INTRODUCTION

Our historians once held the view that the Indian history began with the advent of the Aryans. However, historians from southern India argue that the Dravidian people have had a more ancient and developed civilization than the Aryans. Thus emerged the two streams of Indian history—one biased towards the Aryans and the other towards the Dravidians. Both the streams are largely based on mythologies. Instead of writing history based on myths, the present author attempted some time back to examine what instruments of production were existing at each historical epoch, what were the social relationships that governed production with such instruments, and how the changes in social relations led to political clashes, wars and revolutions.¹

Many scholars and historians have emerged now, who have examined history connecting it with the development of instruments of production, although all of them cannot be

said to have fully assimilated the method of Historical Materialism. These scholars have none-the-less subjected the views and ideas of early historians to strong and effective criticism. For example, the very title of the Sardar Patel Memorial Lectures delivered by Professor Romila Thapar in 1972 was "Past and Prejudice". There she has pointed out that there were two sections amongst the historians, one that tried to justify and uphold imperialist domination of India, and another sympathetic to anti-imperialist struggles. Historians of both these persuasions tried to examine history with a prejudice and to formulate "historical theories" that went well with their respective political biases.

This holds good for the writing of modern Indian history as well. For example, the pro-imperialist historians described the situation prevailing in India during the centuries immediately preceding the advent of foreigners in such a way as to strengthen the claim of the imperialists that the traders from Portugal, Holland, France and England made 'uncivilized' India 'civilized'. Nationalist historians, on the other hand, selected and interpreted historical facts in such a way as to establish that it was the foreign domination alone which stood in the way of India's modernization and progress and but for it, India would have achieved progress comparable to any civilized country in the world.

I have tried to show elsewhere that anyone who examines Indian history objectively would reject both these views which are subjective and suited to serve the narrow interests of the classes which their protagonists represent.\(^2\) In particular, I have attempted to show that it was the weaknesses inherent in the Indian social system evolved through centuries which prepared the ground for foreign domination to take deep roots in the country. Although it destroyed the foundation of Indian society in its ancient and medieval forms, it failed to modernize it on a new basis. It was the process of modernization that began with the freedom struggle.

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\(^2\) Ibid.
This is an approach which is different from that of most other authors on Indian freedom struggle. For example, the pro-imperialist historians treated with contempt the anti-British uprisings that took place earlier in the South in different forms. The nationalist historians, on the other hand, considered them as the beginning of and models for the struggle for national independence. I evaluate these events yet differently. In fact, people’s resistance to the British rule is as old as the British rule itself. Like the anti-British revolts under the leadership of Velu Thampi Dalava and Pazhassi Raja in Kerala, the people in different parts of India had revolted even before the British rule had got established in the country. The 1857 uprisings were the most widespread and the highest form of such local revolts. That widespread anti-British revolt which the British historians designated as “Sepoy Mutiny” marked the end of a stage in the history of the national movement. It was a higher form of revolts jointly conducted by the peasant masses and the feudal gentry who exploited them, in order to preserve the varna-jati relations and the village system based on these relations which prevailed in the country before the establishment of the British rule. At the same time, it was the final stage of a national struggle of a particular type. Finally, the events that followed the 1857 struggle showed that such struggles would never be successful.

Twenty-six years after the suppression of the 1857 revolt, another organized movement emerged against the foreign domination. This was the Indian National Congress. As distinct from the people who participated in the 1857 and earlier anti-British revolts, the people who formed the new organization were those who perceived the ‘progressive’ character of the British rule and foreign culture and wanted to copy it in India. They were, however, distressed to notice that the British rulers who introduced progressive changes in their own country were standing against those changes being introduced in India. This grievance became more wide-spread and grew in intensity and finally turned into an anti-British
mass struggle. August 15, 1947 was the successful culmination of this struggle. Therefore, pro-Congress historians claim that the growth and final victory of the Indian National Congress represented the continuation and successful culmination of the mass revolts that took place in different parts of India in 1857 and earlier.

Several books, monograph and research articles were brought out in the early 1970's marking the Silver Jubilee of Independence, in which studies on anti-British revolts found a prominent place. These researches have surely enriched our historiography. Most scholars, however, failed to provide logical answers to a number of important questions such as:

(1) Why were the revolts that took place in 1857 and earlier not successful? Why did they get suppressed?

(2) Why did the national independence movement that emerged after the suppression of the 1857 revolt keep itself away from armed struggle of the masses? Why was it that the central slogan of that movement came to be 'non-violent struggle' even when it had reached the common masses? Why did leaders of that movement avoid the 'danger' of an armed mass struggle by coming to terms with the foreign rulers?

(3) How was it that sectarian politics based on religious and caste ideologies put obstacles before the nationalists from the very inception of the freedom movement and that the foreign rulers, taking advantage of this kind of politics, were able to foster disruption within the movement? How did India, a single political entity throughout the freedom struggle, come to be divided into two (Indian Union and Pakistan) which came into clash with each other continually after independence?

(4) Why was it that August 15, 1947 which the entire people of the country rejoiced at as the birth of a new era, failed to enthuse Mahatma Gandhi who had stood at the head of the freedom struggle for a generation? Why was it that when a section of his followers turned themselves into new rulers, another section got disappointed
by the contradiction between their words and deeds? Why was it that a large section among the Gandhians began to organize the people one way or another against the new rulers in the subsequent years?

In brief, the early national movement which culminated in the 1857 revolt was violently suppressed by the foreign rulers. The new national independence movement which emerged around 1885, although it ended apparently victorious, raised several new problems instead of fulfilling the aims and objectives it had placed before the people. The reason is not far to seek.

It was in the second half of the 18th century that the British became rulers in some parts of India. It took nearly a century for them to bring the whole of India under their rule. And within another century, on August 15, 1947, they had to wind up their regime and leave the country.

The Indian people fought bitter battles against the foreign domination throughout this period. Thousands laid down their lives in order to make these battles, in which millions participated, victorious. Numerous families became destitute and people faced brutal repressions. It was, in fact, the determination, courage and the organizational skill demonstrated by the people in these battles that forced the British to leave the country.

But independence came not in the manner in which the courageous patriots who participated in this long-drawn-out struggle wanted it. The content of the pledge which the people in thousands of villages and towns were taking on 26th January every year since 1930 did not materialize. Foreign domination over the social, political and cultural fronts was not overthrown; change took place only in the political administration of the country; White masters were replaced by Brown masters.

In the first stage of the fight for national independence feudal princes headed the struggle, while in the second stage, the bourgeoisie was in the leadership. Further, this bourgeoisie did not eliminate the pre-capitalist social system; instead, it came to a compromise with it. Therefore, it is necessary to
reconsider both stages of the struggle for independence—one that ended with 1857 and the other that ended in 1947. The weaknesses inherent in both the stages must be examined objectively and evaluated. Being a modest attempt in this direction, in the present work, my perspective is one of Historical Materialism. Consequently one may find in it an approach quite different from that of the ordinary nationalist historian.

This may naturally raise some doubts in the minds of non-Marxist historians. First, it may be asked: Does not a commitment to Historical Materialism amount to putting a fetter on independent historical investigation? Second, whatever be the situation with regard to other countries, is Historical Materialism relevant to India? In order to answer these questions it is necessary to examine the essence of Historical Materialism and its methods of investigation.

We may begin with the Manifesto of the Communist Party (Communist Manifesto for brief), the most concise and comprehensive of all the works written from the perspective of Historical Materialism. Engels summarizes the content of this work as follows.

...economic production and the structure of society of every historical epoch necessarily arising therefrom constitute the foundation for the political and intellectual history of that epoch;...consequently (ever since the dissolution of the primeval communal ownership of land) all history has been a history of class struggles, of struggles between exploited and exploiting, between dominated and dominating classes at various stages of social development;...this struggle, however, has now reached a stage where the exploited and oppressed class (the proletariat) can no longer emancipate itself from the class which exploits and oppresses it (the bourgeoisie), without at the same time for ever freeing the whole of society from exploitation, oppression and class struggles...(Preface:1883).

Later there arose some misconceptions among Marxists on certain points relating to the essence of Historical
Materialism as summarized above. In a correspondence, Engels himself clarified the position on one of these points. He stated:

Marx and I are ourselves partly to blame for the fact that the younger people sometimes lay more stress on the economic side than is due to it. We had to emphasise the main principle, vis-a-vis our adversaries, who denied it, and we had not always the time, the place or the opportunity to give their due to other factors involved in the interaction.³

In this same self-critical letter Engels clearly brings out the interaction between the economic and non-economic factors.

...The economic situation is the basis, but the various elements of the superstructure—political forms of the class struggle and its results, such as constitutions established by the victorious class after a successful battle, etc., juridical forms, and especially the reflections of all these real struggles in the brains of the participants, political, legal, philosophical theories, religious views and their further development into systems of dogmas—also exercise their influence upon the course of the historical struggles and in many cases determine their form in particular. There is an interaction of all these elements in which, amid all the endless host of accidents (that is, of things and events whose inner interconnection is remote or so impossible of proof that we can regard it as non-existent and neglect it), the economic movement is finally bound to assert itself. Otherwise the application of the theory to any period of history would be easier than the solution of a simple equation of the first degree.⁴

This conception can be found in all the comprehensive works of Marx and Engels and even in their brief correspondences. Marx and Engles did not, nor did the Marxists, ever consider Marxism to contain the ultimate and permanent truth, unlike the faith of the believers in the Vedas and Upanishads. The Marxists, who strive not only to "interpret

³ Engels to Joseph Bloch. September 21 (22), 1890. Emphasis added.
⁴ ibid.
the world in various ways” but also to “change it”, examine objectively the changes that are continuously taking place around them, with the aid of the view briefly stated above. This is the method of Marxism (Historical Materialism) for historical investigations.

When the Communist Manifesto was being written, Europe was witnessing a violent revolutionary upsurge. Marx and Engles who actively participated in this upsurge, analyzed the various theoretical aspects of this revolution. The Introduction written by Engels to the re-publication of Marx’s The Class Struggle in France, 1848 to 1850, analyzing the revolution of 1848-49 and its lessons, throws light on certain questions relating to the application of Historical Materialism:

The work here re-published was Marx’s first attempt to explain a section of contemporary history by means of his materialist conception, as the basis of the given economic situation...If events and series of events are judged by current history, it will never be possible to go back to the ultimate economic causes. Even today...it still remains impossible...to follow day by day the movement of industry and trade in the world market and the changes which take place in the methods of production in such way as to be able to draw a general conclusion, for any point of time, from these manifold, complicated and ever changing factors, the most important of which...generally operate a long time in secret before they...(are) violently felt on the surface.

In the Introduction, Engels also points to certain errors made by Marx while undertaking to evaluate the class struggles in France between 1848-50:

When Marx undertook his work, the source of error mentioned was even more unavoidable. It was simply impossible during the period of the Revolution of 1848-49 to follow up the economic transformation taking place at the same time or even to keep them in view. It was the same during the first months of exile in London, in the autumn and winter of 1848-50. But that was just the time when Marx
began this work. And in spite of these unfavourable circumstances, his exact knowledge both of the economic situation in France before, and of the political history of that country after the February Revolution made it possible for him to give a picture of events which laid bare their inner connections in a way never attained ever since, and which later brilliantly stood the double test applied by Marx himself.

Stating that Marx wrote these in the midst of the revolutionary upsurge in 1848-50 and that some changes were introduced in the formulation as a result of the studies conducted later by Marx himself, Engels continues:

...we declared as early as autumn 1850 that at least the first chapter of the revolutionary period was closed and that nothing was to be expected until the outbreak of a new world economic crisis. For which reason we were excommunicated, as traitors to the revolution, by the very people who later, almost without exception, made their peace with Bismarck—as far as Bismarck found their worth the trouble. But history has shown us too to have been wrong, has revealed our point of view of that time to have been an illusion. It has done even more: it has not merely dispelled the erroneous notions we then held; it has also completely transformed the conditions under which the proletariat has to fight. The mode of struggle of 1848 is today obsolete in every respect....

Marx and Engels, however, did not confine themselves to this self-criticism, with respect to the experience of revolutionary struggles. They also reviewed carefully the contents of each of their works written before, during and after writing the Communist Manifesto. In this process they did not hesitate to draw new conclusions whenever they found new facts which convinced them of the need to revise the conclusions they had earlier arrived at. They took particular care to gather all the historical facts and statistics in respect of all countries, including Russia, China and India. They began to learn many languages for this purpose.

It is clear that Marx and Engels never regarded
themselves as sages who had realized the ultimate truth, but as scientific investigators devoted to finding truth. It is in this sense that Marxist students of history, including the present author, accept the approach of Historical Materialism.

Anyone who is engaged in the study of and research in history with the perspective of Historical Materialism should not neglect the historical facts brought out by other investigators who do not adopt this perspective. Rather, each such historical fact should be carefully examined. Similarly, the conclusions they reach on the basis of these facts should be critically examined. For example, several studies have come out in the recent times in Indian history in general and in the history of freedom struggle in particular. Each of these studies contains a good deal of valuable facts.

However, many of these studies are made with the perspective of bourgeois nationalism. Some others are, on the other hand, written from the point of view of a religion or from the narrow outlook of the people of a region or the speakers of a language. Such biases can be discerned not only in arriving at conclusions but also in selecting the materials for study. They should not be blindly accepted. At the same time, as scholarly investigators, they have brought out historical facts. These facts must be used to enrich the method of Historical Materialism.

