

The significance of the different names applied by historians to the events of 1857

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Abstract

The nature of the uprising of 1857 has aroused from the very beginning, serious controversy. The official British explanation was that the Bengal Native Army had alone mutinied, and any civil disturbances that occurred after, were natural by-products of the collapse of law and order. A British official, William Muir argued that, 'the character of the affair is that of a military mutiny-a struggle between the Government and its Soldiers, not between the Government and the People'. However, this view has been contested largely by writers and historians who argue that the rebellion of 1857 was not solely a military act but involved individuals from various backgrounds.

Introduction

Shakespeare once questioned whether a name changed the essence of an object, person, or even an event. Leading academics of Indian history may indeed have his answer. 1857, to this day, equally perplexes and intrigues historians on account of the different causations and implications the events inspire. In this regard, Rawat says:

The memory of 1857, distorted but hallowed with sanctity, perhaps did more damage to the cause of British rule in India than the Revolt itself- whatever might have been its original character (Rawat, 1998:103).

Rawat's remark exemplifies the political nature of the events of 1857, and because of this there are generally four broad categories of terms used to describe it by observers: mutiny, uprising, war of independence, and revolution. Historians subscribing to these terms use distinct discourse to sculpt the events and their significance to whichever title they may uphold. It is my aim here to rationalize the arguments regarding the use of each term and diagnose which provides the most accurate description of events. This will be done by having a detailed autopsy of events that took place during 1857 social and military commotion.

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The uprising began with a mutiny against the British by the East India Company's (EIC) army in Bengal, in the north of India. This led to widespread civil and urban unrest in all parts of north India. According to Bates, the unrest in the urban areas was mostly communal, characterized by the rioting of unemployed Muslim artisans critical of the successes of Hindu moneylenders who had been prospering under British rule. He argues that the Company was taken by surprise due to the insurrection which meant the ultimate collapse of British power in the sub-continent creating an increase in the many dissenting groups. This trait is for Bates, the most unique feature of 1857 (Bates, 2007:56-61).

The P-53 Enfield Rifle Cartridge Issue

As is self evident, the term mutiny implies insubordination and rebellion within the military and in order to evaluate this position we must discover if unrest and dissent were limited to issues concerning and the actions of military elements. The oft cited cause of the 1857 sepoy mutiny is the introduction of pig and cow fat greased cartridges for the new muzzle loaded P-53 Enfield Rifle to the blatant disregard for the religious practices of Hindus and Muslims. The loading action required that operators ripped the cartridge with teeth, before insertion. The combination of both pig and cow fat offended the sensibilities of both the Muslim and Hindu sepoys respectively (cow sacred to Hindus, and pig inauspicious for Muslims) and was seen as, 'part of an attempt to forcibly convert the sepoys to Christianity' (Bates, 2007:65). The Enfield rifle cartridges not only undercut religious and caste-system norms, but also degraded Indian society and identity. Upon their refusal to load the rifles, the soldiers were imprisoned. This resulted in a general sense of hostility amongst the mutineers who marched towards Delhi to the Mughal Emperor, Bahadur Shah, establishing him as the head of the revolt (Bose and Jalal, 1998: 90). It is important to note here that although there were other causes of the Uprising, British historiographies tend to stress the issue of the cartridges to highlight the fanaticism and the extent of superstition prevalent in the sub-continent. Bates also argues that the Uprising was an indication that the British had misruled India, but were reluctant to admit this, therefore referring to it as a 'mutiny.' The term contains trivial connotations depicting the incident as an act of treason by a group of soldiers. British accounts of the 'mutiny' are often accompanied by accounts of barbarities and horrors, making the Indians seem violent and hence, justifying the restoration of colonial rule (Bates, 2007: 63-66). However, this display of British insensitivity in the context of the Sepoy Mutiny title was merely the spark necessary for action of long festering sepoy discontent. It is due to this that Mangal Pandey of the 34th Bengal Native Infantry shot at his commanding officer, an offence that cost him his life but would later see his likeness reproduced on postage stamps by the Indian National Government.

