



### "THE BEGINNING OF 'PEOPLES WAR' IN INDIA"

**Dr. Kautik N. Dande**  
**Asst, professor, (Student) Dept. of History,**  
**Dr. B.A.M.University, Aurangabad.**



### ABSTRACT

THE 19<sup>th</sup> century witnessed the emergence of a new form of warfare. The “limited war” of the 18<sup>th</sup> century was replaced by the “people war” in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century which in turn gave rise to “total war” during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>1</sup> The European 18<sup>th</sup> century was of limited liability fought without any moral or ideological issues. Eighteenth century raised, equipped and fed by bureaucratised monarchies. While waging warfare, such armies made clear distinctions between the armed forces and the civilians.<sup>2</sup> However, all these restrictions were wiped away in the era of people’s war. According to Stig Forster and Jorg Nagler, it was the people’s armies that conducted the people war. In such armies, citizens became soldiers and the home front was also mobilised to support the war effort. As a consequence, the watertight compartments vanished. And public opinion asserted an important role in shaping the conduct of such wars.<sup>3</sup> John Whiteclay Chambers II says that cultural attitudes (mentality which shaped images of the enemy) also aided the brutalisation of warfare.<sup>4</sup> Soldiers were motivated more by ideology rather than cash or monetary considerations.<sup>5</sup> On January 29, 1858, when Huge Rose’s troops belonging to the Central India Field Force occupied the fort of Rahatgarh, about 84 rebels were captured and 24 of them were executed.<sup>6</sup> Frequently, the eliminated the prisoners. On June 8, 1857, the rebels attacked the fort of Jhansi. Around 5 pm, the British surrendered on condition that their lives will be spared. As soon as they surrendered, the prisoners were put to the sword.<sup>7</sup>

**KEYWORDS :** strategy directed , mobilised , combatants and non-combatants.

### INTRODUCTION

The distinction between combatants and non-combatants vanished in the case of people’s war. Forster and Nagler claim that the Civil War in the US of 1861-65 and the Franco-Prussian War of 1871 witnessed the evolution of a strategy directed against the civilians. This was because the civilians were necessary to sustain the war effort and the former often also joined the people’s armies. The people took up arms and were either mobilised from above or they mobilised on their own spontaneously.<sup>8</sup> Subaltern historiography ascribes autonomy and agency to the ordinary

people. The practitioners of this approach assert that popular initiative shaped the mass violence that unfolded against the alien regime in 1857.<sup>9</sup>

On our entering the thananh inclosure, we found evidence of the praserving ingenuity of the rebels in their having adopted a large quantity of the material of our electric telegraph lines to the present exigencies of their position. They had dug up a number of cast iron screws, in which the telegraph posts are placed, struck off the phlanges of the scews, bored touch holes in them, and were mounting them as guns on carriages. They employed the thick telegraph wire for fixing and strengthening them, besides cutting up a larrge portion of it into amall lengths for grape.<sup>10</sup>

The consequence was the men off duty and even some native soldiers but chiefly the 86<sup>th</sup> and Artillery were frightfully drunk having seized the native liquor shops. They then commenced looting and killing everything black, old men, young women and children! This of course was to be deplored but I had anticipated this. They shouted Kanpur, Delhi and down they went. (Indecipherable) says he saw a room full of dead women with children sucking at their breasts. Other women brought out dead, children supplicating for mercy.<sup>11</sup>

At Hurra, we heard of the arrival in a neighbouring village of reinforcements from Meerut, two Horse Artillery guns, and a party of Carabineers, who had prders to hold the Ghat for us. They had been marching, like ourselves, all night; but not having any of the Meerut district officers with them, and the Ranghur village of Kiwai, at which they halted, being badly affected, the soldiers had been starving for nearly twenty fours..... I at once entered the village to arrest the head men, telling them that they would be paid if they brought food, and their houses fired if they did not. Seeing a couple of calves careering about, I seized one and of orderlies another: these we presented to the carbineers.<sup>12</sup>

The village headmen were also taken hostages as security for the government revenue.<sup>13</sup>

Unlike previous conflicts in southe Asia, women became an integral part of warfare. The horror of warfare during the Mutiny also touched the white women. One British women jotted down in her journal on June 30, 1857 about the conditions in Lucknow Residency in the following words.