The questions raised earlier make obvious the need to enrich the method of Historical Materialism by subjecting the studies and investigations of non-Marxist historians to critical examination. These questions are such that none of the histories of freedom struggle is capable of providing logical answers to them. On the other hand, if one utilizes Historical Materialism to examine the entire freedom struggle based on the study of the development of India’s past, the nature of social system prevalent in India immediately before the establishment of foreign rule in the country and the changes introduced by the foreign rulers in this system, one can provide answers which the nationalist historians are unable to provide. This is what is being attempted in the present work.
I. INDIA BEFORE FOREIGN DOMINATION

It has often been argued that those who formulated the theory of Historical Materialism were ignorant about India and other countries of Asia, and therefore, Historical Materialism is not relevant to India or to its contemporary problems. This is false. For, Marx and Engels were scholar-revolutionaries who viewed the entire world with the fundamental perspective of the bourgeois democratic revolution that was sweeping Europe and of the working class movement that was part of it, and strove to help social transformations everywhere. In the midst of their revolutionary activities, they also attempted to evaluate the developments in India in the background of the development of world capitalism, basing themselves on the materials accessible to scholars in Europe at that time. However, no Marxist would claim that the opinions they expressed resulting from these studies were
complete or faultless. Yet anyone who reads through their works would admit that they were able to go deep into the social transformation that was taking place in India and perceive its essence in a manner in which other historical investigators of their time were unable to do.

Marx and Engels wrote a number of articles in the Daily Tribune of New York in the 1950s which were of critical importance in the history of British rule in India. Not long after they wrote these articles, the struggle for independence, which the British called the “Sepoy Mutiny”, started. They also wrote several articles when the struggle was going on, observing the day-to-day development of events.

Though most of these articles were written by Marx himself, Marx and Engels were constantly exchanging ideas on the Indian developments, as they did on other issues. Therefore, it can be rightly stated that these articles were the result of the joint thinking of the two individuals who formulated the concepts of Historical Materialism. These articles have been collected and published in the form of a book entitled, On the First Indian War of Independence, 1857-1859, by the Foreign Languages Publishing House, Moscow. No one who takes even a cursory glance at these articles can dismiss the relevance to India of the theory of Historical Materialism under the pretext that those who formulated it were ignorant about India.

The materials on which Marx based himself for comprehending the nature and development of world capitalism and for determining its future development were the facts relating to the development of capitalism in England, which was the most advanced capitalist country in the world at that time. In particular, the statistics the rulers of England collected, the reports they prepared, and the debates in British Parliament and the press based on these materials, helped Marx to reveal the real character of capitalism through his works, including Capital. Similarly, the facts gathered by the British authorities on India and the opinions formed on the basis of these facts helped Marx to form his own opinion. Nevertheless,
just as in the case of world capitalism, Marx was able to take an approach with regard to India, which was diametrically opposed to the views of the ruling circles.

However, Marx’s evaluation of India was neither complete nor faultless in its details. This becomes obvious if one considers the volume of knowledge gained through studies made by Indian as well as foreign scholars during the past several decades since Marx wrote his articles on India. But he was able to evaluate India’s past and the changes being introduced by the British rulers as well as the future results of these changes. All this he did in such an amazingly accurate fashion that it far outweighs the inadequacies in the details of his analysis. In particular, this evaluation was done from the viewpoint of a future Indian working class which had not emerged on the Indian scene then.

As in all countries witnessing the advance of capitalism, a conflict was taking place in India also between the old pre-capitalist forces and the new capitalist forces. Marx’s approach was one that helped the rising working class to organize itself against the new dominating class of the bourgeoisie. That was why the Communist Manifesto, which declares that “the bourgeoisie, historically, has played a most revolutionary part”, states: “The other classes decay and finally disappear in the face of modern industry; the proletariat is its special and essential product.”

There are two elements that distinguish the situation in India from that in the European countries where Marx and Engels conducted their practical political activities. The first concerns the conflict between the old and the new, which in India assumed the form of a conflict between the natives and foreign rulers. This is because in India, the old was represented by the native feudal lords and other representatives of the old social system and the forces that overthrew them were the foreigners. In Europe, on the other hand, the representatives of both the old and the new were the natives themselves.

Marx is sympathetic to the foreign rulers to the extent
that they tried to destroy the old social system in India. But since the old is replaced by suppression and exploitation under the foreign domination, Marx expresses the anguish and indignation of a revolutionary against foreign domina-
tion.

The second factor that distinguishes India of those days was the fact that a working class had not yet emerged here, whereas in all the European countries, that class, however small it might have been, had already started emerging. There the working class was becoming an organized force by standing by the side of the bourgeoisie in the fight against feudalism and for the establishment of democracy. Therefore, right in the struggle between the old and the new, a new (working) class, a class which is destined to "dig the grave" of the dominant class within the new, had started emerging. This was not the case with India. Here the conflict was between the foreign rulers trying to subjugate India by destroying feudalism and establishing capitalist relations, and the reactionary feudal social forces fighting to preserve the decadent social system. Marx undertook the task of revealing both the forces. In an article dated June 10, 1853, Marx stated: "I share not the opinion of those who believe in a golden age of Hindustan.... There cannot, however, remain any doubt but that the misery inflicted by the British on Hindustan is of an essentially different and infinitely more intensive kind than all Hindustan had to suffer before."1

Comparing India with Italy, Marx wrote in the same article, "just as Italy has, form time to time, been compressed by the conqueror's sword into different national masses, so do we find Hindustan, when not under the pressure of the Mohammedan, or the Mogul, or the Briton, dissolved into as many independent and conflicting states as it numbered towns, or even villages."2

Marx has no regard at all for the Indian social life which the ordinary nationalist proudly claims as "centuries

2. Ibid p 14.
old". He even hates it. He is prepared to shed not a drop of tear at its destruction. He remarks:

...We must not forget that these idyllic village communities, inoffensive though they may appear, had always been the solid foundation of Oriental despotism, that they restrained the human mind within the smallest possible compass, making it the unsurging tool of superstition, enslaving it beneath the traditional rules, depriving it of all grandeur and historical energies. We must not forget that the barbarian egotism which, concentrating on some miserable patch of land, had quietly witnessed the ruin of empires, the perpetration of unspeakable cruelties, the massacre of the population of large towns, with no other consideration bestowed upon them than on natural events, itself the helpless prey of any aggressor who deigned to notice it at all. We must not forget that this undignified, stagnant, and vegetative life, that this passive sort of existence evoked on the other part, in contradistinction, wild, aimless, unbound forces of destruction and rendered murder itself a religious rite in Hindustan. We must not forget that these little communities were contaminated by distinctions of caste and by slavery, that they subjugated man to external circumstances, instead of elevating man to be the sovereign of circumstances, that they transformed a self-developing social state into never changing natural destiny, and thus brought about a brutalizing worship of nature, exhibiting its degradation in the fact that man, the sovereign of nature, fell down on his knees in adoration of Hanuman, the monkey, and Sabala, the cow.3

Marx's opinion about the British who destroyed such a decadent, degenerate and old Indian society is this: "England has broken down the entire framework of Indian society, without any symptoms of reconstitution yet appearing. This loss of his old world, with no gain of a new one, imparts a particular kind of melancholy to the present misery of the

Hindu, and separates Hindustan ruled by Britain from all its ancient traditions, and from the whole of its past history."⁴ On the question of the future of India, Marx wrote:

All the English bourgeoisie may be forced to do will neither emancipate nor materially mend the social condition of the mass of the people.... The Indians will not reap the fruits of the new elements of society scattered among them by the industrial proletariat, or till the Hindus themselves shall have grown strong enough to throw off the British yoke altogether.⁵

In brief, Marx recognized the historical truth that the British functioned in India as the "instrument of history" to cut at the roots of Indian social system which stood against social progress for centuries. But he was not prepared to compromise in any way with the inhuman aggression and robbery committed by them on that pretext. Marx wrote:

The profound hypocrisy and inherent barbarism of bourgeois civilization lies unveiled before our eyes, turning from its home, where it assumes respectable forms, to the colonies, where it goes naked. They are the defenders of property. But did any revolutionary party ever originate agrarian revolutions like those in Bengal, in Madras, and in Bombay? Did they not, in India, to borrow an expression of that great robber, Lord Clive himself, resort to atrocious extortion, when simple corruption could not keep pace with their rapacity? While they prated in Europe about the inviolable sanctity of national debt, did they not confiscate in India the dividends of the rajas, who had invested their private savings in the company's own funds? While they combated the French revolution under the pretext of defending "our holy religion", did they not forbid, at the same time, Christianity to be propagated in India, and did they not in order to make money out of the pilgrims streaming to the temples of

⁴. Ibid, p 16.
⁵. "The Future Results of the British Rule in India", Ibid, p 38
Orissa and Bengal, take up the trade in the murder and prostitution perpetrated in the temple of Juggernaut? 6

It is clear that Marx and Engels gave India a new revolutionary perspective that would prepare the ground for the growth of democratic forces in the country by exposing the nature of both the British domination and the feudal forces that fought each other.

We rightly used to feel proud that India possessed a far more ancient civilization as compared to the Europeans who gradually established their domination over the country from the sixteenth century. But the fact is that Indian civilization, however ancient it might be, and its social life and economic basis got completely destroyed with the arrival of the European traders. Ordinary nationalists attribute this exclusively to the use of force first by the foreign traders and then by the foreign rulers in order to protect the interests of the former. To say this would mean that a great and ancient civilization was completely destroyed by the representatives of a relatively inferior civilization.

This is contrary to the experience of history. There are, of course, instances of people of inferior civilization conquering countries of superior civilization in many parts of the world. But in such instance, the victors were compelled to adopt the civilization of the vanquished. The same thing happened in the case of India also. Marx says: "Arabs, Turks, Tartars, Moguls, who had successively overrun India, soon became Hinduized, the barbarian conquerors being, by an eternal law of history, conquered themselves by the superior civilization of their subjects." 7

This was altered only by the arrival of the foreign traders who, unlike earlier conquerors, tried to destroy Indian civilization. The process of this destruction reached its zenith with the arrival of the most powerful among the European capitalist countries, the British. Why? Because, as Marx states: "The British were the first conquerors superior, and,
therefore, inaccessible to Hindu civilization. They destroyed it by breaking up the native communities, by uprooting the native industry, and by levelling all that was great and elevated in the native society."

This does not, however, mean that the use of force had no place in destroying Indian civilization. We come across instances of large-scale use of brutal force by the British. But what is more important than the use of force is the fact that the Europeans represented a relatively more progressive mode of production and production relations.

For several centuries, European countries were far behind the Oriental countries like China, India, Iran and Egypt in civilization. But by the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries there began to develop in Europe a new mode of production and a corresponding production relation and also a new civilization based on the new production relations leaving the Oriental countries behind them. As illustrated in the Communist Manifesto:

The discovery of America, the rounding of the Cape, opened up fresh ground for the rising bourgeoisie. The East-Indian and Chinese markets, the colonisation of America, trade with the colonies, the increase in the means of exchange and in commodities generally, gave to commerce, to navigation, to industry, an impulse never before known, and thereby, to the revolutionary element in the tottering feudal society, a rapid development.

And the results? The Communist Manifesto continues: The bourgeoisie, wherever it has got the upper hand, has put an end to all feudal, patriarchal, idyllic relations. It has pitilessly torn asunder the motley feudal ties that bound man to his "natural superiors", and has left remaining no other nexus between man and man than naked self-interest, than callous "cash payment". It has drowned the most heavenly ecstasies of religious fervour, of chivalrous enthusiasm, of philistine sentimentalism, in the icy water of egotistical calculation. It has resolved personal worth into
exchange value, and in place of the numberless indefeasible charted freedoms, has set up that single, unconscionable freedom—Free Trade. In one word, for exploitation, veiled by religious and political illusions, it has substituted naked, shameless, direct, brutal exploitation.

The rise and development of capitalist society is the sum total of these transformations, which affected all aspects of human life. It was with the new life and inspiration that resulted from these transformations that the European traders, whom our ancestors ridiculed as “uncivilized”, came to India. As it happens so often in running races, the Europeans who were trailing behind the hitherto advanced countries like India, China, Iran and Egypt began to overtake them in the race of progress of human society. The process that helped the Europeans to achieve this progress was the rise and development of capitalism which is so masterly illustrated in the Communist Manifesto.

Why was India, which had remained in the forefront for several centuries, pushed back at the stage of capitalist development? Why were the Europeans, who hitherto were trailing behind in the race of progress of human society, able to overtake India and reach the forefront? Marx did not have the relevant materials to find a clear answer to these questions. So, he made no attempt to answer them.

Thanks to the efforts made by some investigators after the life-time of Marx, some materials are now available enabling us to answer these questions. Based on such materials, the present author arrived at certain tentative conclusions:

1. The new mode of (agricultural) production developed by the invading Aryans broke up one by one the non-Aryan tribes. New societies emerged by the merging of different non-Aryan societies, on the one hand, and the non-Aryan and Aryan societies, on the other.

2. The productive capacity of the society as a whole increased as a result of the break-up of the tribal social
system, as well as the progress in the mode of production. Consequently, the production activity became multifaceted, giving rise to a division of labour in the sense that a specific group of people became engaged in a specific type of occupation. As the productive capacity increased, all these factors together gave rise to a new production relation (Chaturvarnya) based on primitive form of exploitation. This turned into the caste system with greater complexity with the corresponding development of the mode of production and increased productive capacity.

3) There is no fundamental difference between the slave system that rose in ancient Greece, Rome and some West Asian countries and the varna-caste system that developed in India. The essential feature of both the system is the contradiction between the exploiters and the exploited. But there is one difference: in one system a large majority of the people were subjected to exploitation by openly declaring them slaves, whereas, in the other, the same thing was done in the guise of caste.

4) When the varna-caste system came into being, a special religious and ideological-philosophical framework was built up around the system of exploitation in order to maintain and justify the system. Thus, there formed in India a framework which was different from the religious and philosophical frame-work specific to exploitation in the form of the slave system. This is what appeared in the form of Hindu religion, Hindu philosophy and Hindu culture, which the Hindu communalists call the “Holy Indian Culture”.

5) Although two different exploitative systems were prevalent in the West Asian countries and in India, there was one characteristic common to production in these regions in the ancient historical epoch. Generally speaking, the production process was for self-consumption. Only a small portion of the wealth produced was sold to others. Similarly, a small portion of the articles
required for consumption was bought from others. In other words, the mode of production called "commodity production" was weak under both the systems.

