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Role of Various Classes in the Revolt Of 1857

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Abstract

Culturally the Indians were always “one”. The Titular Mughal Emperor was there to serve as a thread of unity among the Indians. The British showed disrespect to the Emperor which offended the Indians in General and the Muslims in special. India possesses its own economic system mainly based on agriculture and small industry. The foreign rulers were sending Indian raw-materials to Britain for feeding their new born industries and thus were exploiting Indian resources. The “Doctrine of Lapse” or “Escheat” policy destroyed the Indian Industries. Indian Artisans, craftsman etc. became jobless and the burden of farmland increased. Poverty grabbed seriously the people. The Indian soldiers were paid low-salaries (starting from Rs. 7 to the end of Rs. 9). Indian soldiers were ill-treated in Army by the English causing rise of discrimination in their mind. The number of Indians in Army was far larger than the British sepoy (ratio 6:1). Most of the Indian soldiers were belong to Brahmin and Thakurs of East-India. A general discontent existed among all the Indian soldiers. Such dis-satisfaction were intensified by the Lord Canning introduction of “General Service Act” which required by the sepoy to march anywhere of British Empire. It is obvious that Indian sepoy had natural love and respect their motherland and faith of their own religion. The introduction of Enfield rifle with the cartridges greased with the fat of cow and pig, obnoxious to both the Hindus and Muslims set the spark that enkindled the embers of discontent of the Indian sepoy stored in them for a long time.

Culturally the Indians were always “one”. The Titular Mughal Emperor was there to serve as a thread of unity among the Indians. The British showed dis-respect to the Emperor which offended the

Indians in General and the Muslims in special. The Muslim was already sore at the loss of the post supremacy. Lord Dalhousie’s policy of annexation, the “Doctrine of Lapse” or “Escheat”-

by which many princely states of India were indiscriminately annexed to British. Especially Nana Sahib the adopted son of last Peshwa, Rani Laxmibai of Jhansi and the Nawab of Avodh were extremely injured by this policy.

India possesses its own economic system mainly based on agriculture and small industry. The foreign rulers were sending Indian raw-materials to Britain for feeding their new born industries and thus were exploiting Indian resources. This policy destroyed the Indian Industries. Indian Artisans, craftsman etc. became jobless and the burden of farmland increased. Poverty grabbed seriously the people.

States and jagirs of the princes and other aristocratic people were confiscated who became destitute and in the result skilled persons employed under them became jobless. This led them to join the revolt against the British. The soldiers of the confiscated states lost their means of bread. So they also joined the mutiny against the British.

It is a fact that the Indian life is based on religion. The attachment to religion has kept the Indians united. As per Hindu customs adoption was an important ritual which was refused by the British. This refusal affected the social and

religious sentiments of the Indians.

Abolition of “sati” Custom by the Lord William Bentinck, Hindu Widow Remarriage by law etc. put a deep hit on the Hindu religious feelings.

Seizure of religious grants to both Hindus and Muslims and side by side condemnations of eastern religious (Hinduism, Buddhism, Muslimism) also deeply hit in the religious faith of the Indians.

The unwarranted aggressive spirit of some Christian Missionaries on systematic planned manner, by giving jobs to the converted poor Indian to Christianity was also hated seriously. These types of conversions too created hate against the British.

The spread of English teaching in Schools, spread of Western culture, introduction of railways, telegraphs system etc. were also begun to eye with suspicion among the Indians as because they were seriously oppressed by the aggressive imperialism of British as whole. The efforts of British to invite western culture to Indian life led to a serious discontent.

The Indian soldiers were paid low-salaries (starting from Rs. 7 to the end of Rs. 9). Indian soldiers were ill-treated in Army by the English causing rise of

discrimination in their mind. The number of Indians in Army was far larger than the British sepoy (ratio 6:1). Most of the Indian soldiers were belong to Brahmin and Thakurs of East-India. They were sensitive being high caste Hindu. A general suspicion grew up in their mind as to the westernizing and christianizing policy of the British.

Such dis-satisfaction were intensified by the Lord Canning introduction of “General Service Act” which required by the sepoy to march anywhere of British empire. A general discontent existed among all the Indian soldiers.

It is obvious that Indian sepoy had natural love and respect their motherland and faith of their own religion.

The introduction of Enfield rifle with the cartridges greased with the fat of cow and pig, obnoxious to both the Hindus and Muslims set the spark that enkindled the embers of discontent of the Indian sepoy stored in them for a long time. On 29-03-1857 the Brahmin sepoy “Mangal Pandey” fired the first shot of the revolt 1857 in Bengal.

The participant of the the revolt were both Hindus and Muslims. The Zaminders, Artisans, Pndits Phakirs, businessmen all gradually joint the revolt. Hindustanies,

Marathies, Rajputs, Jats, Ruhilas all fought together against the British under leadership of Bahadur Shah-II the last Mughal Emperor.

We observe that the backbone of the revolt was Army (Sepoy). Nana Sahib Peshwa, Azimulla Khan, Mughal Emperor Bahadur Shah-II, Begum Hazrats Mahal of Oudh, Rani Laxmibai of Jhansi, Khan Bahadur Khan of Barrielly all led the revolt. Kanwar Sing aged about 80 years, Tantia Tope, Moulavi Ahmed Shah, Raja Honumant Singh fought to oust of the British.

We see that Hindu Mukundaram was principal Secretary of Bahadur Shah-II, Azimulla Khan was the principal advisor of the renowned rebel leader Nana Sahib. This clever and intelligent leader published in his newspaper- “Piyas-I-Azadi”- “The Hindu and Muslims Brothers of India awake”!! Dear brothers be hostile to British. The best thing that God gifted man is “Freedom”. The oppressive foreigners snatched away that supreme wealth of us by playing falsr tricks. Shall we bear this forever? No, never.....The English Government will try to use Hindus and Muslims each other. Dear brothers never put your steps in their devil trap. Dear Hindu and muslim brothers forgetting minor discrimination

get together unitedly under a flag in this war for independence.” (Adhunik Bharoter Itihas, by Goutam Chattapadhyay and Manju Chattapadhyay).