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The cartridge issue sparked off the uprising of 1857; however this wasn't the first instance of its kind. As Bates points out the 1806 Madras Mutiny was due to the fact that new leather head gear was found to be polluting (Bates, 2007:66) - however this mutiny did not result in widespread uprising, nor the expulsion of the British from Dehli, "the ancient capital and modern arsenal of India" (Brendon, 2008:129). What is of note here is the fact that the first regiments to mutiny and later march into Dehli were based in Meerut, over 1000 miles away from the 34th Bengal. In an age devoid of expedient communication technologies it seems incredible that the circumstances of Pandey's death would travel so far and cause an uprising of such scale by mutineers who would have never even previously heard his name. There is evidence of other widespread rumours at this time; it was predicted that, as 1857 was the centenary of EIC victory at Plassey, that this year would be its downfall and that this was, 'a prophecy that was widely circulated in north India' (Mukherjee, 1990:92) amongst other rumours, 'about flour being polluted by bone-dust; about forcible conversions to Christianity and about the intentions of the British to disarm the sepoys' (Mukherjee, 1990:95). I can conceptualize the Mandal Pandey rumour as merely a catalyst –even the self import of the cartridge issue is questionable, as it is apparent that the mutineers would later use the same cartridges to fight the British. It was in the colonial interest to attribute the mutiny to religious, irrational fanaticism¹ as this disguised the true nature of the uprising (Bates, 2007:66). However, this extraordinary transfer of information by gossip provides our first clue as to the unrest that was plaguing northern India at the time.

The Enfield rifle is often used as a strategic device (initially employed by William Dalrymple) to describe the sole cause of the outburst as 'religious sentiments being hurt by the grease in the Enfield bullet' (Bhattacharya, 2008: 14) that spurred an anti-British reaction. This rather simplistic account of the revolt of 1857 is commonly used in Sepoy Mutiny rhetoric to understate the important pretext of events leading to the Enfield rifle debacle. This strategy allowed the British to subjugate the sepoys as erratic, and unstable.

Reward cuts and Overseas Travel

The cartridge issue was not the only issue affecting the military. An allowance system that rewarded the standing sepoy armies extra pay if they were stationed beyond their respective frontiers was removed in 1856 (Bates, 2007:66). This directly affected the mutinous troops stationed in the newly annexed state of *Awadh* and casts further doubt on the singular significance of the cartridge issue - as Pandey was stationed in Lucknow. In addition to this, the 1856 Service Enlistment Act forced sepoys to agree to travel overseas,

¹ All belligerents would become known as irrational Pandey's

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something which had been voluntary up until, and this issue that concerned Hindu sepoys fearful of losing purity and caste status by coming into contact with polluting foreigners. Even if the significance of the cartridge issue is limited, there were genuine grievances with military policy which may well deserved mutiny. However, in order to advocate the term mutiny one has to prove that the events of 1857 were isolated only to military elements as per the British colonial definition – otherwise the mutiny is just a part of the larger picture.

The British rulers termed the uprising as the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857. Occupation of India had long been spun on the grounds of a civilizing mission to modernize Indians, and thusly legitimize British rule. As such, when the mutiny erupted, the British wished to describe the events in as restricted a fashion as possible, hoping to minimize the contributors as though to show that the majority of citizens still welcomed their presence. The title of ‘Sepoy Mutiny of 1857’ was born, focusing the scope of discussion wholly upon the sepoys and their behavior.

Growing Grievances of The Bengal Army

In examining the significance of the epithet ‘Sepoy Mutiny’ one must first examine May 10th, 1857 from the context of the instigators of the mutiny; the Bengal Army. Logistically the Bengal Army was composed of volunteer mercenaries hoping for compensation, pensions, and improved living standards provided by the East India Company (EIC). However, growing grievances were fast outweighing the incentives for service in the EIC Army. The standard rate of pay had stagnated at 7 rupees (14 sterling) monthly since the turn of the century, whereas grain prices doubled between 1796 and 1852. (David, 2002) Barracks often flooded and leaked for the entirety of the rainy season, resulting in undue susceptibility to disease. British leaders’ inefficiency, lack of discipline, and motivation left troops wondering why Indian soldiers of greater intellect and military prowess remained to be promoted. (Dunbar, 1939) Furthermore British soldiers had security in higher wages, and generous length of service including promotion. Concerns over measly pay had been quelled since Indian sepoys often employed plundering and pillaging of conquered territories as a wage supplement. But as the world became smaller and conquests of India slowed, the only territory left to loot was abroad. (David, 2002) Hindus objected to fighting abroad as a violation of their caste-rules, while Muslims wished to remain peaceful with their religious brethren in outlying territories like Afghanistan. (Beck, 2007) These growing lists of hardships were fast mutating into resentment of British authoritarianism, and the bubbling of discontent was bound to become a boil when sepoys realized the extent to which Britain had become entrenched in all things Indian, including their land.