6) The *varna*-caste system made the progress of commodity production slower than in the slave system. In India, the system gave rise to the characteristic self-sufficient village system and the caste system as an integral part of it, under which the production of articles for local consumption was carried out by the local people themselves who were traditionally assigned specific occupations. Hence, the need for an exchange of articles across villages was reduced to the minimum.

7) Under slavery, on the other hand, the exploiting class had the motivation to sell the surplus appropriated from the slaves and lead a luxurious life with the money thus obtained. So, in the West Asian countries where the slave system existed, there was a more extensive exchange of commodities than in India with its self-sufficient village and caste systems. Therefore, it was necessary for the exploiting classes in those countries to plunder wealth which could be transformed into commodities. For this purpose they made large-scale incursions into India. The exploiting classes in India with self-sufficient villages could not resist these incursions and defeat the invaders.

8) None of these invaders could, however, destroy the foundation of the social system based on caste and self-sufficient villages. Even those who, taking inspiration from the new Islamic religion, were out to conduct *jihad* against non-Muslim religious believers could not destroy either the caste system or the self-sufficient villages. The result, however, was the formation of a 'Muslim caste' side by side with the numerous 'castes among the Hindus.

9) In the area of production, however, the invasions helped to increase commodity production. But it did not spread to the whole of the society, for the articles
that were bought and sold were luxury items in demand to satisfy the needs of the exploiting classes only. Similarly, as the exploiting classes began to appropriate more wealth corresponding to the increase in production the volume of goods sold in the market also increased. This increase in the exchange of commodities in the market, however, remained confined to the upper layer of society. At the lower level, commodity production and purchase of articles for consumption from the market remained extremely limited.

10) Excepting for a minority of the exploiting classes, the Indian social system continued to be one of self-sufficient villages which could not be destroyed by the invaders from West Asia. Nor could these invaders, emperors, and other military adventurers change the production relations in the rural areas and the social system based on them.

11) Here we see clearly the difference between this and the events after the arrival of the European merchants and the establishment of British power in the country. Unlike the foreign invaders from the Vedic Aryans to the Mughals, the European traders came here with the seed of a social system which was foreign to India. They came here as the agents of the system of commodity production which cut at the very roots of ‘Indian civilization’—the systems of village self-sufficiency and castes.

They were not just the customary merchants who bought here articles needed for maintaining the luxurious life of the exploiting classes in their own countries, and sold here a portion of the articles produced there. Rather, they were the representatives of a new socio-economic system, capitalism, reaching every nook and corner of the world and transforming the people everywhere into producers and consumers for the world market. Having brought about an all-pervading revolution in their own country, they came to India, as they went elsewhere in the world, to fulfil the
mission of transforming everything into a commodity for exchange. Neither the Hindu nor the Islamic form of Indian civilization could survive it.

Thus, all the hitherto invaders who became the rulers of India and who in the process became Indians themselves, surrendered to the new (foreign) capitalism. The last of the ‘Indian’ empires, the Mughal Empire, collapsed and a new (British) empire, entirely foreign, began to emerge.

In sum, the “great ancientness” which helped India to reach the forefront in the race of social progress up to a stage, pushed the country to the background in the modern era of the history of human society, in the era of capitalism. The “great ancientness” which once proudly produced wealth became later a liability.

II. THE CHANGES INTRODUCED BY THE BRITISH RULE: ITS DUAL CHARACTER

On the eve of the sixteenth century—in 1498—Vasco De Gama landed at Calicut. It was from then on that the domination of foreign capitalism, which culminated in the domination by the British, began to take roots in India.

It was the Catholic monarchy of Portugal that Vasco De Gama represented. Before long, a group of traders from Holland, a country of non-Catholics, came to India. Later on, traders came from France and England. Keen competition prevailed for nearly two centuries amongst the traders from these four countries.

During this period the foreign traders had not turned their attention to the sphere of internal trade (i.e., exchange of commodities within the country). They confined themselves to the purchase and exports of commodities that were marketable in their own countries and to the import of commodities for which there was a market in India. As such the places of operation of the East India Company were
coastal areas. They had their headquarters in the port towns.

In the context of the political situation following the decline of the Mughal Empire, the company needed a small unit of military force for the maintenance and protection of the trading centres; and they, therefore, organized such security forces. But these forces did not move into the rural areas in the interior for a period of over two centuries. For the limited purpose of protecting their trading interests they adopted the tactics of co-operating with one or the other of feudal chieftains. They had no intention, at that time, of establishing their rule over this country.

It was in the middle of the eighteenth century that a change in the situation came about. By that time, the Dutch (Holland) had almost totally defeated the Portuguese. The conflict between England and Holland had also ended in the withdrawal of the British from Indonesia and of the Dutch from India. Thus, only Britain and France remained in the field of competition in India.

It was at a particular stage of this competition between these two countries that the trading companies of these two countries considered it necessary to have some hold over the administration of the country, even for the protection of the trading interests for which alone they had come to India earlier. Thus, by the middle of the eighteenth century, an intense struggle developed between them to protect their trading interests and for getting some hold on the administration of this country.

This struggle was not confined to India either; several intensified battles and conflicts were taking place during this period. At this time, a revolution took place in France, smashing the antiquated social system. Following this, the new French rulers unleashed another war in Europe, voicing the message of the revolution. The misdeeds of the rulers of France before the revolution and during the war following the revolution had weakened France in relation to England, both in Europe and in India. This resulted in a global defeat for France.
Thus out of the four European countries which had come to India from the beginning of the sixteenth century, only England remained the ultimate victor. Only small pockets like Pondicherry and Mahe remained in the possession of France and Goa in the possession of Portugal. Holland did not have any possession at all.

The battle of Plassey of 1757, in which the Nawab of Bengal, Siraj-ud-Daula, was defeated, was of crucial importance in the history of the traders from England, which had defeated the other three European powers through mutual conflicts lasting nearly three centuries. "Plassey started a long chain of consequences which utterly changed the face of India; the system of economy and government which had lasted for centuries was transformed." 9

Till then the British traders were also making obeisance, like the Indian traders, to the Emperor at Delhi and to the Nawabs and other administrators subordinate to him, and submissively waiting on them with respect and humility, for favours and concessions. It was true they were using their money-power and military strength in fights against some of the feudal lords with the connivance and assistance of some others. But they were doing this while submitting totally to the political supremacy of the Emperor and the administrators under him.

A fundamental change came over this position with the battle of Plassey. They defeated the Nawab, Siraj-ud-Daula, who was the foremost and the strongest among the subordinates of the Emperor, and put in his place a new Nawab (Mir Jaffar) who was so subservient to the foreign power as to become the synonym for treachery and sedition. Thus the British became the de facto controlling power in an area which was of strategic importance.

Developments took place at a quick pace. In 1764 the Mughal Emperor himself granted the Diwani to the British Company empowering them the rule over the provinces of

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Bengal, Bihar and Orissa. Thus the English East India Company became the direct controlling authority over a large territory, instead of ruling through Mir Jaffer. Subsequently, the British defeated the Nizam and the Sultan of Mysore in South India, the Mahrattas in Western India, and the feudal lords in areas which now form part of Uttar Pradesh and in Panjab (now divided, one part going to Pakistan) and in Sind, now part of Pakistan. Thus:

Within a hundred years from Plassey the whole of India had been forced to accept the British yoke. It was, from the military point of view, a curious achievement. For in all the battles fought the fighters were predominantly Indians. The composition of the army of an Indian chief was not very different from that of the East India Company. The Indian chief’s army consisted of a small contingent of European soldiers led by European officers, especially in the artillery arm, a quota of varying strength of European-trained Indian infantry, and a large number of Indian horse and foot fighting according to traditional ways. The army of the Company consisted of a contingent of European soldiers and an Indian infantry force trained by Europeans; the third element, the untrained trooper, was absent or formed an unimportant auxiliary force. Thus the forces of the Indian princes, under the command of European and Indian officers fought against the company’s forces consisting of European and Indian soldiers under European and Indian commanders. 10

It is needless to say that the army of the East India Company was also similarly constituted.

The British subdued India not in a single battle of the normal type. They utilised the services of a section of the Indian chiefs, including their army, and subjugated the Indian feudal chiefs, one by one, to the position of mere subordinates. They used various tactics to suit this purpose. Battles with their attendant merciless cruelty, diplomatic actions and

10. Ibid, p 231.
the resultant friendly relations, policies and approaches adopted to suit the exigencies of the situation in order to establish their authority—all these tactics were skillfully employed to subjugate India.

It is needless to recount the reasons for their success in this regard. The Indian chiefs were the representatives of a social system which had remained stunted for centuries. The foreign traders, on the other hand, represented a rapidly developing social system. In the conflict between the representatives of the declining and developing social systems, the representatives of the latter emerged victorious.

The changes that followed this victory possessed a dual character. A decadent social system faces all-round destruction following the military defeat of the representatives of that system. And that destruction eventually becomes complete. But in this case, the new foreign rulers did not want a complete destruction of the old—they wanted victory only on the military front—for they knew that the development of capitalism in India as it did in England would be a threat to their interest. That was why Marx stated that “the Indians will not reap the fruits of the new elements of society scattered among them by the British bourgeoisie till in Great Britain itself the new ruling classes shall have been supplanted by the industrial proletariat, or till the Hindus themselves shall have grown strong enough to throw off the English yoke altogether.”

It is this dual character of the social revolution that took place in India, following the establishment of British rule over this country, that paved the way for the struggle for India’s national independence. It was again this dual character of the social revolution that gave rise to two types of freedom movement in India—that of 1857, and the other that began after the 1857-59 struggle. Before going into the details of these movements, let us examine the character of this social revolution, how it manifested itself, and its impact on various spheres of social life.

We have seen that the battle of Plassey of 1757 was the turning point in the evolution of British rule in India. From that time onwards, virtually, and from 1764, the year in which the Diwani was obtained from the Emperor at Delhi, formally, the English East India Company became the actual rulers of India. This had its impact on the entire social system.

As we know, the social and administrative set-up prevailing in India prior to the advent of the foreign traders consisted of a hierarchy with more or less self-sufficient village communities with local self-government at the bottom, i.e., the level of the villages, feudal chieftains, with limited responsibilities of tax collection and rendering help during wars, occupying an intermediate position, and the prince or the Emperor at the top. This set-up and the social and administrative system evolved with the development of capitalism in England were poles apart in character. Consequently, there was an unbridgeable gap and contradiction between the legal enactments, rules and procedures and the consciousness and conception developed as a consequence in the minds of the people under these two systems. When the conflict between the two differing systems was beginning to develop, the Diwani granted by the Mughal emperor to the English East India Company in 1764, in fact, facilitated the domination by one over the other, that is, the domination of a system imported from a foreign land over the one which had remained relatively unchanged for several centuries.

On obtaining powers under the Diwani the English Company began to introduce in Bengal, and subsequently in areas where they acquired administrative powers, such reforms as would destroy the entire system in existence for centuries, including village life, the domination of feudal and caste-communal forces over it, the agricultural and industrial structure and the juridical system. And after the administrative power was transferred from the Company to the British Crown, this process continued in a more planned manner.
Under the rule of Mughal Emperors land relations had reached a relatively developed form in India, although the system was not working uniformly throughout the country. But there was one element common to all the variants of this system. And this common element was that no attempt was made by the administrative authorities to establish ownership rights on land or even to seriously interfere with the rights of those who were in possession of land. They confined themselves to collecting land revenue at the prescribed rates. The landlords who were emerging in the feudal system also confined themselves to collecting rent from the occupants, and did not interfere much with the rights and privileges of the possessors of land. The dues payable to both the landlords or to the administrative authorities were also fixed according to convention. This system was in existence for some centuries.

However, the new rulers (East India Company) tried to replicate the conceptions and laws regarding land ownership which were prevailing in their own country. Accordingly, one section of the new rulers began to function on the basis of the concept that the ownership rights rested solely with the king or the ruler. Another section, on the other hand, adhered to the theory that there must be a landlord in between the ruler and the actual possessors of land. Efforts were made to interpret the land ownership system in accordance with the concepts held by the respective sections of the rulers. Consequently, three land ownership systems—Zamindari, Ryotwari and Mahalwari—with several variants came into existence in different parts of the country.

Despite variations, all these systems are equally exploitative and pauperize the possessor of land. Under the Zamindari system, the landlord, who was liable to remit a prescribed amount to the government, could collect as much as he wished from those in possession of the land. Under the other two systems the Government directly collects the tax from the possessors of land at rates fixed on an increasing scale. The ultimate result of both types of collection is
the increasing burde on the cultivating peasants.

For instance, in the Madras Presidency, under the Ryotwari system, the land revenue collected in the year 1810-11 was £10,00,000. By 1825-26 the amount had increased to £40,00,000. In Bombay, the revenue collected was £8,00,000 in 1817, rising to £11,50,000 the next year and to £18,60,000 by the year 1837-38.

As mentioned earlier, it was in Bengal that the English Company had secured ruling power for the first time. There the Company introduced the Zamindari system. The agents of the Mughal Emperor collected in 1764-65 £8,18,000 which rose to £14,70,000 in 1765-66 and to £28,60,000 in 1790-91.

Not only the amounts collected directly by the Government as tax or as rent through landlords but also the laws enacted for this purpose disrupted the rural economy of India. The theory that each piece of land must have an owner—either the ruler or the landlord, or alternatively, the possessor—was basic to the laws of land relations enacted by the foreign rulers. This was an anathema to the traditional Indian concepts and the consciousness of the people. The core of the old Indian village system was that although the possessors of land, the landlord, the feudal chief and the ruler, had certain rights of their own, none of them had an unlimited right.

When the English concept of land ownership was brought into practice in India, the owner, whether it be the Zamindar, or the landowner created by a legal enactment or the possessor of the land could mortgage or sell his right on the land. The land of the possessor could now be seized for default in payment of rent due to the landlord or the taxes due to the government. As a consequence, landowners and those in possession of land fell into the grip of a new section, the money-lender. According to Captain Wingate, the then Revenue Survey Commissioner in the Bombay Province, "a set of low usurers is fast springing up, by who small sums are lent for short period at enormous rates of interest
to the very lowest of the population who have not credit enough to obtain advances from the more respectable of village bankers.”

