliament, in papers sent home by the Governor-General of India-in-Council that ‘aged women and children are sacrificed, as well as those guilty of rebellion’. They were not deliberately hanged, but burnt to death in their villages and then accidentally shot. Englishmen did not hesitate to boast or to record their boast in writing, that they had spared no one and that peppering away at niggers was a very pleasant pastime. And it has been stated, in a book patronised by official authorities, that ‘for three months eight carts went their rounds daily from sunrise to sunset to take down the corpses which hung at the cross-roads and market places and that six thousand beings had been thus summarily disposed of and launched into eternity...An Englishman is almost suffocated with indignation when he reads that Mr. Chamb-
ers or Miss Jennings was hacked to death by a dusky ruffian, but in Native histories or history being written in Native legends and traditions, it may be recorded against our people that mothers and wives and children, with less familiar names, fell miserable victims to the first swoop of English vengeance."

Holmes, the historian, thus summarises the holocaust:

"Old men who had done us no harm; helpless women, with suckling infants at their breasts, felt the weight of our vengeance no less than the vilest malefactors." (Sepoy War, pp. 229-30)

Agreeing with another English historian, we too think "It is better not to write anything more about General Neill’s revenge," except to say that, by all accounts, many more Indians were done to death in the Allahabad region alone than the total number of the revolutionaries’ victims in the whole of India during the fateful 1857-58 period. We might also mention that on numerous occasions the revolutionaries had spared the lives of the English men, women and children. In numberless villages the villagers had given asylum in their homes to the English fugitives, whose countrymen exacted much more than full retribution from the people of Allahabad, before and after occupying the town.

Repercussions in Towns and Rural Areas

People in both towns and rural areas completely boycotted the English. According to Charles Ball, the English could not get Doli-bearers or even ordinary labourers at any price. No one, particularly in the villages, dared to sell provisions to the English or to work for them. If anyone ventured to do so, his nose and ears were cut off, if he was not killed outright. Added to all this was the intense heat of the month of June. It led to an outbreak of cholera in the English camp.

We now proceed to narrate the developments in Kanpur, following the liberation of Delhi.

Kanpur

Kanpur was the birth-place of the idea and the plans of the revolution. The principal leaders of the revolution in Bithoor
near Kanpur were Nana Sahib, his two brothers, Bala Sahib and Baba Sahib and, last but by no means the least important, the shrewd and exceptionally capable Azimulla Khan (see Chapter XVIII). Also present at the Bithoor Durbar was the famous Tatya Tope, the Maratha military leader. Sir Hugh Wheeler was the English General commanding the Company’s army at Kanpur.

The news of Delhi’s liberation reached Nana Sahib on the 15th May, three days before it reached General Wheeler, who received the report on the 18th. An English writer has commented that one of the most astonishing features of the “revolt” was the speed with which authentic news from distant places was conveyed to its leaders by special messengers who moved amazingly fast. (Narrative of the Indian Revolt)

The Hindus and the Mussalmans of Kanpur celebrated the regaining of Delhi’s independence with eclat. Festive parties were held everywhere. The imminence of India’s freedom from foreign rule was openly talked about in bazaars and other public places. The sepoys in the cantonment were holding secret meetings to formulate their final plans for “the day”. Notwithstanding all this enthusiasm, Nana Sahib decided to hold his hand till the appointed date, viz., 31st of May.

On the other side, the English had not been idle. Some reinforcements from Lucknow had arrived at Kanpur to help General Wheeler’s force of 3,000 sepoys and about a hundred white soldiers. A “fort” was hastily improvised on the south of the Ganges, primarily as a place of refuge for the English should the need for it ever arise.

Strangely enough, General Wheeler had so complete faith in Nana Sahib’s loyalty to the English as to send him an appeal for armed help. Nothing loth, Nana Sahib left Bithoor and on 22nd May arrived in Kanpur with a few hundred of his armed retainers and two pieces of cannon. On his arrival, General Wheeler entrusted to him for safe custody the Company’s treasury and magazine. Nana Sahib immediately put a guard of 200 of his own soldiers over both.