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It is important to note whether or not the sepoy regiments can be considered as a military force apart from the population. British officers remarked that sepoys were merely, peasants in uniforms and Mukherjee points out that, 'The peasant in uniform'... disowned his uniform only to become the peasant with arms... they reclaimed their peasant character [and] merged with the ordinary people' (Mukherjee, 1990:99). We can draw from this that the sepoys would have also been susceptible to issues affecting the populace as a whole. W.H Russel² writes that 1857 was, 'a war of race, and a war of revenge, of hope, of national promptings to shake off the yoke of a stranger, and to re-establish the full power of native chief' (Mukherjee,1990:92). Whilst we shouldn't just take an ambitious journalists account at face value, we can find other supporting evidence that the revolt went beyond the military. A British officer is reported to have written that, 'So daring an act of mutiny... encouraged and strengthened the hands of the disaffected amongst the native troops and other classes in the station and neighbourhood' (Mukherjee,1990:96) and more directly, 'as it spread, the army revolt was transformed into a popular uprising' (Lahiri,2003:36).

During and leading up to 1857, territorial conquest was the prime objective of Britain, and Lord Dalhousie was the instigator of said endeavours. He went on an expansion rampage of the British state while concurrently diminishing the sovereignty of the princely states. During his tenure (1848-1856), he used a variety of justifications for annexations claiming that a late ruler had lacked a legitimate heir, that the ruler was misgoverning, or simply that the Company needed a particular territory. This is cogent as the EIC was previously careful to inhabit India via the strategy of indirect rule. Indirect rule was less intrusive and created a smoke-screen which allowed Indians to maintain a semblance of identity through the incorporation of Princely States. However, Dalhousie's administration (1848-56) began an Annexation policy called the Doctrine of Lapse. The Doctrine proclaimed that any state with an incompetent ruler or without a natural heir would be consolidated under British legislation to safeguard against outside rule. Moreover the custom of 'adoption to secure an heir' would no longer be in practice. Dalhousie captured 'seven states in seven years, in central India, Bengal, Rajasthan, and the Punjab hills' in this way (Metcalf, 2002: 94-6). The final annexation of the last independent Indian state to the British was Oudh (present day Awadh), which the majority of the Bengal Army called home (Fallon, 1997). The annexation of the Kingdom of Awadh in 1856 is an example of such annexation justified by a ruler's misgovernment (Fisher, 1994:1-50). Awadh was under indirect rule of the British and the ruler of the kingdom was loyal. The British resident in Awadh wrongly accused the ruler of misgoverning and misusing his power which led to its eventual annexation (Bates, 2007:66). It may be worth mentioning that

² Early war correspondent

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this method of annexation was considered illegitimate by the rulers of different kingdoms and the Company managed to earn huge amounts of revenue through this policy. In doing so, the British themselves created feelings of anger and animosity not only amongst the common people, but even amongst the elites of the sub-continent who felt their power and influence threatened by an outside force. Historically, Oudh was the dutiful puppet of the British, supplying Brahmin and upper-caste troops to the Bengal Army. Prior to the annexation the soldiers held revered positions as keepers of safety and were 'supported by the British against the corrupt native government' (Harris, 1973: 14). During the post-annexation, the British superiority ceased the advantages and thus the remaining good relations between sepoy and ruler.

To justify their cause the Company maintained that these annexations would bring economic advantages to Britain, the Company itself, and the Indian Empire. The annexations were then validated to be in the best interest of the indigenous population who were brought under 'civilised' British governance. Thus, the Company's position could never be secure as long as it encountered threats and hostility from the Indian states. Hence, the British pre-assumed themselves as the 'guardians' of India. Pro-annexationist writers assume that the British conquered and ruled India because their rules portrayed superior systems of law, commerce and morality. Consequently, they pointed at the degraded and the exploited conditions of women, believing that such systems must prevail under 'oriental despots.' Pro-annexationists also argue that the annexations were beneficial for the Indians and the British in terms of revenue and raw materials vital to British trade in Asia and its industrial revolution (Fisher, 1994:1-50). This policy of annexation incited many Indian rulers, including the Rani of Jhansi and the Mughal imperial family, to fight against the British.

Ties to their kinsmen were languid, Bengal Army members no longer had Oudh to call home after the British annexation of the territory, and the quality of life within the soldiery was no longer worth the allegiance to the British. The Army had nothing to lose, and everything to gain. The concept of the Sepoy Mutiny was not an attempt at abolishing all alien rule; rather the sepoys were looking for a new leader to serve that would be more sympathetic to their needs. As such, they marched on the Red Fort from Meerut to Delhi and coerced Bahadur Shah Zafar, the last Moghul Emperor to act as their leader. Historians like H.S Bhatia (2001) view this nomination as a ploy to legitimize the sepoy's cause, in hopes of a drastically altered power hierarchy, which placed their needs at the zenith. In many ways the sepoys occupied Delhi in the same way the British had coerced the princes from their holdings. The British separate themselves from this in stating that the antagonism of the native elite showed sepoy-centricity and a paucity of followers. (Dasgupta, 2008: 164-65)