Thus, the landlords and the usurers, the two sections that emerged as a consequence of the land reform measures introduced by the English Company, joined together to loot the vast majority of peasants and other sections of the rural poor. And the practice of paying a major share of the loot to the English Company also came into vogue. Alongside these, handicrafts and the foreign trade based on these crafts, which had been extant for centuries in India, declined gradually. For instance, Indian textiles exported in 1795-96 amounted to Rs. 21,22,319.5. In 1829-30, the value of textiles exported fell to Rs. 6,95,725. On the other side, the value of goods imported to India from England in 1814 was £ 18,00,000. The value of imports rose to £ 45,00,000 in 1829. Thus, while the foreign market for goods produced by handicraftsmen in India declined, the market for foreign goods expanded.

The pauperization of the rural people as a result of the land reforms introduced by the Company and the decline in the trading and industrial sectors ruined both the villages and urban areas alike. It will not be an exaggeration to say that it was this decline and the ruin of the Indian people that accelerated the development of capitalism in England. English political commentators themselves have accepted this fact.

“In England, too, the agrarian revolution had thrown labourer out of land and increased unemployment, causing great misery and hardship. But the Industrial Revolution which followed soon absorbed the unemployed labourers in the newly established manufacturing industries, so that the period of unemployment and hardship was short. In India, on the other hand, labour was released from industry but there was no comparable development of industries or exten-

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12. From the report of Capt. Wingate quoted by Tarachand, op cit, p. 299.
sion of agriculture to absorb that labour......In India the human suffering caused by the social revolution was incalculably greater and much more prolonged."

A question may be raised as to why the people of India were prepared to submit meekly to the situation, undergoing sufferings and misery resulting from it, and why they did not rise in revolt against British domination.

As will be seen in the following chapters, the people of India did, in fact, rise in revolt on several occasions against British domination, and in many cases these revolts assumed the form of armed insurrections. Revolts had burst out at various stages in various forms from one end of the country to the other. And these revolts date back to the very beginning of British domination.

None of these revolts was, however, as widespread as the struggle of 1857. Nor were they centred around the centre of power located in Delhi, considered the traditional capital of Indian rulers. These revolts were, on the other hand, isolated struggles carried on at places far away from Delhi and confined to relatively small areas. And each one of these struggles was suppressed as was the revolt of 1857. Why did it happen?

The answer is simple. Traders had come to India even earlier from West Asia and a few even from Europe and the eastern countries like China. While carrying on their trading activities, they were also participating at the same time in the socio-cultural life of this country. In the process they identified themselves with the life of this country. Many of them settled down in India and subsequently became Indians.

The people of India regarded the European trading companies located in the port towns and the persons working in these companies in the same way as they did the traders who had come to India earlier. They believed that these traders, like their predecessors, would gradually become 'Indians' or at least maintain friendly relations with the people of the country.

Tara Chand, Ibid, pp 335-386
Two and a half centuries after the landing of Vasco da Gama at Calicut, when the European powers, including the British and the French began to engage themselves in intense conflicts with each other in the middle of the 18th century for domination, Clive of England and Dupleix of France came to India as representatives of the trading companies of their respective countries. With their arrival the character of the trading companies which they represented changed completely. In their efforts to beat each other they began to exert influence on the local elites and gain control over the administrative machinery through them. The battle of Plassey represents an important stage in the victory which England was able to win in this regard.

It must also be understood that the situation that developed in India following the decline of the Mughal Empire provided a fertile ground not only for the conflicts between England and France but also for the earlier conflicts between Portugal and Holland, and between these two countries on the one hand and France on the other.

After Aurangzeb, no Mughal Emperor possessed anything more than the title. The Nawabs, princes and military chieftains under these emperors were functioning as de facto rulers. There were also areas which were not even formally part of the Mughal Empire. What prevailed in India at the time was the dominance of provincial rulers and feudal chieftains who were, formally or otherwise, independent of the Mughal Emperors of Delhi. Each one of these provincial rulers was trying to extend his authority to wider areas, and to curb the feudal chieftains in the areas under his control. Such conflicts amongst the local rulers were an integral part of the political situation prevailing in India at that time. For instance, three princes in Kerala—the Zamorin of Calicut, the Maharaja of Cochin and the Maharaja of Travancore—emerged as powerful rulers after defeating in war several feudal chieftains. And it was in those circumstances that Vasco da Gama landed in Calicut. For two centuries thereafter, foreign trading companies
first, the Portuguese, and then the Dutch, and following them the British and French tried to establish their trading supremacy by alternatingly fraternizing and opposing this or that ruler. The three rulers, on the other hand, utilized the armed might of these European trading companies which had maintained small naval forces originally to protect their trade in order to extend their respective territories. The same thing happened all over India. It became the practice of those wielding power to seek the assistance of the European trading companies for settling mutual conflicts as also to solve disputes over succession within the ruling families.

Ruling families, feudal lords and the local chieftains, however important they were in the social life of the time, were not the only sections that constituted the elite of that period. A class of traders was also emerging in India, although at a pace slower than in the European countries. Groups of people engaged in transporting and exchanging goods from one end of the country to the other had come to be formed in India. Many of them were so wealthy that they lent money even to the emperors and the princes.

In other words, social forces of capitalism were developing within the medieval Indian society, although at a slower pace than in the European countries. Trading was carried on by these groups in collaboration with the European trading companies. And in the process, the Indian commercial class also made profits, as did the European trading companies.

All these sections, namely, the former rulers, feudal lords, local chieftains and such others, as also those engaged in trade and industry, were interested in the functioning and development of the European trading companies. The European trading companies, on the other hand, tried to carry on trade without jeopardizing the interests of these sections. The British who gained ultimate victory over other European traders also continued this policy for some years even after consolidating their position. The period extending up to the middle of the 19th century witnessed a sense of co-operation between the British rulers and the newly affluent classes
consisting of landlords, traders and usurers. But this co-operation did not last long.

The Indian elite of those days did not realize that there was a special feature which distinguished these foreign traders from those who had come earlier in India’s history. Hence they did not consider it in any way harmful or detrimental to their interests to enter into economic contracts or even military pacts with these traders.

The Indian elite did not realize at that time that France and England had adopted, by the middle of the 18th century, an approach different from that followed hitherto by the European companies, which, if put into practice, would deprive the elite class of India of its own ruling power. They had only the blinkered view of getting the help of the European companies for attaining their temporary selfish aims.

We have already noted briefly the developments which followed the victory of the British in the battle of Plassey, namely, their taking over control of the administration in Bengal, Bihar and Orissa by securing the Divani from the Emperor in Delhi, the land reforms measures implemented by them, and the decline of industry and trade in India as a consequence of the economic policies pursued by the British Government in England and by the new British rulers in India. The ruinous changes that were brought about in the sphere of economy did not leave the ruling classes alone.

In fact, the changes that were brought about in the system of land ownership following the grant of the Divani in Bengal, Bihar and Orissa and later on in all other areas which were brought under the domination of the British, had their impact in the administrative and educational spheres and in all sectors of the socio-cultural life of the country. Axe fell on the very roots of the Gram Panchayats and other local self-governing bodies, of caste-communal organizations, and not merely on the establishment, the Emperor and other rulers, the feudal lords and the provincial chieftains. It was such a transformation that the British rulers brought about when they altered the system of revenue administration.
The change was enormous which it was the nature of this decree (relating to the decision of the Court of Directors of the Company that its servants should take upon themselves the entire care and management of the revenues—EMS) to produce. It was a revolution much greater, probably, than any previous conjecture—than even the change from Hindu to Mohammedan masters, had been able to create. The transition from Hindu to Mohammedan masters had only changed the hands by which the sword was wielded, and favours were dispensed; the machine of the Government, still more the texture of the society, underwent feeble alterations; and the civil part of the administration was, from conveniency, left almost wholly in the hands of the Hindus. A total change in the management of the revenues more deeply affected the condition, individually and collectively, of the people of India than it is easy for the European reader to conceive. It was an innovation by which the whole property of the country, and along with it the administration of justice, were placed upon a new foundation.  

The revenue department which was primarily responsible for the collection of taxes became the main instrument of general administration. The revenue department, from the District Collector down to the village officer, controlled by the rulers at the centre and provinces smashed the foundation of the traditional administrative system which continued till then. No longer did the village Panchayats and other local self-governing bodies, as also the local chiefs and feudal lords who were supervising the functioning of these bodies and taking a share of their income, find any place in the administrative set-up. Instead there was now a steel frame which lay extended from the village staff at the bottom to the Governor-General at the top.

The former elite classes, however, continued to enjoy their old position and status of landlords and the income

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derived therefrom, or *malikhat*. A small section of these elites also obtained ruling powers as princes under the suzerainty of the British as long as they remained loyal to the new rulers. But none of them had any real or visible share in the administration.

The moves towards evolving and consolidating this new administrative set-up were gradual. In 1773, 1783, 1813, 1833, and 1853, each year, either an "India Act" was enacted in the British Parliament or the administrative system was reorganized in some other manner. At each stage the role of the British Government enhanced. The foundation of the former rulers and their subordinates, the feudal landlords and of the socio-cultural life that was the basis of their administrative functioning, was eroded in proportion to the increase in the role of the British Government.

Many revolts erupted in several parts of the country towards the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th. Not only was each of these revolts suppressed, but the feudal lords who remained in power in Delhi, which was India's centre of administration in the ancient and medieval periods, and in surrounding areas were also subjugated. It was with this development that the true colours of the new (foreign) rulers were revealed to both the elite classes and the common people throughout Northern India. It was the outburst of the dissatisfaction that arose out of this situation that was witnessed in the struggle for independence in 1857-59. Tara Chand describes the situation on the eve of this outburst in the following words: "A deadly pall hung over India, under which the classes were smothered and the masses breathed with difficulty. The Muslim and Hindu ruling princes were disarmed and isolated; the Muslim and Hindu families, tribes and castes which had provided soldiers, administrators and leaders, were ostracised from offices of responsibility and condemned to serve as helots; the Muslim and Hindu learned classes were deprived of patronage and slowly squeezed out of their avocations."
In the background of the resultant discontent of the elite class was the miserable life of two sections of the people—the artisans and urban poor, on the one hand, and the pauperized peasants and the rural poor, on the other.
THE EARLY STRUGGLES
AND DEFEATS

1. REVOLTS IN SOUTH INDIA

The series of revolts which broke out in 1857 in North India and lasted nearly two years were India’s “first struggle for independence”. Till the nationalist research scholars started to gather facts and evaluate this struggle, it was known as the “Sepoy Mutiny”, the name given by the British. It was, in fact, not a “Sepoy Mutiny”, but a magnificent form of people’s struggle. The Sepoys, of course, played a prominent role in that struggle. This has now been widely accepted.

However, about half a century prior to this mass upsurge, South India had witnessed another revolt. Nationalist historians have now brought to light certain facts relating to some of the clashes which formed part of that revolt and about the valiant patriots who played a leading role in them.
Apart from these isolated and sporadic armed revolts, however, South India did not witness a freedom struggle as organized and as sweeping as the 1857-59 struggle of Northern India until recently.

As part of the centenary celebrations of the 1857-59 struggle for independence, several studies were carried out by eminent scholars on the history of the freedom movement in India, under the direction of the former Union Minister of Education, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad. This gave an impetus to a number of scholars and students of history to conduct studies and research into the history of the various struggles for independence in different parts of India. One outcome of such researches was *South India Rebellion—First War of Independence 1800-1801* by Rajayyan, from Madurai University, based on official documents in Madras archives.

The revolt of 1800 in South India was as inspiring as the 1857-59 struggle in North India. The planners, organizers, leaders and other heroic patriots belonging to various sections of the people had left the imprints of their personality on the history of struggle of not only South India, but also on the India-wide struggles for independence. And the names of at least some of these patriots—Kattabomman of Tirunelveli, Pazhassi Raja of Malabar and others—and their glorious deeds are, to some extent, known to us.

So far, the glorious deeds of these patriots were regarded only as stories of isolated acts of heroism. This is not correct. They formed part of a widespread movement which extended all over South India covering not only the four States of Kerala, Tamilnadu, Andhra and Karnataka, but also Maharashtra. In short, the resistance and revolts of 1800-1801 constituted an attempt to mobilize the various sections of the masses as well as the elites inhabiting areas south of the Vindhyas into an organized force to fight the foreign aggressors. Rajayyan has characterized these revolts as "the most widespread of all liberation wars of the"
pre-Congress epoch" and the "first and the last violent popular struggle of any formidable dimensions", etc.¹

Overwhelmed by the facts of history discovered by him, the author sometimes even belittles the significance of the 1857-59 struggle. While disagreeing with Rajayyan in regard to such incorrect conclusions, we are at the same time grateful to him for having written a book on the independence struggle in South India based on authentic facts.

The author describes the political situation and circumstances that led to the South Indian revolt, which can be called the first freedom struggle of India, before going into the details of the sweep of that struggle, the maturity and the organizational skill and efficiency of the leadership, the despicable tactics adopted by the enemy and the successive clashes that took place.

Any one who examines the facts now brought out by Rajayyan in the light of Historical Materialism can clearly see that the political factors which led to the struggle in its sweep and mass support were also responsible for its ultimate defeat. An understanding of this political situation also helps us to understand the features that differentiate this struggle from the freedom struggle of North India.

In this connection, it is worthwhile to note certain special features of South India. This region was totally free from the domination of the emperors who had ruled North India, right from the period of the Mauryas to that of the Mughals. At times when this region happened to be subjugated by one or the other of these emperors, liberation from such domination was achieved speedily. And at the time when the foreign conquerors, from the Portuguese to the British, were attempting to establish and consolidate their position in India, all regions of South India were free from even nominal domination of the Delhi Emperor.