Two of the principal revolutionary leaders of the Company’s sepoys were Subedar Teeka Singh and Subedar Shamsuddin, whilst Nana Sahib’s two chief lieutenants in Kanpur were Jwala
Prasad and Mohammad Ali. All four of them held secret conferences at night on a boat in midstream with Nana Sahib and Azimulla Khan. The news about the revolutionary activities at Delhi had reached the English at Kanpur, and when they became aware that something like it was afoot in Kanpur too, they appeared to have lost their nerve. According to an English writer the flimsiest rumour about the outbreak having occurred somewhere in Kanpur would send them scurrying to the improvised fort with their women and children. 24th May was Queen Victoria's birthday; but in 1857, the usual gun-salute was not fired at Kanpur because the English feared that the sepoys might misconstrue the firing as a signal for starting the revolt.

The Actual Outbreak

The pre-arranged signal for starting the revolution was the firing of three shots in quick succession. It was given at midnight on 4th June, and the revolution broke out immediately. Subedar Teeka Singh rode out of the lines followed by a few hundred horsemen and a few thousand foot soldiers. Some of them burnt the English buildings according to plan. Others went round from place to place pulling down the Union Jack and replacing it by the green flag. Nana’s soldiers joined the sepoys, and the Company’s treasury and magazine came into the possession of the revolutionaries. All this happened during the same night.

In the morning on 5th June, the sepoys of the Company's army and the Kanpur citizens unanimously elected Nana Sahib as their “Raja” under the suzerainty of the Delhi Emperor. Later in the day, the Emperor’s green flag mounted on an elephant was taken round the city and the cantonment in a huge and magnificent procession. Nana Sahib discarded the role of a loyal friend of the English and openly assumed the leadership of the Kanpur revolutionaries.

Nana Sahib’s Ultimatum to General Wheeler

Next morning (6th June), Nana sent a warning to General Wheeler that if the latter did not vacate and hand over the fort to the revolutionaries during the day, it would be attacked that very evening. The fort was not surrendered and at sunset the
attack was duly launched. By then, almost all the English living in Kanpur had taken refuge in the fort with their women and children. Those who, for one reason or another, could not get in, or were left in the city, were done to death. The fort was then besieged.

THE SIEGE

Nana Sahib had plenty of guns and shelled the fort heavily. The shells falling inside the fort killed the English in such numbers that it became difficult to bury all the dead. A single well in the fort was the only source of water for the besieged. Nana’s guns directed their firing on the well and the English were without any water. They suffered agonies due to thirst in the intense June heat of Kanpur. Those who were not killed by the shells, fell victims to fever, dysentery and cholera. All the same, the guns on the walls of the fort continued to work steadily, thanks to the remarkable courage of the English gunners. The extreme difficulty of sending a message for relief out of the beleaguered fort was overcome with the help of a loyal Indian servant of the Company who volunteered to take General Wheeler’s note to Lucknow. The note was tied under the wings of a bird, which the volunteer carried. It was written, partly in English, partly in Latin and partly in French. The words read:

“Help! Help!! Help!!! Send us help or we are dying.
If we get help, we will come and save Lucknow.”

Nana Sahib’s spies in the fort were daily bringing to him reports of the conditions therein.

HELP FOR NANA SAHIB

During the siege, help for Nana’s cause, in money and men, kept pouring in from the zamindars all around Kanpur. This encouraged him and his colleagues to no end. His own force increased to 4,000 men.

SERVICE BY WOMEN OF KANPUR

The women of Kanpur, both Hindu and Muslim, discarded their seclusion to render service to the besiegers. They took to
the latter ammunition, food and other necessities and boldly went right up to the walls of the fort. Amongst them, Azeezan, a public dancer and singer, earned well-deserved renown. A historian has stated that Azeezan, fully armed, rode about for hours, day after day, through the town and the cantonment, with "lightning speed", helping and ministering to the needs of the wounded, taking them food and milk. Quite often she rode right up to the walls of the fort, utterly regardless of guns firing from both sides and cheered up the revolutionaries.

At the same time, the civil administration and the problems of keeping up the supplies to the men fighting at the front was not overlooked. Under Nana Sahib's guidance, the prominent citizens appointed Hulas Singh as the Chief Judge. The duty of arranging for supplies to reach the fighting line was entrusted to Mulla. For civil cases, a court, with Jwala Prasad, Azimuthah Khan and Bala Sahib as judges, was established. The citizens cheerfully obeyed all orders promulgated by Nana Sahib. According to the historian, Thompson, those who were found guilty were severely punished, and law, order and peace reigned in the city. (The Story of Cawnpore by M. Thompson)

SURRENDER OF THE FORT

After two fierce battles on 18th and 23rd June, General Wheeler on the 25th hoisted the white flag over the fort. Nana Sahib ceased firing immediately and sent a letter to General Wheeler, which translated into English reads:

"To the subjects of Queen Victoria—All those who have had nothing to do with the implementation of Dalhousie's policy, and are ready to lay down arms, will be safely conducted to Allahabad."