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Some refer to 1857 as a people's war; the idea being that the sepoys were mutinying in the name of their kin or fellow peasants. However, as Lord Elphinstone, the Governor of Bombay (1853-60) notes, the Bengal sepoys were 'more influenced by their intra-regimental brotherhood than by their family ties' (David, 2002). This was detrimental to the British for obvious reasons; the sepoys were in possession of weapons, were the only organized military in the country, and outnumbered the British by more than five to one (Beck, 2007). Essentially, the sepoys were militarily organized by the British for an internal uprising, an egregious mistake when the Enfield rifle debacle escalated. As mentioned the causes of the mutiny can't be limited to the greased bullets.

Economic Suppression

Marx (1835) speaks of the, 'profound barbarism of bourgeois civilization,' which dominated India. V. Savarkar introduced the term 'First Indian War of Independence' in 1909 (<http://www.indianetzone.com>) citing the power of unity and mass mobilization coupled with strong leadership as the defining principles in stomping out the British 'barbarism'.

Economic suppression was definitive in the war of independence. 'The rebellions were led by the scions of feudal aristocracy, tribal and non-tribal who saw in the events of 1857 an opportunity to...free themselves from the clutches of money lenders and other agents of the oppressive Raj' (Singh, 1998: 84). Heavy tax raises -around 50% of the monetary value of the farmer's produce- (<http://1857.org.uk>) left peasants dispossessed of their land, while each piece of property was 'brought into the tax nexus...to increase its income for the Company' (<http://www.scribd.com>). Free trade was established to jerk the Indian economy out of immobility. Although this led to a decline in tariff barriers, the British manufactured cotton always entered India tax free, whereas, Indian products entering Britain had heavy tax levied on them. This resulted in the sharp decline of the export of Indian textile and the Indian manufacturers' inability to compete with industrialised British products in the foreign market (Bates, 2007:84). As a result, proclamations were sent out to persuade certain social groups like merchants, civil servants, artisans, highlighting that the British had not only monopolised trade, high status jobs in the civil service, but were also a cause of large-scale unemployment amongst the Indians. It was assured that things would be promising under the rule of the Mughal Emperor and thus, rebellion was necessary (Bates, 2007:69). Hence, the British 'parasitic form of economic exploitation' (Singh, 1998: 84) required a mass mobilization against colonial rule in hopes of saving India from destitution.

Peasant Insurgency

Guha uses the phrase 'peasant insurgency' to identify the consciousness of the peasant masses which led to an uprising. It was the replacement of the oppression exercised by local despots under the previous system by a more regulated and systematic form of exploitation initiated by the British. In short, a sense of antagonism was invoked amongst the rural population against the British who, it was believed, were revitalizing landlordism (Guha, 1983:7). British methods of land tax were largely unpopular since those unable to pay the tax were made to appear before a magistrate and were likely to be deprived of their lands if they failed to meet revenue payments (Bates, 2007:61). Moreover, the Permanent Settlement Act of 1793 assigned private property rights in revenue collection to *Zamindars*. They were to collect the rent and pay a part of it as land revenue. Collection was a difficult task for the revenue was very high. Hence, many Zamindars defaulted or sold their property rights to other *Zamindars* (Bose and Jalal, 1998:69-70). This ultimately led to agrarian protests that held British revenue demands to be arbitrary and high, insensitive to the needs of drier areas (Bose and Jalal, 2003:94). It was also stressed that the increase in land tax may have been bearable during agricultural prosperity, but was unacceptable at a time when the Indian society was affected by a severe economic depression (Bates, 2007:61).

Mass mobilization was conducted primarily but was not limited to the ruined land-owners and what independent historians term 'peasants in uniform': the sepoy troops; all sorts of people, belonging to different communities, castes, and classes... There were many identities but in the movement, they were one' (Yadav, 2008: 15). Some two hundred and fifty million people inhabited the subcontinent in 1857 (Dunbar, 1939: 513), the majority of which were disgruntled with their diminishing sovereignty at the hands of the British. Peasants rushed from their fields and onto the front lines to show they wouldn't be playing a subaltern role in the destruction of the British regime, and the creation of a new India (Pati, 2008). Caste and religion blurred as the forced adoption of the sacrilegious Enfield rifle united Hindus and Muslims along previous cleavages. The remarkable point was that the war of 1857 acquired a national character due to the unification of the Hindus and Muslims through allegiance to the country and participation in a common struggle (Gupta, 2008). One dimensional accounts of the war as a struggle between the British, Hindus and Muslims isolates the process as a widespread 'nativistic and revivalist resistance to alien intrusion' (Kopf, 1966: 561).