The Marathas who had been consistently carrying on a struggle against the Mughal Emperors had not only liberated their region, but had even invaded the northern regions and

acquired some areas from the domination of the Mughal Emperors; the Nizam of Hyderabad had virtually become an independent ruler, though in name he was subordinate to the Mughal Emperor; the Sultan of Mysore refused to recognize the suzerainty of the Mughal Emperor. There were several other States which maintained independence like Mysore—the Tamil princes of Tanjore, Madurai, Ramanad, Arcot, etc., and the princes of Malabar, whom Rajayyan credits with the distinction of having maintained their political independence for over 1000 years. Cochin and Travancore had grown up into powerful States.

Perennial feuds were taking place amongst the princes of the region south of the Vindhyas. Each prince was persistently trying to make the others accept his domination so that he could rise up to the position of a powerful ruler or even an emperor. They had no compunction in forging alliances with any one in order to achieve their aim. It was as part of this tactic that they were ready, as and when it suited their purpose, to forge a friendship with or be hostile to the foreign trading companies.

These rulers had to carry on fights with the feudal lords under them as well, because it was a specific feature and integral part of the administrative set-up in South India. "Known as Poligars, at time as rajahs and Zamindars, these chieftains occupied a key position in the political structure between the princes and their subjects... They paid rent to the ruler for their lands and maintained bands of armed men for service with troops of the State in critical times. They undertook to protect private property against robbery and pay compensation in the event of their failure, As guardians of public welfare, they enforced police authority, administered justice, founded villages, conducted religious festivals, maintained temples, promoted cultivation and assisted charitable services. As an intermediary authority they performed what the rulers normally negotiated to do in the field of public welfare. While the common people found it beyond their reach to gain positions in the central administration, they
experienced no such difficulty in the establishments. This created and nurtured a bond of affinity between Poligars and the masses.\textsuperscript{2} (In Tamil Nadu and Karnataka the feudal lords were known as poligars. The terms “feudal lords” is used here to include those in Kerala also though they were not known by that name).

Friendly relations between the masses and the feudal lords were looked upon by each prince to be as dangerous to him as the military forces of other princes. For, as long as they (feudal lords) enjoyed popularity with the masses no prince would be able to establish his domination over them. Even if they succeeded in defeating their enemies and conquering their territories, there was no guarantee that they could sustain their domination as long as the feudal lords existed.

It was these princes who had to conduct war against their feudal lords as well as against other princes that welcomed with open arms the foreign traders as forces that could be of help and assistance to them in both these ventures.

In this dual struggle, they could, of course, depend to an extent upon the local allies, namely, some other princes and their armies. But the foreign companies could help them more effectively for two reasons. First, these foreign trading companies had more effective weapons and better method of warfare using these weapons. Second, the foreign companies which commanded larger maritime forces could bring in more commodities for them and obstruct the enemy’s sea route. Therefore, it became a part of the policy of the princes to depend on one or the other foreign company which came to India one after another.

The policy of dependence on foreign trading companies in order to extend the areas of their domination became common amongst the princes in the 16th century throughout India. But South India had a special feature as compared with North India. As stated earlier, there was not an emperor even nominally in the South. Each prince was independent, and as such the victory or defeat in the various conflicts that

\textsuperscript{2} \textit{ibid} pp. 22,24.
took place amongst them was solely dependent on the military strength of the respective combatants.

Furthermore, southern India is closer to coastlines than the regions in northern India. As such, the foreign mercantile companies, backed by naval and military forces, could exercise influence on the political relations in southern India more skillfully and rapidly than they could in the northern Indian region.

As a consequence, by the end the 18th century the whole of South India came under the domination of the British. The princes in this region surrendered one by one to the British at different times. The Rajas of Travancore, Pudukkottai, Tanjore, Arcot and Mysore, the Peshwa of Poona and the Nizam of Hyderabad, either subordinated their authority to the British or their territories were turned into British territories. By the close of the 18th century a dual administrative system of British India and native States came into being in South India.

It is the revolt of the feudal lords who were the subordinates of the princes, against the new rulers that has been dealt with in Rajayyan's book. As mentioned earlier, these feudal lords maintained friendly relations with the common people and as such their revolt against the British had the support of the masses. Each feudal lord was able to deploy thousands of soldiers on the field. And when the forces at the command of the various feudal lords who entered into fraternal alliances were mobilized together, it turned out to be a big military force.

An organization comprising the leaders of these revolts, from Kattabomman of Tirunelveli at the southern end to Dhondoji Wagh of the area comprising North Canara and South Maharashtra, came into being to mobilize military forces and co-ordinate their activities. Rajayyan has analysed in detail the individual characteristics and qualities of each one of these leaders, the methods of mobilization and co-ordination and the resultant centralized action programme. As in the case of the revolt of 1857-59 it was only through a
long-drawn-out armed conflict that the British were able to suppress the planned programme of revolt organized by these leaders.

Rajayyan describes Maruda Pandyan of Sivaganga as the "most conspicuous amongst the leaders, and the political strategist of this movement". He mobilized not only all the feudal lords in the regions south of Madurai, including Kattabomman of Tirunelveli, and the masses of people in their areas, but also worked with the aim of mobilizing the anti-British insurrectionists in areas like Dindigual, Coimbatore, Malabar, Mysore and Maharashtra and utilize the military forces of all of them to attack the British fortresses.

The plan of action succeeded to a considerable extent. The British found it hard to suppress this revolt of 1800-1801 in South India, just as they found it later on in 1857-59 in North India. Rajayyan has cited the opinions and comments expressed by some of the British military chiefs and administrators for this. The saga of these revolts is bound to create in our minds feelings of esteem and respect for the insurrectionists of South India.

But this revolt in South India was cruelly suppressed by the British in the same manner as they did all other freedom struggles in India, including the struggle of 1857-59. Hundreds of heroic patriots who had participated in this struggle were sentenced to death. Several hundreds of others lost all their properties and were reduced to a state of destitution. Dozens of persons were deported. National independence which was the cherished goal of their life turned out to be only a remembrance of the past and a dream of the future. Masses of people had to suffer untold miseries under the brutal heels of the British.

What caused such a development? Maruda Pandyan, foremost amongst the leaders of the struggle, provides a simple answer. In the Tiruchi proclamation of 1801, Maruda Pandyan stated that the princes who were not "aware of the duplicity" of the Europeans "foolishly" trusted them and that there was "no unity and friendship" amongst the people.
“His Highness the Nawab Mohammed Ali having foolishly given the Europeans place amongst you has become like a widow. The Europeans violating their faith have deceitfully made the Kingdom their own and (are) considering the inhabitants as dogs, accordingly exercise authority over them. There exist no unity and friendship amongst you. The above castes (Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vysyas, Sudras and Mussalmans) who not being aware of the duplicity of these Europeans...have not only inconsiderately culminated each other but have absolutely surrendered the Kingdom to them.”

It appears that Rajayyan agrees with this. But this is not a satisfactory explanation, for this does not explain the reasons for the “foolishness” of the princes and disunity among the people. Nor does Rajayyan explain why a system that existed for several centuries came to such a pass only now.

The real answer to the question had been indicated in the preceding chapters. The conflict here was between an outdated decadent indigenous social system and a foreign social system that was being newly evolved. While, on the one side, one section is eager to build a new society, another section is eager to protect its own land and the ancient customs and traditions characteristic of it. It is only through imbibing the essence of modern society that came to this country through the foreigners, and modernising our society can we protect our country from attack by foreigners. On the other hand, the planners and organizers of the freedom struggle were striving to restore to the rulers their respective territories in accordance with their beliefs and customs. In the following chapters we shall see that the organizers of the North Indian revolt that took place half a century later fought for the same objectives, which again constituted the weakness of that struggle.

3. Ibid, p 232
II. THE BACKGROUND OF 1857 STRUGGLE

In one respect eastern India comprising Bengal, Bihar, Orissa and Assam is comparable with southern India. Maritime transport of this region provided easy access to foreign trading companies; they established themselves there and then gradually transformed their trade relations into political relations, as they did in the South.

This region was, however, different in another respect from South India. This region formed part of the Mughal Empire. The Nawab of Bengal was one amongst the several subordinate local rulers under the Mughal Emperor. The British became the rulers in the eastern region of India by establishing trade relation with the Nawab of Bengal to start with and then by gradually transforming these relations into political relations. Once they secured the concessions they sought from the Nawab of Bengal, they took particular care to obtain from the Mughal Emperor the grant of the Diwani (the right to carry on civil administration) of this region in order to ensure the security of the concessions.

Unlike the kingdoms in the South, the Mughal Empire had, by this time, succeeded to a certain extent in establishing a centralized administration. The land revenue system devised and implemented by Raja Todarmal, a minister in the court of Emperor Akbar, had brought the feudal lords under the centralized administration as it did the military force under the Empire. In many regions in South India, too, there were intermediaries like Poligars who had considerable influence among the people. But such a system had become weak throughout the North in the later Mughal period itself. The Mughal administration had appointed many elites as local agents in place of the traditional Jagirdars and Talukdars.

It was on the basis of this historical fact that the new British rulers introduced Permanent Settlement in 1793 in eastern India. This system was different from the Ryotwari system which they introduced in South India.
Under the Ryotwari system, the actual cultivators and the government are in direct contact with each other without intermediaries. The actual yield that the cultivator got from his landholding, his expenses for cultivation, etc., were assessed and the share to be paid to the government out of the surplus was fixed. The government collected its dues directly from the actual cultivators. The amount payable to the government was fixed from time to time.

Under the Permanent Settlement (Zamindari) implemented in eastern India, the government did not deal with the cultivators directly. Instead, the government dealt with intermediaries known as Zamindars, Taluqdars, etc. The dues that these intermediaries had to pay to the government were permanently fixed. The intermediaries who duly discharged their liability of paying the prescribed amount due to the government could collect any amount they liked from the cultivators. Even if the income of the intermediaries increased, the dues that they had to pay to the government remained static.

These differences in landownership relations gave rise to a difference in the political system. In South India, the Poligars and other feudal lords who had been intermediaries before the introduction of the Ryotwari system were deprived of the position and benefits they had been enjoying for centuries. The principal motive force for the revolts in the South was the anguish and indignation of those who were thus deprived of positions.

In eastern India, on the other hand, instead of abolishing the intermediaries a new section of intermediaries came into being. In the place of the feudal lords who were performing various functions, including the collection of taxes, for centuries under the Mughals, another section of intermediaries with the sole responsibility of collecting taxes began to emerge in the later period of the Mughal Empire. The new intermediaries often functioned in accordance with the will and pleasure of the Nawabs of those days.

It was in this historical background that the British rulers
who obtained the Diwani from the Mughal Emperor gave permanency to the system of intermediaries. Consequently, the new intermediaries emerged with opportunities to earn income but without the political power which the Jagirdars and Taluqdaris were enjoying earlier. Thus within 20 years of introducing Permanent Settlement, the Zamindary properties began to be bought and sold for prices several times over the amount of a year’s tax. Through these transactions a new wealthy section with as much interested in the Zamindari properties as the Zamindars themselves, emerged in these regions. More than one intermediary (at times as many as half a dozen) appeared in between the Zamindar and the actual cultivators. Usurers engaged in money transactions with these intermediaries also became a part of the social life of those regions.

At the other end of this process were the actual possessors and cultivators of land, most of whom were getting pauperized. Even a section of the Zamindars lost their land due to their inability to pay the dues to the government. But no section of the former elite class in areas covered by Permanent Settlement lost everything as a result of the British rule as it happened in the case of the Poligars and other feudal lords in South India where the Ryotwari system was introduced. It was on account of this that eastern India submitted relatively peacefully to the British rule at a time when a widespread freedom struggle was going on in South India.

The living conditions of the poorer sections of the people and the middle class were nonetheless getting worse in eastern India as they were in South India. The common people of eastern India had to bear an additional burden of the new intermediary created as a result of the introduction of Permanent Settlement.

Despite this, such widespread struggles as were taking place in South India did not take place in eastern India. This was because, unlike in southern India, there was no section of intermediaries to lead a struggle of the common people in eastern India. The section of intermediaries which should have considered itself capable of heading such a struggle was
interested in the maintenance of the British rule. That was why, again, eastern India remained relatively peaceful at a time when widespread struggles were taking place in South India.

I have used the terms "relatively peaceful" deliberately. It was not as if the entire eastern region was peaceful till the year 1857. Even prior to 1857, several revolts and clashes had taken place in some areas of Bengal, Bihar, Orissa and Assam. But such revolts were distinctly different in character from the struggle that was carried on in South India during 1800-1801.

As distinct from the struggle in South India, the struggles that took place in eastern India were mainly the revolts of the tribals. The Chuwar tribes of areas extending from western Midnapur to southern Bihar, and of Chota Nagpur and Orissa, the Ho tribes of Singhbhum, the Santals of Rajmahal area, the Gonds of Orissa, the Bhoomijas of Malbhum, the Kols and Mundas of Chota Napur, and the Khasis of Assam were involved in revolts on many occasions. In Orissa, tribal landlords and princes also participated in the resistance movements along with their people. Each one of these events taken in isolation represents the demonstration of the untiring patriotism of the Indian people who were not prepared to surrender to the foreign domination.

But no efforts were made to link these various struggles into a coordinated struggle under a central leadership in eastern India. That such an effort was made in South India distinguishes it from eastern India. This difference arose because in eastern India there were no sectors like the puggars and the feudal lords of the South, capable of coordinating the various scattered struggles taking place in different regions. At the same time, as a consequence of the Permanent Settlement, a new section of intermediaries having a vested interest in the continuance of the domination of the new rulers (the British), had emerged in eastern India. Thus the common people of this region, who were eager to fight against the new rulers, found themselves in a helpless situation.

Consequently, with the beginning of the 19th century the
British were able to consolidate their domination both in southern and eastern parts of India. While in South India the consolidation was effected after suppressing a relatively widespread freedom struggle, such a consolidation was achieved without any significant resistance in eastern India. The tribal revolts referred to above broke out only by the second decade of the 19th century, after the British rule was consolidated in the plains of Bengal and in South India.