Next day, on the 26th, representatives from both sides met for negotiations. A remarkable feature of the negotiations was that they were conducted in the Hindustani language, because Nana Sahib's representative, Azimuthah Khan insisted on it, even though he knew English quite well. The English representatives had, therefore, to talk in Hindustani.

Ultimately, all the English survivors of the siege surrendered to Nana Sahib. The fort with its guns, arms, ammunition and treasury was also delivered to Nana Sahib. On behalf of Nana
Sahib an undertaking was given that all the English would be safely conveyed in boats to Allahabad. That very night, 40 boats were collected, stored with provisions for the journey and moored at Sati-Chowra Ghat, ready to start for Allahabad as soon as the English got into them. In the morning on 27th June, the English were carried from the fort in palanquins and on elephants to the Sati-Chowra Ghat, about a mile-and-a-half away.

As soon as the last of the English had departed from the fort, the Union Jack flying over it was hauled down and Emperor Bahadur Shah’s green flag was hoisted in its place.

The Massacre at Sati-Chowra Ghat

During the previous eight or ten days, thousands of refugees from Allahabad and from the rural areas adjoining it, whose homes, relatives, women and children had been burnt to ashes by Gen. Neill’s soldiers, had poured into Kanpur. The accounts of the horrible atrocities perpetrated on them had inflamed the townspeople and enraged the sepoys at Kanpur.

The boats carrying the English refugees were due to start for Allahabad at 10 a.m. on 27th June. But from early morning, thousands of angry sepoys and townspeople had begun arriving at the Sati-Chowra Ghat. Nana Sahib was then in his palace.

It has been stated that as soon as the English refugees arrived at the Ghat, Col. Ewart was assaulted by an angry sepoy. Then, as narrated in Kaye and Malleson’s *Indian Mutiny* (Vol. II, p. 263), the men amongst the English refugees were made to stand in a line. One of them, probably a clergyman, requested and was given permission and time to read aloud to his brethren some prayers from the Bible. As soon as the reading was over, the sepoys started cutting off the heads of every Englishman in the line one by one. Four of the refugees succeeded in slipping away in boats during the confusion. They and the 125 women and children, whose lives had been spared and who were sent in custody to Sowda Kothi, under Nana Sahib’s orders, were the only survivors of about a thousand English who had taken refuge in the fort before it was besieged. It is stated that the sepoys who had collected in large numbers at
the Sati-Chowra Ghat, and who were responsible for the massacres were not on duty there.

The hanging at Banaras of young boys who were flaunting the "rebel" colours in a sportive mood can in no way be justified. Similarly, the cold-blooded murder of hundreds of unarmed men, who had surrendered only after Nana Sahib had solemnly promised them safe conduct, is unjustifiable. An atrocity is an atrocity and must be condemned as such, whoever might be the culprit.

NANA SAHIB'S RESPONSIBILITY

Nana Sahib was not very far away from Sati-Chowra Ghat at the time of the massacre and as narrated in Kaye and Malleson's *Indian Mutiny* (Vol. II, p. 258) he did give the sepoys a free hand to do what they liked with the Englishmen, so long as they (the sepoys) did no harm to any Englishwoman or English child.

NANA SAHIB'S TREATMENT OF ENGLISH WOMEN & CHILDREN

After the stain which had thus attached itself to Nana's reputation, it is not to be wondered at that numerous reports about the inhuman treatment meted out by him to English women and children became current in India and in England. But we would, in this connection, invite attention to the following facts:

(i) The Commission which was later appointed by the English to investigate the accusation against Nana Sahib held that the accusations were "false" (Muir's Report and Wilson's Report. Also Kaye and Malleson's *Indian Mutiny*, Vol. II, p. 267)

(ii) Justin McCarthy has stated in his *History of Our Own Times* (Vol. III):

"The elementary passions of manhood were inflamed by the stories, happily not true, of the wholesale dishonour and barbarous mutilation of women...As a matter of fact, no indignities, other than that of compulsory corgrinding, were put upon the English ladies....There were no outrages, in the common acceptation of the term, upon
women. No Englishwomen were stripped or dishonoured, or purposely mutilated."