Leadership of the Uprising

In such a widespread rally people can lose direction, as such leadership was deemed imperative to a successful uprising and so Nana Sahib (a Maratha

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Indian leader) was employed for the job. Nana Sahib had under Dalhousie's Doctrine of Lapse lost his right to an annual pension and had been denied in his appeal to the Court of Directors, this rage at the stoppage of his stipend meant backlash against the British. Nana Sahib went fast to work in garnering support from fellow disenfranchised princes and rulers through extensive travel campaigns and letter correspondence. He opened communications and planted the seed of war hoping to attract a following, however, very little outcry was heard until the annexation of Oudh (David, 2002). Nevertheless, the sepoys had begun the war on May 10th without notification of Nana Sahib who had to play catch-up in organizing the Kanpur Massacre in June of 1857. Nana Sahib, Tantiya Tope, Azimoolah Khan and Brigadier Jwala Prasad are leading luminaries of the war in gaining control of Kanpur and driving the British to near defeat (Trevelyan, 1886). Independence was proclaimed in Kanpur on the 7th of June, and recorded as the first successful anti-colonial re-possession of Indian soil.

Nana Sahib's leadership and mass mobilization carried importance after the war had concluded. The British soon realized the system of divide and rule with its 'fatal division of powers and responsibilities' could no longer thrive. (Dunbar 1939, 516) The East India Company was abolished, there was a reorganization of British administration, and authority was concentrated at the Crown. (David, 2002) This reorganization would one hundred years later lead to India's Independence. The 1857 Uprising is often seen as the spark in one hundred years of fighting.

The First War of Independence?

The rebellion of 1857 was not just an act of insurrection by the Indian army. 'This revolt of 1857 was neither a national war of independence nor simply a mutiny.' (Kulke & Rothermund, 1986: 253) Decisive aspects of each name do not fit appropriately with the historical context, whereas the title of 'Revolt of 1857' encompasses all ingredients of the events. While one can't wholly argue the atrocities of 1857 were purely mutinous in nature, there are definitive points that discount the theory of the events as a 'War of Independence'.

Abul Kalam Azad (1957) posits that the war of independence title is nothing shy of political propaganda. Historian spin doctors wished to show the revolt as a calculated overthrow planned by the Indian elite to liberate society and to regain control and social freedom from the British government. Select persons have been painted as the organizers of the revolt, namely Nana Sahib. However, evidence points to Nana Sahib's participation as limited and narcissistic. Nana Sahib 'did not rise against the British till...personal interests had been damaged,' (Bhatia, 2001) chiefly his pension and pride. For these reasons he was localised and insular, and could not develop a national

movement. What's more the 'Sindhia of Gwalior, the Holkar of Indore, the Nizam of Hyderabad, the Raja of Jodhpur and other Rajput rulers...and many other ruling chiefs, and a large number of *zamindars* gave active help to the British in suppressing the Revolt. Less than one percent of rulers actually participated'. Territorially, the revolt occurred in the restricted neighbourhood of Uttar Pradesh and central India. Nearly 80% of the Indian population was geographically excluded and thusly unaffected by the events. (Singh, 2001:181) This territorial locality is more akin to the Sepoy Mutiny, which never claimed a widespread nationalist following versus what the war of independence was based upon.

Anglicising the Subcontinent

Initially, the British refrained from Anglicizing the sub-continent. However, the 1813 Charter Act permitted Christian missionaries to access India (Jalal and Bose, 1998:78). It was then feared by the civilians that the British had come to India to Christianize the population (Bates, 2007:66). This Anglicizing advocated the spread of Western-learning which was also promoted through the employment of English language by Indian urban elites. According to Thomas Macaulay, law member in William Bentincks council, all learning in Indian language was useless. The aim of Western education was to form a class of people who could be interpreters, English in opinions and tastes. Hence, Bentinck replaced Persian with English as the official court language and the government in 1835. Not all members of the population welcomed these changes. In fact, a majority of Muslims remained aloof from Western education responding with much fervour to reformist Islamic movements (Jalal and Bose, 1998:84-85). These subtle changes became one of the causes of the unrest in 1857.

Religion

Religion is also flagged as a point of unification (Hindus and Muslims fighting side-by-side) during the revolt. However, this assertion disregards the entirety of the Sikh community and their role in the events. During the revolt of 1857 the Muslims sought to reinstate the rule of Muslim princes, and Hindus worked to bring the Marathas back to power. E. Valbazen (1986: 370) notes that religious sects felt mutual jealousy or hatred towards the British but, 'in this strange land patriotism does not exist, the feeling of nationality, of independence finds no echo in the population.' Reinforcement of this is with the advent of Bengal troops aiding the British in destroying the independent kingdom of Punjab in 1845-46 (Bhatia, 2001: 180). In fact, some Sikh troops fought with in alliance with the British to contain the revolt, and were consequently recruited as neutral allies after the revolt had dissipated.