The British were, however, not content with the consolidation of their position in Bengal and southern India. They were determined to extend their dominion to other regions of India, too. They had no compunction in unilaterally violating the provisions of agreements they had entered into with various feudal lords and princes. They ceded the territories ruled over by several princes and feudal lords, who were nominally under the suzerainty of the Mughal Emperor but were in fact independent rulers of their territories.

Ultimately they wielded their sword even against the Mughal Emperor. They changed their attitude towards the Emperor. From the position of supplicants seeking concessions from him and offering tributes to him, the British officials started behaving as if they were the 'dispensers of boons'. One British administrator (Amherst) made it plain in writing to the Emperor: "Your Kingship is but nominal, it is merely out of courtesy that you are addressed as King."4

The British Resident at the Court refused to stand in his presence when presenting Nazr. Auckland asked Bahadur Shah to abandon his claims and rights. He stopped the offering of Nazr, the privilege of granting robes of honour and holding Durbars. The Diwan-i-Khas and the Diwan-i-Am were closed. He was pressed to give up residence in the Red Fort, to abjure the title of King and to abandon his prerogative to name his successor. 5

5. Ibid
There were no repercussions in North India when the authority and status of poligars and other feudal lords in South India were eliminated. This was because in North India the British were partially recognizing the status and position of the Mughal Emperor and of the Nawabs, princes and others subordinates to him. Further, in Bengal and other areas where Permanent Settlement had been introdced, a section of intermediaries who were interested in keeping themselves attached to the British administration had emerged. But as the British began to establish a centralized administration extending to the whole of India soon after consolidating their power in South India and Bengal, the rich elite classes of North India also rose in revolt against the British rule.

It was an outburst of these feelings that was witnessed in the period from 1857 to 1859. We shall go into the details of these struggles later on. But let us note here how some of the authoritative spokesmen of the British administration had themselves characterized the rebellion of 1857-59.

Disraeli was one of the eminent thinkers amongst the British administrators in the 19th century. He characterized this struggle as a "national revolt" and opposed to its being treated as an "army revolt".

Ellenborough who became the president of the Board of Control of East India Company in 1853, censuring the confiscation of talukdaris in Oudh. wrote: "We must admit that, under the circumstances, the hostilities which have been carried on in Oudh have rather the character of legitimate war than that of rebellion."6

Another historian (Justin McCarthy) has recorded: "It was a combination of military grievances, national hatred and religious fanaticism against the English occupation of India. The native princes, and the native soldiers were in

it. The Mohammedan and the Hindoo forgot their old religious antipathies to join against the Christian."

As we have already noticed, from the point of view of modern nationalism, the South Indian struggle of 1800-1801 and the North Indian struggle of 1857-59 were national struggles with a number of weaknesses and inadequacies. But we should not underestimate the historical importance and significance of these and other bigger and smaller struggles that took place in different parts of India. Each and every one of these struggles demonstrated the intensity of the feeling of patriotism among the Indian people which could not be suppressed by the use of brutal force. The freedom fighters of the later generations strove to uphold the great traditions of these struggles and march forward by avoiding their weaknesses.

III. "SEPOY MUTINY" OR POPULAR REVOLT?

The British had once propagated that what took place during the years 1857 to 1859 in India was only a sepoy mutiny and that it did not have any support from the people of India.

Later on, when the national movement for independence gathered momentum, historians came forward with facts claiming that it was a freedom struggle and that it had widespread support of the people. Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, who had actively participated in the freedom struggle and who was convicted to a long term of imprisonment, had even written a book, entitled The Indian War of Independence in which he had brought out several facts and authoritative documents that had not yet seen the light of the day.

Following Savarkar, several other political activists and scholars of history, basing themselves on the stand of the nationalists, tried to evaluate the struggle of 1857-59. As a

7. Ibid.
result of extensive research conducted by them, it came to
light that the British officials who had either directly partic-
ipated in those incidents or had witnessed them, were them-
selves divided on the character of the so-called Sepoy Mutiny.
Col. G.B. Malleson, Sir John William Kaye, Charles Ball,
Rev. Alexander Duff and many others had cited several ins-
tances of mass support that the insurrectionists had. Ac-
ording to Keye, there was none among the Hindus and Muslims
from Ganga to Yamuna who was not against the British.

Malleson expressed the opinion that the majority of the
people in Oudh (Ayodhya) Rohilkland, Bundelkhand, Sagar
and Narmada were against the British.

What is more, Disraeli, who later became the Prime
Minister of England, participating in the deliberations in the
House of Commons on July 27, 1857, disagreed with the
official view that the Indian struggle was merely a "military
mutiny."

By 1947, as in the case of many other matters, a new
impetus was given to research into the Indian freedom strug-
gle. The centenary of the "freedom struggle" which the
British authorities called "Sepoy Mutiny", was celebrated
under the auspices of the government itself. As a part of the
celebrations extensive research work was organized. Com-
mittees were constituted under the direct leadership of Maulana
Abul Kalam Azad who was then the Union Minister for
Education.

Prof. Tara Chand's History of the Freedom Movement in
India, from which several quotations were given in the earlier
chapters, was the result of this work. This was prepared under
official auspices. A series of monographs was also published
non-officially under the supervision of Dr. R.C. Majumdar.
Several other books, pamphlets and theses were also brought

London, 1878-80.
9. Sir William Kaye, A History of the Sepoy War in India, in three volumes,
London, 1878-80.
11. Dr. A.D Duff, The Indian Rebellion; Its Causes and Results, London 1858
out. Yet, although not in the same from as in the earlier
days, two fundamentally differing approaches remained with
the historians on the nature and contents of the struggle of
1857-59.

Although it is not correct to characterize it as a mere
"Sepoy Mutiny" as the British administration had done
earlier, it is not correct either to maintain that the sepoys
or the civilians took up arms and fought against the govern-
ment with the aim of liberating the country from the yoke of
the British; their aim was selfish—this was one opinion. In
the view of another section of scholars, what took place in
1857-59 was a people's revolt.

The most vociferous advocate of the former opinion
was Dr. Majumdar, and of the latter Dr. S.B. Choudhury.\textsuperscript{12}
In between these two was Dr. S.N. Sen;\textsuperscript{13} the author of \textit{Eighteen
Fifty Seven} published with an introduction by Maulana Azad.
He opined that in Oudh and in the surrounding areas it was
a people's rebellion; while in other places it was merely a
sepoy mutiny.

But it is important to note that even Dr. Majumdar, who
was opposed to the characterization of 1857-59 as a freedom
struggle, was not prepared to consider it as a mere sepoy
mutiny. The very title of his book was "\textit{Sepoy Mutiny and the
Revolt of 1857}."\textsuperscript{14} Justifying this title, he wrote: "I have selec-
ted the title 'the Sepoy Mutiny and the Revolt of 1857' as in
my opinion it correctly describes the essential nature of the
movements, whatever we might take of it. The word 'revolt'
is used in its normal sense of casting off allegiance to the
rulers, and does not convey any moral judgement such as
disapproval or odium."\textsuperscript{15}

Thus, it can be seen that even right from the British
officials and historians referred to above to the Indian schol-
ars of history like Dr. Majumdar who have no sympathy

\textsuperscript{12} S.B. Choudhuri, \textit{Civil Rebellion in the Indian Mutinies (1857-59)}, Calcutta,
1957

\textsuperscript{13} Surendra Nath Sen, \textit{Eighteen Fifty Seven}, New Delhi, 1957.


\textsuperscript{15} Majumdar, \textit{Ibid}, II Ed., Introduction, pp XVI-XVII.
for the objectives of the struggle, do concede the popular support to it.

One can say without hesitation that it was a rebellion in which millions of people in areas covered by the present Uttar Pradesh, and some parts of Bihar and Madhya Pradesh participated. At the same time, it was a movement without popular support in the entire South India, eastern India including Bengal, and in Punjab. Even scholars like Dr. Choudhury who characterize it as a people’s struggle do accept this fact.

When we examine this struggle taking into consideration all the facts which are accepted equally by the scholars from both the camps, we arrive at the following conclusions.

1) In the sense that it was the sepoys who played the main role in the anti-British revolt, it was a sepoy mutiny.

2) However, behind the ‘sepoy mutiny’ lay the intense discontent of the people. Therefore, when the sepoys rose in revolt (in certain areas even before the mutiny started), the rural poor revolted against the rulers who were ruining their lives, and against the nouveau riche who were fattening themselves with the backing of the rulers. What the civilian rebellionists did was to destroy the government offices and official records and physically liquidate government officials, the nouveau riche usurers and traders. In this sense, the struggle of 1857-59 (at least insofar as the regions mentioned above) was a popular rebellion.

3) Except in this limited area, however, there was not only no popular support for the struggle, but it faced the opposition of the educated new generation, who stood behind the British government. For this reason one cannot say unequivocally that what took place in 1857-59 was the “first struggle for independence” as claimed by the government and the nationalist political leaders and historians.

We have also to specially mention here that a predominant section of Indian soldiers stood with the British in 1857-59 to suppress the revolt and they outnumbered
many times the sepoys who rose in revolt. Had there been no assistance from the Indian soldiers, not only the British would not have been able to suppress the rebellion, but they would have had to pack up and leave the country. The bourgeois nationalists and nationalist historians are shutting their eyes to this truth when they characterize the 1857-59 struggle as the "first struggle for independence".

Hence three important questions come up before one who studies history scientifically without pre-conceived notions and prejudices.

Firstly, how was it that in Oudh and the surrounding areas people's revolt mingled with the sepoys' mutiny and how could that rebellion last nearly two years, throwing a challenge to the British rule?

Secondly, why was it that only a sepoys' mutiny without a people's revolt burst out in regions outside these areas? What was the reason for any type of people's struggle not coming up against the British in any other region?

Thirdly, why did a majority of the soldiers and the civilian population come forward to render help to the British to suppress the sepoys who started the mutiny?

Before answering these three questions it is necessary to make one thing clear. A revolt like the "Sepoy Mutiny" of 1857-59 with or without the backing of a people's struggle was an indication of a very deep crisis of the existing society. In all revolutions, soldiers' revolts such as this have played an important role.

In the famous terminology of Lenin, sepoys (or soldiers) are "peasants in uniform". Their discontent presents itself during revolutionary stages in the form of quintessence of all contradictions in society. That was why Lenin gave the "Soviets", which were the revolutionary organizations of soldiers as well as of the workers and peasants, a very prominent place in the advance of the Russian revolution.

In the socialist revolutions of recent times as in China, Korea, Vietnam and Cuba and in all other revolutions of the historical periods, the discontent amongst the ranks of
the armed forces and the revolts that gave expression to this discontent have played key a role.

In India, the British had organized a military which was totally different in character from all types of military organizations that were in existence in India. Till then military organization that were extant in India was one formed under the feudal lords who were holding a dominant position in all sectors of life, incuding social and cultural. The military hierarchy consisted of the emperor or the king at the top, with the feudal lord and the local chiefs below him, in that order, who maintained relations, though exploitative, with the people. This relationship between them and the people was reflected in the military organization also.

On the other hand, the British built a military organization with a new kind of relationship between officers and rank based on pay and bureaucratic discipline, breaking the traditional set-up. Moreover, in this new organization, officers at all levels were foreigners. Consequently, unlike in the earlier set-up, there remained absolutely no relationship between the officers and ranks touching upon the social and cultural aspects of life. The sepoys came to realize that the British rulers were utilizing them to destroy all socio-cultural institutions that their predecessors had fondly built and also those who were heading those institutions. This naturally fostered anger and indignation in their minds.

This intense feeling first burst out as early as in 1806. The Vellore mutiny in the South was a forerunner of 1857-59, although it was relatively smaller in extent. Following this revolt, several small revolts of a similar nature had broken out in various parts of the country. Although each one of these was suppressed, the forces behind these struggles, namely, the social forces born out of the contradictions between the official duties that the sepoys were forced to discharge as tools of foreign rulers and the reality that they belonged to that section of the people who were ruined day by day, being the victims of exploitation by the very same
foreign dominators. The 1857-59 revolt was the outburst of these forces.

Considered in this light, the question once again comes up before us: Why did 1857-59 not spread all over India and why the majority of the sepoys themselves and the civilian population, except in Oudh and the surrounding areas, helped the British? A detailed answer to this question may be found in the chapters that follow. But let us note one point here. The contradiction inherent in the feudal military set-up in India before the British established their power in the country was far greater than the contradiction in the military organization built by the British. In fact, although the Mughal Emperors declared themselves the rulers of India, neither under them nor in the earlier periods was there a State or military organization which could be termed really "Indian". During the decades immediately preceding, various sections like the Sikhs of Punjab, the Hindustanis, Maharashtrians, South Indians and so on, had their own separate military organizations and chiefs. They were fighting amongst themselves, each one striving to dominate over the other. It was as part of these fights that they entered into military alliance and political relations with the foreigners. In Marx's words, "How came it that English supremacy was established in India? The paramount power of the Great Mogul was broken by the Mogul Viceroy. The power of the Viceroy was broken by the Mahrattas. The power of the Mahrattas was broken by the Afghans, and while all were struggling against all, the Briton rushed in and was enabled to subdue them all."\(^6\)

This state of affairs was reflected in 1857-59 as well. The Rani of Jhansi, Nana Saheb and other recognized leaders of that revolt sought at one time or the other the assistance from the British in order to protect their own interests and to inflict defeat on their opponents. When they started their struggles against the British, their opponents sought the help of the British against them. No wonder, therefore, when

\(^6\) *The First Indian War of Independence*, op cit, p 33.
the leaders themselves acted in this manner, the ordinary soldiers and the lower ranks acted as tools of the British against the mutiny.

Briefly, the rebellion of 1857-59 was the outburst of the social contradictions that lay below the new military organization and the State established by the British rulers in India. And behind the suppression of the rebellion lay the fundamental contradiction inherent in the pre-British Indian society.