It appears that the leaders of the rebellion were fully acquainted with their weakness as well as their target and as such they earnestly wanted the unity of both the main classes of India and in this juncture they were very much successful to remove communalism from the Indians.

In Delhi Bhakat Khan a sepoy led the rebellion. In Kanpur Nana Sahib declared himself as “Peshuawa”, Tatyatope and Azimulla Khan organized the war on behalf of Nana Sahib. In Lucknow Begum Hazrat Mahal of Oudh led the revolt of declaring her adopted son as Nawab of Oudh. Rani Laxmibai of Jhansi conquered Gwalior with the help of Tatyatope. In Bihar Kanwar Singh of Jagdispur, a Zaminder, led the rebellion. Moulavi Ahmedulla led the rebellion at Faziabad, Rohilakhand. All of them fought against the British to oust them from Hindustan.

In North and Middle part of India a “General Revolt” started side by side the rebellion. The civil populations, displaced peasants, dispossessed Zaminders, oppressed Tribal populations and the dissatisfied sepoys fought together. The aggrieved people not only attacked the British but also

destroyed valuable documents and official records by fire.

Though in this great revolt large number of general civil people, farmer, artisans and labour class people joined themselves yet some Zaminders, businessmen, influential persons favoured by British, showed their loyalty to the British. Talmiz Khaldun pointed out that the Zaminders and Mohajon class of Bengal and also the English knowing intellectual class actively supported and help the British at the time of rebellion. (The great rebellion, T. Khaldun).

As per the dated 13-09-1857 issued by the Company Government it appears that “As the revolt was shaped as favorable character and as it appears impossible to identify the large number of participants the Magistrates ordered to burn out or to destroy the villages as a whole of those villages from which the villagers took active part in the revolt.” According to general Homes “only at Oudh 1,50,000 no’s of armed rebels were assassinated, out of which only 35,000 were sepoys.”

Noticing the uprising of 10th May 1857 of the sepoys in Meerut, the then Dewan of British of Assam, “Muniram Boruagh” was influenced and inspired to make free Assam from the grab of British. His plan was to drive away the English from

Assam with the help of Indian sepoys of Assam and to make “Kandarpeswar Singh” as the king of Assam. He accordingly sent secret message from Calcutta to Kanderpeswar Singh and Piayali Boruah and some others.

Thereafter and uprising grew up among the sepoys of Gauhati, Jhorhat, Dibrugarh and Goalpara. But the rebellion was stronglu suppressed by British Officers and the conspiracy of Moniram Baruh was focused by one Harnath Parbotia for which the entire plan was failed. Kandarpeshwar Singh was arrested and abandoned to Bardwan. Piyali Baruah, Maya Ram Nazir, Patiram Baruh, Madhu mallik, Bahadur Gaonbura, Marangi Guru Gohai, Karmid Ali etc. were arrested, Some sepoys was suspended and some were abandoned Captain Charles halraid, the Commissioner Shivsagar ordered to hang Moniram Dewan and Piyali Baruah. It is observed that Moniram Baruah led the aristocratic class of Assam who were dis-satisfied upon the British for a Long time.

We carefully observed that in spite of great efforts by the leaders to generalize the revolt all over the India some states, land lords like Punjab, Gujrat, Hyderabad, Madras, Mysore, Bombay, Bengal, South India etc.

did not join the revolt. Rather some of them directly helped the British with wealth, soldiers, fooding materials etc.

We noticed the educated Indians of various parts of India only find out that the rebellion was uprising for the interest of the Muslim Community to gain their lost pride. Further educated Bengali Hindus mainly observed the communal side of the great revolt.

At the time of great rebellion, various newspaper of Kolkata such as “Sombad Probhakor”, “Sombad Bhaskar” “Somprokash” etc. published various articles against the revolt. These newspaper mainly pointed that “ the revolt wasassociated with the interest of regaining political power of the Indian Muslim Community...the communal figure became prominent in lieu of national figure of the rebellion to the educated Bengali Hindus” (Banglar Samajik Itihaser Dhara by Binoy Ghose, Page-293).

We see that Punjab and archa, Datia, Gewalior, samphar etc. states of Uttar prodesh directly acted against the rebels. They fought against the rebel’s along with the British Army.

We carefully observe that from Bengal to Bihar, Uttar Prodesh to Delhi civil people join the sepoys who were directly or indirectly oppressed by the British. They

could realize that only by ousting the British they can earn peace and certainty in their life.

At the end of the revolt we see that the east-India Company ceased to exist. The control of the Indian Government finally assumed by the British crown. This revolt taught an extreme lesson to the foreign imperialistic traders, invaders. The active participation of various classes clearly indicates that there was a direct fight between mainly two classes one of which extortioner and the other is subjected to extortion. We can refer here the message written in the essay news sent from India by Carl Marx that- “The rebellion which the British ruler termed as mere a military uprising was a actually national movement.”

In a national movement each and every class of people use to join it. The character of the revolt of 1857 clearly indicates that all class of the Indians of Middle and north India specially, directly or indirectly, were associated in the revolt which was brutally suppressed by the British Empire. But, the flame of nationalism kindled in the revolt by their supreme sacrifice of the rebels ultimately forced the British to Quit India within next century. The call of the “Delhi Chalo” and “Meri Jhansi nehi Dungi” – I shall not surrender my Jhansi – shall remain a call of aspiration for freedom in the mind of all the Indians forever.

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