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In addition to the insensitivity of the administration, during this period aggressive Christian missionary attempts were underway in-line with utilitarian arguments that Indian society was barbaric – with reference to exaggerated accounts of Sati, female infanticide and the Jagannath practices³. Inam Lands⁴ were also, 'regarded as a drain on the state's resources to be curtailed' (Bates, 2007:62). The impact of this on unrest can be seen by the fact that, 'the most visible symbol of [Christianity] was the first church built in 1837 in Delhi... the cross and the gilded ball which adorned the top of the dome of the church were repeatedly fired at' (Lahiri, 2003:37) due to the fact that, 'there was among the people and the sepoys a deep-seated belief in the existence of a deliberate British plot to overthrow caste and religion' (Mukherjee, 1990:95).

Misrule of the East India Company

Bates tells us that, 'Dissent and un-trust were widespread... the inadequate intelligence of the East India Company meant that the seriousness of opposition... overtook them' (Bates, 2007:61). We shall observe how it can be argued that the cause of 1857 was mainly due to misrule by the EIC and from this we will present the case that 1857 was a popular uprising of which the mutiny was a part, and that the use of the term mutiny hides the full extent of unrest in the area.

The EIC had a history of misrule and during its early rule economic exploitation resulted in the Bengal Famine of 1770 where more than a 1/3rd of the population died. Exploitation was not simply limited to the administration, Brendon notes that a lawyer, having amassed £20,000 in India, wrote that Europeans, 'encounter an uncongenial climate for what they can get' (Brendon, 2008:126). The issue of taxation and exploitation continued into 1857 and the newly annexed states. An Englishman's eye-witness report of 'Lucknow on the eve of the Mutiny' concludes that 'the people in general, and especially the poor, were dissatisfied because they were taxed directly and indirectly in every way' (Habib, 1998:11).

Here, it is important to consider the cultural and societal impact of colonial rule and how this contributed to unrest in the region. When the British arrived in India they made efforts to explore its culture. This trend was initiated by the early Governor-General Hastings who made efforts to use scholarly methods to rule in part by native customs. However Governor-General Cornwallis changed this and sought to remove Indians from positions of power and blamed the corruption of EIC officials on indianisation. The feeling of racial superiority and segregation grew and the disdain in the ruling psyche towards

³ Widow Suicide, the killing of female babies and a chariot festival respectively

⁴ Gifts of land for religious practice

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the populace of India was exemplified by the way that one Major remarked that, "those niggers are such a confounded sensual lazy set... that you might as well think to train pigs"(Mukherjee,1990:94).

It was partly due to the belief that the Indian society was backwards that the British EIC changed the legal system, taking power out of the hands of *Zamindars*⁵ or village community and putting it in the hands of the EIC magistrates. Bates states that the open courts were, 'an affront to the traditional hierarchy in rural areas, a hierarchy seen by Indians as political and social' (Bates, 2007:62). The British method of justice was especially violent and a popular punishment was for miscreants to be blown from cannons so that, 'their bodies were effaced and the on-lookers covered with blood and fragments of flesh' (Mukherjee, 1990:94). The perceived injustice in the legal system and brutal punishments added to the unrest.

We have so far provided ample cause for a popular uprising; we will also identify several rebel groups that rose up from the populace as opposed to the military. The policy of Lapse allowed the EIC to annex Princely states in which it deemed rule was inefficient and in 1856 the Company used this to annex Awadh, choosing to disband the 50,000 trained troops of the Nawabs army - instead of recruiting them as they had done with Ranjit Singhs regiments from Lahore. These masterless uncrowned soldiers would later rise up during 1857 and crown the Nawab's 14 year old son as King. Elsewhere, land reforms by the EIC had ignored nomadic and pastoral peoples, favouring groups that cultivated agriculture and timber production. This policy led to the deforestation of tribal areas and the loss of livelihood caused a series of rebellions in the 1820's by the nomadic peoples who had now been forced into a life of banditry. When Taty Tope flees Kanpur, it is not surprising that these tribes rise up to support him as, 'from a life of banditry and petty thieving, it is but a small step to join in open rebellion' (Bates, 2007:60).