(iii) Sir George Trevelyan (Cawnpore, p. 299) has stated that during the melee at Sati-Chowra Ghat's some sepoys abducted four English women. As soon as Nana Sahib heard of it, he rescued the women, and severely punished the sepoys.

As a matter of fact, Nana Sahib's treatment of the English women and children was humane and even generous. Meat formed part of their diet and the children were also given milk. The children were allowed to go out for fresh air three times a day.

Finally, we would quote General Neill himself:

"At first they (Englishwomen) were badly fed but afterwards they got better food and clean clothing and servants to wait upon them." (General Neill's Report)

Nana Sahib's Installation as Peshwa

On 28th June, 1857, Nana Sahib held a huge Durbar at Kanpur. It was attended by six battalions of infantry, two regiments of cavalry, numerous zamindars and numberless townspeople.

First of all, a salute of 101 guns was fired for the Emperor Bahadur Shâh, then a salute of 21 guns was fired for Nana Sahib as Peshwa.

Nana Sahib thanked the people and the sepoys for all that they had done and the help which they had given for the success of the revolution in Kanpur.

A lac of rupees was distributed in rewards to the assembled sepoys.

Three days later, on 1st July, Nana Sahib formally installed himself at Bithoor on what was termed "the Peshwa's Gadi". It appeared that with Nana Sahib's ascension to the Gadi, the well-nigh dead Peshwa power was coming to life again.
CHAPTER — XXI

JHANSI AND OUDH

RANI LAKSHMBAI OF JHANSI

As mentioned earlier (Ch. XVII), Jhansi was annexed by Lord Dalhousie in 1854, following the death of its young Raja Gangadharrao in November, 1853. The latter had adopted a son, a child named Damodar Rao, whom Lord Dalhousie had declined to recognise as the rightful heir to the Gadi. Gangadharrao’s widow, Rani Lakshmibai, who was barely 18 then, had after her husband’s death, carried on the administration of the State on behalf of her minor son, with amazing efficiency, till Lord Dalhousie annexed the State by a proclamation dated 13th March 1854. Jhansi was then occupied by a contingent of the Company’s Indian army. The annexation had given rise to widespread and bitter discontent amongst the people throughout the State—and Rani Lakshmibai protested against it vigorously. Lord Dalhousie completely ignored the discontent and the protest. Not only that; he seized the deceased Gangadharrao’s private jewellery valued at rupees four-and-a-half lacs and two-and-a-half lacs in hard cash and deposited the same in the Company’s treasury. He also declared in so many words, that although the minor Damodar Rao would, on attaining majority, become entitled to get back the private property of his father, he would never become entitled to the Gadi. (Jhansi Papers, 1858, p. 31)

To add insult to injury, Lord Dalhousie offered to Rani Lakshmibai a monthly pension of Rs. 5,000/- which the latter contemptuously refused to accept. Then followed a campaign of vilification of the young widow.

“Evil things were said of her...It was alleged that the Rani was a mere child under the influence of others, and that she was given to intemperance. That she was not a mere child was demonstrated by her conversation; and her intemperance
seems to be a myth.” (Sir John Kaye, History of the Sepoy War, Vol. III, pp. 361-62)

We would also quote the statement of Major Malcolm, who had personal knowledge of Rani Lakshmibai's character and way of life. In an official letter to the Governor-General, dated 16th March, 1855, Major Malcolm wrote that the Rani

"...bears a very high character and is much respected by everyone at Jhansi". (Jhansi Papers, p. 28)

Contemporary records also go to prove that Rani Lakshmibai was a young woman of upright character, exceptional courage and acumen, and was extraordinarily capable. As a child she had lived with her parents at Bithoor, at the exiled Peshwa Durbar where she was extremely popular as Kumari Lakshmibai. As a girl she had learnt riding, and the use of arms and was a crackshot at the age of seven. She used to go with young Nana and his brothers on their hunting expeditions.

Rani Lakshmibai and the people had never been able to reconcile themselves to the disgrace of the Jhansi Gadi implicit in the annexation of the State, even though several years had passed since then. It was therefore only natural that the Rani became one of the most important, and she proved to be the bravest, of the top leaders of the 1857 Revolution.