IV. THE BATTLE OF DELHI

The outburst of revolt of the sepoys of Meerut against their officers on May 9, 1857, marked the beginning of the "Seyoy Mutiny". These rebellious troops marched to Delhi, and on reaching there appealed to Bahadur Shah, the living successor of Akbar and Aurangzeb, to take up the leadership of the anti-British struggle they had started.

Bahadur Shah was an old man, a simpleton, and did not possess the traditions and fame established by his predecessors. Nothing more could be said of Bahadur Shah than that he was born in the family of the Mughal Emperors who had ruled the country for several decades, in grandeur and glory. In other words, he represented only the outer shell of the renowned Mughal Empire.

But even this shell turned out to be a sharp weapon in the anti-British struggle. Weak and old, he was the last of the Mughal Emperors and the symbol of a social and administrative system which the people of Delhi and the surrounding areas had witnessed for several generations. It was in his name that the soldiers and the civilian population of that area organized the anti-British struggle.

We have noticed earlier, that the British became the rulers in Bengal and the surrounding areas by obtaining the Diwani from the Emperor of Delhi. It was by recognizing at least nominally the supremacy of the Emperor of Delhi that
they acquired the right to thus rule over Bihar, Orissa and other regions. In Bengal, on the other hand, they became the rulers after acting in the name of the Nawab who was directly under the Emperor.

It was in the initial stage of the power of the English East India Company that they acquired power in this manner directly from the emperor or his local representative. They had to act very cautiously at that time. Their method was to enter into military and political alliance with the princes and Nawabs under the emperor without offending him and even by pretending that they were submissive to him. The situation obtained at that time was such that only by following this policy in all the bordering areas of the empire would they be able to establish their domination.

In about the same period, the British gained ruling power in southern India, a region which was not even nominally under the jurisdiction of the Emperor of Delhi, by forming alliance with the princes and Nawabs in that region. Amongst these princes and Nawabs was the Nizam of Hyderabad who was nominally under the jurisdiction of the Emperor as also the Marathas who were consistently in conflict with Delhi. Thus the British began to consolidate their power in regions which were ruled by princes and others who were outside the jurisdiction of the emperor or were only nominally under him.

The situation obtained in the regions described as the centres of “Sepoy Mutiny” was entirely different. To the people of those regions, the Emperor of Delhi was not a distant ruler. They had been living directly under the authority of Emperor for generations. The elite class discharged various duties and responsibilities as part of that administrative system and received as remuneration for such services in cash or in the form of land or other benefits and concessions, and acquired authority and position. The Muslims among them were contented that the administration under the Mughal emperors was their own, while the Hindus were convinced that, though belonged to a different religion, they were being
treated with affection and respect. (Even under the rule of Aurangzeb, who was regarded as anti-Hindu, there were several Hindus occupying high positions.) Thus the Delhi Emperor was the head of an administrative system which generally enjoyed loyalty and confidence of the elite classes irrespective of the religion they professed.

Fully realising this, the British dealt with the Emperor with deference and submissiveness during the period just prior to the outbreak of the "Sepoy Mutiny". We have noted earlier that the flames of anti-British sentiment began to flare up in North India leading to the sepoys and civilian revolts when they changed their attitude towards the Emperor of Delhi. A change of a similar nature also came about in their attitude towards the princes and Nawabs, subordinate to the Emperor, and the Talukdars and other feudal lords subordinate to the princes and Nawabs.

The British decided to deal with feudal lords, princes and the Nawabs of Delhi and the surrounding areas only after consolidating their authority in eastern and southern India and after getting a section of the people friendly to them by transforming the socio-economic structures in these regions.

Another change that had come about as a result of this decision, namely, paying formal visits to the Emperor and offering him presents, etc., has already been mentioned earlier. Along with this they also deprived the princes and Nawabs of the right of adoption of successors, as also various traditional rights and benefits they had been enjoying since long. In addition, they also took measures to supervise the administrative functions of the princes and Nawabs and under the pretext of obviating misdeeds, to transfer the administration to themselves. In short, they unleashed a virtual attack against the Emperor of Delhi, the princes and Nawabs.

At stated earlier, before doing this, they had already consolidated their authority in eastern and southern India. Even in Punjab, Nepal, North-west Frontier region and in
Afghanistan they had established their authority. And for this purpose they managed to secure the help and assistance of the Emperor of Delhi and of the feudal lords of the neighbouring areas.

With the completion of this process, only the Emperor of Delhi and the rulers in the surrounding areas remained to be tackled. It became certain that in the event of a confrontation with them, the British would secure the assistance of the elite class and solidiers of the other regions. It was only then that they turned towards the rulers of Delhi and surrounding areas. It was for this reason that, as described in the earlier chapter, the struggle of 1857-59 and the people's revolt were confined mainly to this region. It was again for this same reason that while the sepoy mutiny was going on with the co-operation of the wide masses of the people at least in these limited areas, parallel struggles by the rural and urban poor and middle classes broke out against the British.

As far as this region was concerned, it was a real people's movement. It was not only the Emperor of Delhi, the princes, Nawabs and Talukdars and other feudal lords that the British ventured to attack and suppress. The life pattern then extant amongst the masses of people in the entire region was one based on the domination of the feudal elements with the Emperor of Delhi at the top. The destruction of the domination of the feudal lords meant disruption of the life pattern of the people. It also meant that the entire people were compelled to move towards a situation wherein they had perforce to bring about a thorough change in the pattern of life that they have been living for generations. Naturally therefore, the waves of anti-British feelings expressed by the feudal elements swept also through the common people. They had looked upon the feudal lords, including the Emperor of Delhi, as their traditional leaders and hence joined the anti-British struggles organized by them.

In the previous chapter we had made particular mention of some incidents as evidence to show that the Sepoy Mutiny was accompanied by people's revolts. Besides killing British
officials and setting fire to their offices, the masses also destroyed the records maintained by the *Nouveau riche* of their monetary transactions, profiteering in trade, etc. These incidents revealed the fact that the attacks unleashed by the revolting people were not against the traditional feudal lords but against the new elites who were fattening themselves in the shade of the British administrators. While destroying the properties of this section of the elite classes, they chose as their leaders the traditional elites, like the Rani of Jhansi, Nana Saheb who rose to become the Peshwa of the Marathas, and such others. It was a part of this that the sepoys who raised the banner of revolt in Meerut marched to Delhi and installed the successor of Akbar and Aurangzeb as their leader. The British knew that this would have serious repercussions throughout northern India. They feared that the people who see Bahadur Shah, whom they were compelled to recognize at least nominally as the Mughal Emperor, head the princes and Nawabs leading the Indian soldiers against the British, would render all assistance to the mutineers. They were therefore determined to capture Delhi, the capital of the Emperor at any cost and take the "Emperor" prisoner. On the other side, the revolting sepoys were determined not to yield and not to allow Delhi fall to the British.

Consequently, the "Battle of Delhi" which lasted for a few weeks was an important event in the struggle of 1857. It had military significance. But even more significant was the political aspect of the battle.

The fall of Delhi and the imprisonment of Bahadur Shah did not end the Sepoy Mutiny and people's revolt in the military sense. But the British occupation of Delhi, the capital of an empire for several generations, and the imprisonment of the head of that state, started the process of decline of the morale of the insurrectionists—both sepoys and masses of people. Following these developments, the sepoys and the people in revolt could not hold out for long; the centres of revolt fell one after another and finally the leaders of the revolt either surrendered or were captured.
The most regrettable aspect of the battle of Delhi was the shameless role played by Bahadur Shah and his family. Even to maintain the fame and prestige of his family, the Emperor and the members of his family were not prepared for a confrontation with the foreign masters. It was due to the pressure of some sort from soldiers and the people that Bahadur Shah ultimately agreed to be installed as the leader of the insurrectionists. And later he agreed to remain informally their leader and sign the proclamation and to stir the masses as long as the high tide of the struggle lasted.

But right at the time when the tide of the struggle began to rise high, he (actually through his wife) did whatever was possible to negotiate a settlement with the British with the aim of saving his life and as much property as possible. While in detention as a prisoner in the Delhi fort, and also before the trial court this successor of Akbar and Aurangzeb ventured to prove his innocence by stating that he did not do anything against the British except succumb to the pressure of insurrectionists to have his name used as their leader. This marked the shameless degeneration and surrender not of Bahadur Shah as an individual but of the class he represented.

True, others like Nana Saheb and the Rani of Jhansi, also belonging to the same class, left deep impressions on the history of the struggle. However, they also met with the final defeat due to the betrayal by a majority of their own class. They were the kind of people who refused to stand by the insurrectionists and rendered assistance to the foreigners to suppress them even during the high tide of the popular revolt. Thus, it was the class consisting of the Bahadur Sh (shahs), who surrendered to the enemy at a crucial juncture and other feudal lords who had stood with the enemy all along that was at top of the society of those times. This constituted the fundamental weakness of a movement which has been characterized as ‘the first freedom struggle’.
V. THE END OF AN EPOCH

With the imprisonment of Bahadur Shah, the end of the Sepoy Mutiny and of the accompanying mass revolt was in sight. But this was not only the end of a particular struggle or revolt, but a development that also marked the failure of the Indian society that had been in existence for centuries before the advent of the European trading companies in India. This marked the end of a historical epoch extending over the ancient and medieval periods characterized by the prevalence of the varna system which resulted from the disintegration of the ancient tribal society, of castes which had evolved out of it and the village community basic to it.

As we have seen, till the advent of European trading companies, the Indian society consisted of three elements, namely, the Emperor of Delhi, the local rulers directly under the Emperor or independent of him, and the feudal lords aligned to them. The rebellions which commenced as local revolts during the last decades of the 18th century and culminated in the sepoy mutiny and the popular revolts of northern India in 1857-59, constituted a series of setbacks which this system had to face. With the defeat of the 1857-59 struggle, the last and the most extensive of these revolts, society (or the elite class occupying top positions in that society) had to lay down its arms. The surrender of Bahadur Shah and the heroic end of Rani Jhansi illustrate this fact. But here it was a defeat not only of the elite class but of the people as a whole. What was lost in the military victory of the British was not only the ruling power of the Delhi Emperor or the properties of the Talukdars and other landlords but also the entire social life pattern of the whole people embedded in their system of beliefs, customs and behaviour. The common masses had felt the intense urge to protect and maintain their social life pattern and to resist the foreigner’s attacks on it. This urge could be found expressed at each stage of the future anti-British struggles.
We had referred earlier to the break out of a series of revolts in the different parts of the country towards the end of 18th century. The type of revolts which the Hindu Sanyasys and the Muslim Fakirs had carried out, sometimes jointly and sometimes separately, must also be included in this series.

These revolts occurred at a time when the British had not yet been able to consolidate the authority which they had acquired formally from the local Nawabs in Bengal and the nearby areas and from the Emperor of Delhi. As in the case of the popular revolts in other areas, what was reflected in these revolts, too, was the acute discontent of the sections of the people who were being pauperized under the British rule, and who had lost their political authority. Thus, following the Bengal famine of 1770, the people who were affected by it mobilized themselves under the leadership of Hindu Sanyasys and Muslim Fakirs. In various parts of Bengal, the forces under the Sanyasys with such strength as could exterminate the entire British domination, were able to locally defeat the British soldiers.

But the Sanyasy-Fakir revolts were, unlike the other regional revolts of the period, mainly based on religious feelings. The feeling was widespread among the Hindus and the Muslims that Christianity which the European trading companies brought with them would be dangerous to their system of life and faiths. Therefore, they believed it their moral duty to resist this religion and its protectors, the British.

The Sanyasy-Fakir revolts burst out as a result of these feelings combined with the acute politico-economic discontent that was growing day by day amongst the people.

Following these revolts, various other movements based on religious feelings began to emerge in various parts of the country. Among them, the Muslim revolts had a distinct character. The Muslim elites had been holding high positions in the administrative set-up during the days of the Delhi Sultanate prior to the Mughal empire. The feeling
that they would lose these privileges and positions goaded them into anti-British revolts. Similarly, discontent was growing amongst the Hindus, too. Several revolts in which they also participated burst out in various parts of the country. But the notion that the Muslim rule which embraced the whole of northern India was about to end gave rise to certain movements with specific Islamic characteristics.

Of these, the Faraidi movement of Bengal and the Wahabi movement in the present Uttar Pradesh were two movements worth particular mention. The core of both these movements was the call to protect their Deen (religion) from the attacks from foreigners. The main enemy of these movements at that time was Christianity, which was considered to be the force which was attacking both Hinduism and Islam, along with the British, who were the patrons of that religion. Consequently, these movements did not lead to Hindu-Muslim conflicts. However, it contained the germ of the condition for the development of Hindu-Muslim communalism which, later, led to the break up of the unity of the national freedom struggle.

Both Hinduism and Islam had been existing for centuries in this country before the advent of the British. It is true that at times, in certain areas, these two religions had entered into conflicts. But, they both had existed as part of the same Indian society. The people of both the religions and their socio-cultural leaders had approved of the same society embedded in the caste, village and joint-family systems. The Christians who had considerably spread in many parts of India (e.g., in Kerala) also had imbibed this characteristic features of the Indian society.

But the situation changed with the advent of the European trading companies. Initially the Portuguese and later other European companies viewed and used Christianity not as a religion but as a weapon to protect and develop their capitalist class interests in this country. This led to conflicts between their Christian religious propaganda and religious beliefs and
the customs based on caste of all sections of the people, including Christians, who had been living here for generations. (In Kerala, for example, the conflict between the local Christians and the Portuguese company men and the resultant Koonan Kurisu Pledge are historically well known.) No wonder then that Hindus who claim to be the representatives of the Indian culture based on the Vedas and epics and the Muslims who claim to be the descendants of those who had ruled the country for centuries, opposed this new (Christian) religious propagandists and their rule.