Diverse Aims and Lack of Unity and Common Objective

Historians have offered plenty explanations for the causes and the impact of the revolt of 1857. However, it is worth noting that it seemed the European community was more concerned about blame than making an enquiry. Civilian officials indicted the army authorities for inefficiency and inability to maintain discipline neglecting the possibility that there was a general discontent in the northern frontier (Stokes, 1986:4). Furthermore, surviving accounts concerning the Mutiny have proved to be serious attempts made by the British to pacify the country. The documents are filled with fabricated conspiracy theories accusing anyone save the colonial regime itself (Bates, 2007:64-65).

⁵ Federal tax landlords who had enjoyed judiciary powers under the Moghuls

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British officials in the North-Western provinces claimed that the Mutiny was a result of conspiracies by the old Muslim elite and that the mass of the population was satisfied with English rule. They were convinced that the 'insurrection is a great Mohammaden conspiracy and the sepoys are the tools of the Mussalmans' (Stokes, 1986:4). Some even argue that the Mughal Emperor, Bahadur Shah, had been at the crux of this plot to restore the Mughal regime. In the Kingdom of Awadh, the attempt to re-establish Mughal rule had formulated the basis of rebel organization at Lucknow. S.B Chaudhri (Chaudhri, 1957, in Stokes, 1986:7) in his *Civil Rebellion on the Indian Mutinies* demonstrated that 1857 was a 'rising of the people.' R.C. Mujumdar (Mujumdar, 1957 in Stokes, 1986:7) scorns the attempt to argue that the 1857 struggle was a holy war for self-determination. He claimed that civil disturbance was the by-product of a political vacuum caused by the military mutiny and was largely self-seeking in character. Another interpretation maintains that the events of 1857 were a peasant revolt due to the manipulative nature of the land revenue system-the loss of land rights was the force behind the rural explosion of 1857. However, J.W. Kaye (Kaye, 1867, in Stokes, 1986:5), a chief historian on the Mutiny suggests that the explosion came from deep within the civil society. He states that British policy had abandoned the aristocracy and priesthood, including the peasant classes.

Although confined to the northern half of the sub-continent, the 'Mutiny' is often read as an all-India event and is raised to universal significance. It is perceived as the rise of indigenous society against the modernizing traits of colonial bureaucracy. It was the rejection of Western modernity, 'the revolt of the old order against the new' (Stokes, 1986:13). Bates maintains that the uprising helped create a mythology of resistance that formed powerful ideological weapon for various nationalist movements in India during the freedom struggle of 1930s and 1940s (Bates, 2007:79). In addition, although the revolt was more of a civilian uprising, the people of the sub-continent were not united in their cause. The Indian army mutineers themselves had mixed motives. Some wanted to restore the Mughal Emperor, Bahadur Shah Zafar to authority. Hence, they marched to Delhi where he was staying in exile, rather than Calcutta, the seat of British power. In doing so, they failed to acknowledge the large numbers of Indians who never desired Mughal rule to begin with-these included the Sikhs in Punjab. Even those who were prospering under the rule of the East India Company were ignored. Those who took arms were often fighting against the British for their country, Awadh, Bengal, and other countries, but it was not in the name of India itself. Due to the lack of a common objective, the Indians lacked a common strategy to defeat the British as well (Bates, 2007:62-63).

Having made the case that the events of 1857 were more an uprising than a mutiny, we must turn and diagnose whether the events were tantamount to a revolution or as Savarkar puts it, "the first war of independence" (Bates,

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2007:63). In response to this R.C Majumdar retorts that, "on the whole it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the so-called First National War of Independence of 1857 is neither first, national nor a war of independence" (Bates, 2007:63) and further afield, Davies, whilst developing a theory of revolution, summarizes that the events of 1857 were a "civil disturbance that fell short of producing profound revolution" (Davies, 1962:8).

It is argued that the term revolution or War of Independence is used by 20th Century nationalists in a similar way to employ of the term mutiny by the colonials; indeed Savarkar's would later become the leader of the Hindu Mahasabha⁶ and use 1857 as a rallying call for independence. We shall observe that whilst there was sufficient unrest to qualify a revolution, this was not the true nature of 1857.

Brendon writes that, "The Mutinneers were never able to transform the uprising into a war of independence. They lacked unified command, a coherent strategy and (for the most part) Enfield rifles" (Brendon, 2008:131) which gives us the two main areas we shall explore in this matter – the lack of leadership and singular purpose.