**JHANSI THROWS OFF THE ENGLISH YOKE**

As per plans of the revolutionaries, 4th June, 1857, had been fixed for the outbreak at Jhansi. On the appointed date, Havildar Gurbaksh Singh of the Company's 12th Indian Infantry (which had been stationed at Jhansi on its occupation by the English), started it by seizing the Company's magazine and treasury. Then Rani Lakshmibai came out fully armed and placed herself at the head of the revolutionaries. She was hardly 21 then.

On 7th June the Company's fort at Jhansi, then occupied by the English, was attacked on behalf of the Rani py Risaldar Kaley Khan and Tehsildar Mohammed Hussain. The Company's troops in the fort made common cause with the revolutionaries and Jhansi became independent that very day. Rani Lakshmibai once again occupied the Jhansi Gadi as the Regent, on behalf of her minor son, Raja Damodarrao. The Union Jack
over the fort was hauled down and replaced by the green flag of the Delhi Emperor. The independence of Jhansi was proclaimed throughout the State by beat of drum to the accompaniment of the usual formula: "The world is God's. The country is the Emperor's. The orders are Rani Lakshmibai's."

It has been stated that on 8th June, 67 English men, women and children in the fort were massacred under the orders of Risaldar Kaley Khan. According to Sir John Kaye, Rani Lakshmibai had nothing whatsoever to do with it. None of her own men were present on the spot, nor was her assent asked for, much less given. (History of the Sepoy War, Vol. II)

**Oudh's Preparations for Revolution**

The fiercest and hardest-fought battles of 1857-58 were fought on the soil of Oudh. The reason was that the people of Oudh, from the highest to the lowest, had staked everything that they had on the success of the revolution. G.B. Malleson writes:

"The whole of Oudh was up in arms against us. Not only the Indian sepoys of the Company's regular army, but 60,000 men of the deposed Nawab of Oudh, the zamindars and their tenants were solidly ranged against us. In addition, 250 fortresses, some of them with heavy guns mounted on their walls had also gone to the revolutionaries. All these people had weighed the Company's rule against that of their own Nawab's and had, by and large, decided that the latter had been much better than the Company's administration. Even the pensioners who had retired from our army had openly declared against us and every one of them took an active part in the revolution." (The Red Pamphlet)

The smouldering fires of disaffection had been fanned by the intensive revolutionary propaganda carried on over a long period by thousands of Mouvis and Pandits, who had gone round from barracks to barracks, and from village to village, filling the sepoys and the people with a religious zeal for the revolution. The result was that nowhere else in the country were the preparations made with such meticulous care and efficiency as in Oudh.
DISARMING OF VII OUDH IRREGULAR INFANTRY

In the beginning of May, 1857, the news of Mangal Pandey's hanging reached and inflamed the sepoys in the Lucknow Cantonment. Those who could not restrain themselves burned down some English houses.

On 3rd May, according to Charles Ball, four men of the VII Oudh Irregular Infantry

"...forced their way into the quarters of the adjutant of the regiment (Lieutenant Mecham) and ordered him to prepare for death. They informed him that, personally, they had no quarrel with him but that 'he was a Feringhee and must die' ... The mutineers having paused, that he might speak to them, he said 'Men! ... I am unarmed, and you can kill me; but that will do you no good. You will not ultimately prevail in this matter; another adjutant will be appointed in my place.... Why, then, should you destroy me?" The expostulation had a fortunate and unexpected effect upon the intruders, who turned and left the place without further attempting to molest the astonished officer." (History of the Indian Mutiny, Vol. I, p. 52)

The same evening news of the incident reached Sir Henry Lawrence, the Chief Commissioner of Oudh, who immediately:

"...ordered out Her Majesty's 32nd Foot, the 13th, 48th, and 71st Native Infantry, the 7th Cavalry, and a battery of eight guns manned by Europeans, and proceeded to the lines of the mutineers, about seven miles from the city. Darkness had set in before he arrived and his movement had been so sudden, that the men of the 7th regiment were completely taken by surprise. Within five minutes after his troops had reached the parade ground the bugler was ordered to sound the assembly; and the men on making their appearance were commanded to form in front of their lines. The Infantry and Cavalry then formed on either side of them—the guns being ranged in front...and the 7th, completely baffled awaited their doom, whatever it might be. They were simply ordered to lay down their arms, and they obeyed without a moment's hesitation." (Ibid)
FURTHER STEPS TAKEN BY SIR HENRY LAWRENCE