More than the religious doctrines and systems of beliefs, it is the customs and rituals which the people as members of a community practise which easily stir up their emotions and feelings. The Hindus, Muslims and the local Christians had their own customs and rituals before the advent of the foreign traders. Each community was tolerant towards the customs and beliefs of the other and the authorities also did not interfere in such matters. (Even if on certain occasions, certain rulers had interfered with others’ religious beliefs, the people of their own community hardly supported such actions.)

But, under the British rule, an attitude of deriding other religious doctrines and faiths and violation of their customs and rituals came into vogue. This pained both Muslims and Hindus alike. They lined up against the British rule. Hindu religious leaders called upon their followers to fight against the British to protect Hindu Dharma. Similarly, the leaders of the Muslim religion called upon their followers to smash foreign rule in order to protect their Deen.

Among the people’s anti-British sentiments, which originated first in Bengal and South India and later led to

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17. The Koonan Cross is situated in Mattancherry, Cochin. The Portuguese power established in Cochin refused to recognize the existence of the indigenous Christian community in Kerala which is commonly believed to have been established by St. Thomas himself. They tried to impose the Catholic-Portuguese religious customs and practices on the local Christians who strongly resented it. The Pledge they took in front of the cross is part of the declaration of freedom from Portuguese domination, rejecting the Catholic-Portuguese conventions and defending their own.
the sepoy mutiny and people's revolt, the feeling that caste rituals and "religious doctrines and beliefs were in danger" was the most prominent. Whenever the Indian soldiers revolted against the British rulers, from the local sepoy mutiny in Vellore in 1806 to the widespread revolt of 1857-59, it was evidently the feeling that their caste and religion were in danger that led them to action.

For instance, what led to the Vellore Sepoy mutiny of 1806, was certain orders issued by their superiors about the dress and bearing of the sepoys. These orders banned the Hindus practice of donning the caste mark of *tilak* on their forehead, compelled the Sikhs and Muslims to remove their beard or hair, and directed the use of caps in place of the headgears or turbans which the Indians were wont to use customarily. The use of hides and skins of animals in making caps was also an irritant to the Sepoy, as they did not know as to which animal hides and skins were being used. All these measures caused serious concern in the minds of soldiers belonging to the Hindu, Muslim and Sikh communities. They suspected that these measurers were a part of the British conspiracy to get them excommunicated from their community and then proselytize them to Christianity.

Following these developments, Indian soldiers had revolted on many occasions against their superior officers. It is true there were various causes for their resentment, but the main cause was their suspicion that they would be forced to renounce their religious beliefs and customs and to embrace Christianity. The Hindu soldiers resented when they were ordered to go to war in foreign countries, because crossing the sea would have invited excommunication in accordance with the practice prevalent at that time.

Several such incidents constituted the apparent cause for the 1857 sepoy mutiny. The suspicion that animal fat was used to grease the cartridges caused resentment amongst the soldiers. The Hindus believed that they would lose caste if cartridges greased with the fat of cows were used. Similarly, the Muslims resented the use of grease taken from
boars. In fact, it was this suspicion that instigated the sepoys to revolt on the 9th of May 1857 in Meerut and subsequently in other places.

A rationalist or a materialist might dismiss all these as mere superstition. And they might characterize the soldiers who revolted on account of such superstitions as obscurantists and reactionaries. But the fact remains that the generations-old beliefs, faiths, customs and practices of lakhs were being violated. As mentioned earlier, these beliefs, faiths, customs and practices reflected the cultural ethos of a centuries-old society. That was why the Meerut mutiny reverberated in several other military centres too.

These feelings stirred up not only the soldiers in the military camps, but also the civilian population, with no lesser intensity than in the case of soldiers. The British were introducing several other measures, which, as in the case of the measures relating to the dress and bearing and use of arms by the soldiers, were bound to thoroughly transform the family life, property rights, education, and cultural advance of the civilian population.

The abolition of the practice of Sati (the burning of widow on the funeral pyre of her husband), and the legalization of widow re-marriage were progressive measures approvable by a modern society. But these measures were totally contradictory to the beliefs and practices of the Hindus. The Muslims felt that if the government which broke the customs and faiths of the Hindus would also do the same to them.

Both Hindus and Muslims saw the missionary propaganda of Christianity with the active connivance and protection of the authorities as an evidence. They even suspected that the new educational institutions established by the British government were being used as centres for proselytization. Thus, Christianity and its propagators roused the ire and harted of the entire mass irrespective of Hindu-Muslim religious differences.

The doctrines, faiths, customs and rituals based on casteist-religious institutions, were symbols of the collective
life of the Indian society like the political set-up including the Empire of Delhi and the rulers and provincial-regional chiefs under it. The socio-cultural structure was also an integral part of the ancient-medieval Indian society. It was this system which the European trading companies, from the very beginning, tried to destroy as they had tried to destroy the political system consisting of the rulers including the Emperor of Delhi, Talukdars, Jagirdars and other feudal lords. The rebellions of the Sanyasys and Fakirs on one side, and the various struggles of the local people on the other side, culminating in the sepoy mutiny of 1857 and the widespread people’s revolts were struggles against these acts of the European traders. The defeat sustained by the provincial rulers and the Emperor of Delhi was, in fact, the defeat of the old Indian society based on institutions of castes and religions.

VI. THE UNWRITTEN SETTLEMENT

Following the suppression of the 1857-59 Sepoy Mutiny and the popular revolt, the new British rulers began to initiate vindictive measures. Bahadur Shah, who was taken prisoner, was exiled. Rani of Jhansi and many other leaders died. Many of those who survived were tried in courts and sentenced to death or to long periods of imprisonment. The mutineers and the people who had participated in the rebellion were subjected to cruel and heinous repression. The attitude of the British after 1859 was that of a conquerer towards the vanquished.

They did not conceal this either. British leaders, through the columns of newspapers, and in speeches in and outside parliament, demanded that no mercy be shown to those who rose against them in India.

The British administrators, however, realized that the feelings roused amongst the people by the mutiny and the people’s rebellion which had lasted nearly two years could
not be suppressed easily through such direct acts of repression. The role played by the sepoys and the civilian population in the two-year-long mutiny and rebellion was of such magnitude as could neither be easily forgotten nor belittled. They realized that it was a widespread rebellion in which the princes who were ousted from seats of power, the feudal lords who had lost their landed properties and the poorest of the poor people actively participated. They were afraid that in case the causes that led to the outbreak of the rebellion continued to exist, similar rebellions would recur in northern India itself or it would spread to other regions of the country. They realized that it was necessary to eliminate these causes in order to maintain their rule.

Following this realization, they brought about some substantial changes in the policies they had been pursuing till then. They were conscious of the fact that a foreign government would not be in a position to redress the grievances of the masses of people in the villages and urban areas. But it would be possible for the administrators to placate the feudal lords, and the heads of casteist and religious institutions who had played a leading role in turning the dissatisfaction of the masses into revolts, and transforming such revolts into an intense armed struggle. It was for this sort of appeasement that the British administrators were trying.

As we had noticed earlier, a few years prior to 1857, the British rulers had been pursuing a policy of depriving the princes, the Nawabs and other rulers and feudal lords like Jagirdars and Talukdars, of their rights and privileges and confiscating their landed properties. That policy had to be abandoned. There were suspicions amongst the Hindus and Muslims and other non-Christian sections of the people that the British were trying to destroy all their religious faiths, customs and practices. This suspicion had to be removed—that’s all.

Accordingly, Queen Victoria made a proclamation before the people of India on the occasion of her assumption of power as the Empress of India in 1858. The Proclamation
gave concessions to two important sections of the Indian people, the native princes and the feudal lords. To the native princes it gave the undertaking that the British Government would honour all the agreements hitherto been entered into between them and the East India Company or their representatives. The government would guarantee their rights, privileges and position of honour. To the feudal lords, the proclamation undertook to preserve their ancestral feudal properties and all privileges associated with them. It further assured that in the event of bringing new legislations, it would give due considerations to the rights, traditions, and customs and practices which had been extant right from the ancient times.

Obviously, the Proclamation undertakes to protect not only the economic interests of the landlords, but also their privileges as heads of the casteist-religious society and all the laws, conventions, and the rituals and practices associated with them.

That is, earlier in the years immediately preceding 1857, the British had taken a number of steps, such as annexing the territories ruled by the Rajahs and Nawabs, abrogating the agreements between them and the British, replacing old landlords by new, bringing under the direct control of the British the territories of the native princes and the land and properties of the landlords under the pretext of revenue arrears and maladministration, refusing to recognize the rights of the princes and feudal lords to adopt and nominate heirs, and so on. That was why the feudal elite threw the entire weight behind the Sepoy Mutiny and the mass revolt. The Proclamation envisages giving up the anti-feudal approach contained in these actions and to make efforts to placate and turn them loyal to the British rule. Similarly, it was also necessary to take precautions against the communal and religious sentiments of the people reaching a point of outbreak as it happened in 1857-59. That was why the Proclamation assured that the customs, traditions, etc., would be taken into consideration before introducing new legislative measures.
The proclamation of Queen Victoria thus contained provisions to appease, at least to some extent, the people of India who took part in the Sepoy Mutiny and the revolts and the feudal elite who gave leadership to them as also to arrive at a compromise with the latter.

There were two faces to this compromise. There was, of course, no question at all of making a written compromise settlement directly with those who had participated in a revolt that was suppressed. But it was possible to have an unwritten compromise with them. The feudal elite and the common people who had waged the struggle under the former’s leadership must recognize the fact that the power of the British government was unassailable and that the British would rule in such a way as to protect the rights, positions and properties of the feudal lords and to assure that the religious faiths and customs of the Indian people (non-Christian) would not in any way be harmed.

Needless to say, this approach represented a fundamental departure from the policy that had been pursued by the East India Company and the British government prior to 1857. This was a move to win over the former Rajahs, and the aristocracy including the feudal elite as allies of the British rule. A new approach was also adopted to honour the popular sentiments within the limits of religious practices and social life, in order to ensure that people’s discontent that might arise in the course of the conduct of the administration of the country with the help of these new allies, did not burst out in another revolt.

And the elites of the existing Indian society were satisfied with this. There was no possibility of obtaining any rights or privileges of a wider extent or of more significance than what has been assured in the Proclamation. All ways and means to obtain more powers had ended with the suppression of the 1857-59 rebellion. As such, the elites of those times saw that the only way to protect their class interests was to be satisfied with what they got and to try to ensure that they get all the rights and privileges that were specified
in the Proclamation, and at the same time, to remain as loyal subjects of the Empress accepting the rule of her government.

Thus, the Proclamation of Queen Victoria made after the suppression of the revolt of 1857-59 meant a settlement, unwritten on the part of the feudal elite and written on the part of the British rulers. The elite class characterized this as a "Magna Carta" obtained from the British rulers. They made it clear through words and deeds that they shall ever remain "loyal and respectful" to the rulers who had very "graciously bestowed" upon them these rights and privileges.

It is for the first time in India's history that a group of foreigners, keeping their foreign identity—without getting merged with the socio-cultural mainstream of this country—became the rulers of this country. Never before had a king or a queen ruled over the princes and people of India sitting in a throne in a far-off place. But, unlike the different foreign groups from the Aryans to the Mughals which had become themselves Indianized and sat at the helm of affairs, the British were now able to transform the whole Indian social structure, using an administrative machinery situated 5,000 or more miles away.

However, they had to win over the former rulers and elite sections, without creating hatred in them and alienating them. And the elites of this country represented a feudal (or pre-capitalists) society. There was a basic contradiction between that society and the capitalist society which the British represented. This compromise between the foreign rulers and the native elites, who, by remaining loyal to the former, were trying to retain their power and position, representing two mutually contradictory social systems, gave rise to a number of incongruities. These incongruities have played their unique roles in the development of events in India in the years to come. We shall examine them in details in the next few chapters.

As a beginning of this examination, let us notice here that there is an irreconcilable contradiction between the wishes maintained by the British rulers and that of the Indian feudal
aristocracy which now decided to function as subjects loyal to them. This contradiction is as follows. The task of the British rulers as representatives of capitalist society was to cut at the roots of the existing pre-capitalist society evolved here for centuries. The feudal aristocracy now determined to function as loyal subjects and to help the British in suppressing the discontented common people, on the other hand, wanted to preserve at least the remnant, if not the whole, of that pre-capitalist society. At the same time, the educated middle class which considered the Sepoy Mutiny and the popular revolt reactionary and advised the people to keep away from them, was baffled at the assurance given by the British to protect the doctrine, customs and practices which they considered reactionary.

The British representing capitalism cannot exist without strengthening the social forces represented by the educated middle class. At the same time, to curb the growing dissatisfaction of the people as an inevitable consequence of the development of capitalism, they had to enter into a political alliance with the feudal elites representing the reactionary forces.

It is out of this contradiction that the next stage of the struggle of the Indian people for national independence emerges.

The British rule which got consolidated itself in India following the suppression of the Sepoy Mutiny and popular revolt was taking India irresistibly along the path of capitalism. As an inevitable consequence of this capitalist development, the roots of the pre-capitalist society were being cut, one by one. The new social forces born out of the development of a capitalist society were growing.

At the same time, considering self-existence in the administrative and political domains, it becomes imperative for the British to strike a compromise with the declining pre-capitalist forces. Consequently, the foreign capitalist rulers and the constantly growing indigenous capitalist forces came into clash with each other. The latter forces
were striving to bring changes in all aspects of the social life in accordance with the capitalist forces which were growing as a consequence of the actions of the British rulers. The alien character of the foreign rulers, and their dependence on the representatives of the pre-capitalist society constituted an obstacle before this.

This situation gives rise to a new movement, rather than one assuming the form of an armed struggle as of the 1857-59 period, fighting for national independence along the constitutional and peaceful path led by the very same section of the society which stood with the British against the Sepoy Mutiny and the popular revolts. Here ends one stage of the national struggle against the alien rule and begins another. In place of one form, it assumes another form. The successors of those who had stood with the mutineers in 1857-59, now align themselves with the government against the freedom struggle; the successors of those who opposed the Sepoy Mutiny and people's revolt branding them "reactionary", now play an active role in the freedom struggle.