The Azamgarh proclamation issued by the rebels is in the main a list of religious, administrative and economic demands which fits the causes of 1857 that we have identified. In the document there is no mention of nationalism, "Mother India" or even ideological terms such as self determination. Stokes argues that the rebels were fighting for a variety of different causes and nationalisms (Bates, 2007:64) and we should remember that at this time India was not a tight polity and even the idea of India as a nation state hadn't existed until the British arrival. Interestingly whilst Mukerjee maintains that "the rebels thought that they were fighting in defence of their religion. And in this there was no difference between a Hindu and a Muslim" (Mukherjee, 1990:95), Bodkin notes that, "the disappearance of British authority in much of northern India was followed by the re-emergence of traditional rivalries in the area" (Brodkin, 1972:278). It further strengthens the argument that there was little to no co-ordination by political groups in the events of 1857. In this regard we can view 1857 as being more akin to the Palestinian Intifada's and henceforth an uprising rather than a revolution.

It is clear that the uprising was more generally attempting to re-establish the old order as Mukherjee writes, "in 1857 dethroned kings or dispossessed princes... were chosen to lead and give the uprising a legitimacy" (Mukherjee, 1990:105). The nature of this retrospective quest for legitimacy is supported in

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the case of Nana Sahib, who as the adopted son of the Maratha Peshwa⁷ and, despite a dispute with the EIC over his father's pension, had remained friendly right up to the 1857 uprising (Mukherjee, 1990:98). The Nana only joined the uprising because, "surrounded by an insurgent population eager to embark on a career of destruction, the Nana could only have courted death and destruction by opposing the rebels" (Mukherjee, 1990:103) and Mukherjee goes on to identify similar situations for the retired Mughal emperor in Dehli, the Rani in Jhansi, and the eighty-year-old Kunwar Singh in Jagdishpur. Whilst revolutions are often led by political elites, such as a Washington or Khomeini, in 1857 we observe more reluctant leadership and a retrospective hunt for legitimacy.

The insurrection of 1857 brought the rule of the East India Company to an end and in 1858 the sub-continent was brought under the British crown. In the same year, the Mughal Emperor was tried in court and exiled to Rangoon. After his exile in 1877, Queen Victoria was proclaimed the Empress of India (Bates, 2007:80). The Mutiny had cost the British a sum of 50 million pounds. This amount had to be paid by the Crown to the authorities in London and to reconcile this debt, the taxation system was revamped. Land revenue was moderate, but an income tax was established for the first time upon wealthier urban groups (Bose and Jalal, 1998:95-96). In light of the events of 1857, measures were taken to pacify India as a whole. Restrictions were placed on tribes and other nomadic and pastoral groups on wandering about for these individuals were active participants in the uprising. A Vernacular Press Act was implemented in 1878 whereby printing slanderous articles in non-English newspapers was banned. The British also initiated a new policy of 'divide and rule' winning the allegiance of rulers and aristocrats to the Crown. To avoid the Mutiny of 1857 from occurring once more, it was decided that the ratio of Indian to British soldiers in the army be kept 2:1 (Bates, 2007:85). These changes indicate that the British were forced to make amendments to their governing policies for they were consciously aware of their unjust activities that had driven the population to rebel against the existing system of the Raj.

In essence after 1857, colonial rule in the sub-continent remained unstable. It is perhaps better to suggest that the events of 1857 were an uprising of civilian as well as military groups unrest where although individuals lacked unity in their aim they rose up from scattered backgrounds to express their sorrow upon colonial rule. It has also been demonstrated that historians and other experts have offered plenty explanations for the events of 1857, but there are disputes for this seems a sensitive and a complex issue to remain neutral about. In my opinion, the uprising of 1857 was multi-faceted and

⁷ prime minister

should not be looked at solely as a military or a Muslim instigation against the British, but as a collective move by the people of India as a whole.

Conclusion

The 1857 is a difficult issue to name, with varying opinions on its nature, what happened and who took part. Even scholars who generally agree on the events of 1857 have discrepancy in details, for example on whether or not women and children were killed at the massacre of Kanpur (Bates,2007:71), (Mukherjee,1990:114), (Brendon,2008:132). Whilst by no means ecliptic, based on what has been presented here we can observe that rebellion was not limited to the military, and so the term mutiny is not sufficient. To go to the other extreme and term these events as revolution or war of independence is to misrepresent the goals of the rebels. Sitting in-between the two, we find that the term uprising most honestly represents 1857's events.

As one can see there are various aspects of 'Sepoy Mutiny of 1857' and 'First Indian War of Independence' which either overestimate or attribute absent sentiments to the events. The uprising of 1857 is a ground of neutrality, which incorporates all aspects of the events, explained above, as facts standing on the timeline of history. There are no implied connotations; rather the uprising is just that: an uprising. Granted it is an uprising surrounded by vast factors, meanings, and circumstances which one must take into in determining the implications of the events. Whichever context one views the uprising of 1857 under; there is no denying the extreme significance of the events for their reactionary causes and revolutionary effects (Butler, 1931: 66-67) then, now, and forever.

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