After disarming the 7th regiment, Sir Henry had recourse to diplomacy and adopted conciliatory methods. He held a military Durbar on 12th May at which he delivered an impressive speech in Hindustani. In it he drew pointed attention of the Hindu and Mussalman sepoys to the importance of their steadfast loyalty to the Company’s Government, which had benefited both. For the benefit of the Muslim sepoys, he related how Maharaja Ranjit Singh had dishonoured Islam. Similarly, he recalled to the Hindu sepoys’s mind the various ways in which the Mughal Emperor, Aurangzeb, had laid the axe at the root of the Hindu religion. He emphasised that the English alone could save them from each other. He then distributed shawls, swords and pugrees (turbans) as presents to reward the loyalty of the sepoys. For all the effect that the speech and the presents had on the Hindu and Mussalman sepoys, he might as well have saved himself the trouble. The sepoys were not impressed. On the contrary, both saw clearly that the sole object of recalling the past animosities between the two communities was to keep them at daggers drawn with each other and so to keep both under English domination.

Next day, on 13th May, news of the outbreak at Meerut reached Lucknow, followed on the 14th by news of Delhi’s liberation.

Sir Henry took precautionary measures immediately. He fortified Machhi Bhawan and the Residency, and all the Englishwomen and children were taken and lodged there. He ordered that all Englishmen in Lucknow should be compulsorily drilled and trained in the use of arms. He even sent a special emissary to General Jung Bahadur, the Prime Minister of Nepal, to request help for the English in their dire calamity.

THE REVOLUTION BREAKS OUT AT LUCKNOW

The signal agreed upon for the outbreak was reported to be the firing of some shots in the cantonment on 30th May between 8 and 9 p.m. Accordingly:

“.....before the chimes that told the hour of nine had ceased to vibrate on the ear, a discharge of musketry was heard
in the lines of the 71st. regiment of native infantry." (Ibid. p. 181)

The next morning, on 31st May, Sir Henry Lawrence advanced against the revolutionaries with some white soldiers and the 7th Light Indian Cavalry. The latter were sent in advance; but upon meeting the revolutionaries, some sowars went over to them. Later, the 48th Infantry, the 71st Infantry and 7th Cavalry discarded the Union Jack and replaced it by the green flag.

"Leaving, therefore, 200 Europeans and four guns in the cantonment, he (Sir Henry) moved with the remainder of his force to the city, and dispatched the following report to the Governor-General, dated Lucknow, May 31st, 2 p.m.

'Most of the houses in the cantonment have been burnt at the outbreak. The mutineers, consisting of half the 48th native infantry, about half of the 71st, some few of the 13th, and two troops of the 7th cavalry, have fled towards Seetapore'." (Ibid p. 183)

SITAPUR

Sitapur is to the north-west of Lucknow and some 50 miles from it. The three infantry regiments stationed there discarded the Union Jack on 3rd June and raised aloft the green flag. They seized the Company's treasury and killed all the English that they could find. Twenty-four are stated to have been killed, whilst some sought and were given refuge in the houses of the zamindars in the neighbourhood of Sitapur.

FARRUKHABAD

Tafazzul Hussain Khan, the Nawab of Farrukhabad, had been deposed by the Company. The revolutionary sepoys went from Sitapur to Farrukhabad. The English there had taken refuge in the fort. After some hard-fought battles, the sepoys occupied the fort, killed all the English there and reinstated the deposed Nawab on the Gadi. Within a few weeks not a single Englishman was left in the Farrukhabad State.

FYZABAD

Fyzabad town and Division, constituted the most important as well as the most disaffected region of Eastern Oudh.
The chief cause of the disaffection has been stated by Sir Henry Lawrence in the letter which he wrote to Lord Canning in April, 1857:

“The Talukdars have also, I fear, been harshly dealt with. At least in the Faizabad Division, they have lost half their villages. Some Talukdars have lost all.” (Quoted in History of the Indian Mutiny by Kaye and Malleson, Vol. III, p. 266, 1898 Edn.)

Moulvi Ahmed Shah was one of the dispossessed Taluqdar. From the time of the annexation of the Kingdom of Oudh, he had been devoting all his time, attention and energy in preparing the people for "the War of Independence". He toured constantly and extensively in Fyzabad, Lucknow and Agra, and addressed public meetings. The meetings were everywhere attended by thousands of people, who were so impressed by the impassioned eloquence with which he narrated the history of their hundred years' subjection to foreign rule that, before dispersing, they invariably took the pledge to stake everything they had, even their lives, on the success of the coming "war for freedom". Not only by public speeches but also by publishing pamphlets and periodicals he carried on intensive propaganda and agitation. The English ordered his arrest but the Oudh police would not carry out the order and so the English had to detail a military posse to effect the arrest. Moulvi Ahmed Shah was arrested, tried for overt acts of rebellion and sentenced to death. His arrest and conviction added fuel to the smouldering fires of rebellion throughout the region.

The Company's troops stationed in Fyzabad at that time consisted of two infantry regiments, some cavalry and some guns.

Immediately after Moulvi Ahmed Shah had been lodged in jail pending his execution, the sepoys, joined by the people, raised aloft the green flag of independence. Assembled on a parade, they plainly told their English officers that, in future, they would obey only such orders as were given to them by their Indian officers. Subedar Dalip Singh forthwith took in custody all the English officers. The walls of the jail were demolished and Moulvi Ahmed Shah's fetters were cut away.
The sepoys and the people then unanimously elected Moulvi Ahmed Shah as their leader, and as such, he immediately wrote to all the English in Fyzabad, calling upon them to quit the town. He then arranged for boats to take them away, provisioned the boats and even gave the departing English some money for incidental expenses on the journey. Law and order were established in the town, and on the morning of 9th June, the end of the Company’s rule and the re-establishment of King Wajid Ali Shah’s rule were proclaimed throughout the town and the entire Fyzabad region. In obedience to Moulvi Ahmed Shah's strictly enforced orders, not a single English life was taken in Fyzabad throughout the upheaval.

**SULTANPUR AND SALONI**

Sultanpur hoisted the green flag on 9th June, and Saloni did the same the next day. Sardar Rustam Shah, Taluqdar of Saloni, had publicly declared his determination and taken a pledge not to rest till English rule had been uprooted. His treatment of the Englishmen, women and children was, however, unexceptionable and even generous.

**SHAHGANJ**

Raja Man Singh of Shahganj had been jailed by the Company’s administration in connection with some dispute about revenue. After the outbreak he assumed the leadership of the revolutionaries. With the concurrence of the other local revolutionary leaders, he gave asylum in his fort to 29 Englishwomen and children and kept them safe and sound all the time.

**RAJA HANUMAN Singh of KALA-KANKAR**

We cannot do better than quote the historians Kaye and Malleson about Raja Hanumant Singh:

“This noble Rajput had been dispossessed, by the action of the revenue system introduced by the British, of part of his property. Keenly as he felt the tyranny and the disgrace, his noble nature yet declined to regard the fugitive chiefs of the nation, which had nearly ruined him, in any
other light than as people in distress. He helped them in that distress; he saw them in safety to their own fortress. But when, on bidding him farewell, Captain Barrow expressed a hope that he would aid in suppressing the revolt, he stood erect as he replied:

"Sahib, your countrymen came into this country and drove out our King. You sent your officers round the districts to examine the titles to the estates. At one blow you took from me lands which from time immemorial had been in my family. I submitted. Suddenly misfortune fell on you. The people of the land rose against you. You came to me whom you had despoiled. I have saved you. But now,—now I march at the head of my retainers to Lakhnao to try and drive you out from the country." (italics ours. History of the Indian Mutiny by Kaye and Malleson, Vol. III, p. 273 (Footnote), 1898 Edn.)

CHIVALRY OF OUDH ARISTOCRACY

Contemporary history reveals a number of Hanumant Singh's both Hindu and Mussalman, whose patriotism was matched by their chivalry. They openly led the revolutionaries but, at the same time, did not hesitate to give asylum in their palaces to fugitive English officers, women and children. Instances are mentioned in the letters and reports of the English survivors.

END OF THE COMPANY'S RULE IN OUDH

Barring a small part of the city of Lucknow, the whole of Oudh had freed itself from the Company's clutches between 30th May and 11th June, 1857. Sir George W. Forrest refers to it as follows:

"Thus in the course of ten days, the English administration in Oudh vanished like a dream and left not a wreck behind. The troops mutinied, the people threw off their allegiance. *But there was no revenge, no cruelty.* The brave and turbulent population, with a few exceptions, *treated the fugitives of the ruling race with marked kindness, and the high cour-
tesy and chivalry of the people of Oudh was conspicuous in their dealings with their fallen masters, who, in the days of their power, had from the best (?) of motives, inflicted on many of them a grave wrong.” (State Papers, Vol. II, p. 37. Italics ours).