Another heroine of 1857 was the Rani of Jhansi. By early June 1857, the mutineers at Jhansi received Rs.35,000 in cash, two elephants and five horses from the Rani. The Rani also raised 14,000 men and two guns which were hitherto buried within the fort to escapr the scrutiny of the British.<sup>14</sup>

Like a true warrior, the Rani died in the battlefield. Along with elite women there was also spontaneous involvement of women at the subaltern level. Jhansi: "The women were seen working in the batteries and carrying ammunition".<sup>15</sup>

My mastre Sreemunt Maharajah Peshwa Bahadur at the sacrifice of every ease and comfort as well as of his wealth, property etc has for the purpose of defending the religion both of the Hindus and Muslims prepared himself to slaughter the followers of Christ as they are the enemies of the faith of the Muslims and Hindus. The said Maharaja has, by waging a war with the Christians, put several of them to the sword and has resolved not to refrain himself from as long as he breathes his living air, and to annihilate at once the people of this race now in india.<sup>16</sup>

The rebel leaders painted the conflict as a religious-cum racial war to motivate their followers.

The 12<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment atationed at Jhansi received a letter from the rebel government at Delhi atating that the Bengal Army had mutinied. Since this regiment had remained faithful to

the British, the men had become outcaste and lost their faith. Immediately, four sepoys who were ringleaders started provoking the regiment to rebel. And finally they succeeded.<sup>17</sup>

The whole Native Regular Army are ready to break out, and unless a blow be soon struck the Irregulars as a body will follow their example. Send for our troops from Persia. Intercept the force now on its way to China and bring it to Calcutta.

*Telegram from John Lawrence, chief commissioner, Punjab, to G F Edmonstone, secretary to the government of India, May 12, 1857<sup>18</sup>*

The two tables show that in midst of the mutiny, the size of the Madras and the Bombay armies did not register any quantum leap. The increase in the number of European soldiers of the Bombay Army between 1858 and 1859 was significant but not massive. By April 1858, there were 96,000 British soldiers in the subcontinent backed up by large number of loyal Indian yroops.<sup>19</sup>

After the recapture of Lucknow in March 1858, the rebels spread all over India and conducted sporadic low level warfare against the British. The guerrilla war continued till April 8, 1860, when Raja Man Singh betrayed Tantia Tope to the British.<sup>20</sup>

The British also depended on the armies of the Indian princes who remained loyal to the Company. The total princes ruled over a large chunk of of territory and total number of inhabitants under their rule numbered 4,00,00,000.<sup>21</sup> The Jammu Contingent of Maharaja Gulab Singh of Kashmir and the Subsidiary Force of Hyderabad (10,698 men) did good sevice for the British during the Mutiny.<sup>22</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Violence inflicted by both the rebels and the British against each other and frequently on the non-combatants and civil society had as instrumental function. By inflicting violence, both the colonial atate and the rebel regime tried to shore up their own effort and weaken that of their enemy. Infliction of large-scale violence was necessary to destroy the financial and demographic potential of the enemy and also affect their morale. So, there was nothing uniquely colonial about the savagery against non-combatants displayed by both the British and the rebels during 1857-1859. The brutalisation of combat was due to ideological commitments on both sides. Patriotism and a sense of revenge drove the Union and Confederate troops as well. Similarly, muscular Christianity and revenge provided fire to the British in India. The rebels were motivated by a "mix" of religion and caste pride that constituted a sort of pre-modern nationalism. The participation of the marginal group (i e, blacks) was much more intense in North America during the Civil War compared to the role played by the tribes and low castes in India diring the 1857 uprising. Nevertheless, both the American Civil War as well as the 1857 Mutiny irrevocably changed the face of war.

## REFERENCES

- 1) The story of linear evolution of total war is teleological and been challenged by several historians. Still, I think such a developmental model is helpful in understanding the gradual unfolding of warfare in Eurasia and North America between late 18<sup>th</sup> century and the fourth decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.
- 2) Eric Robson 'The Armed Forces and the Art of War' in J O Lindsay (ed), *The new Cambridge Modern history: The old Regime, 1713-63*, Vol 7, 1957, reprint, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1966, p 165.

- 3) Stig Forster and Jorg Nagler, 'Introduction' in Forster and Nagler (eds), *On the Road to Total War: The American Civil War and the German Wars of Unification, 1861-71*, German Historical Institute Washington, Cambridge, DC and Cambridge University Press, p 5.
- 4) John Whiteclay Chambers II, 'The American Debate over Modern War: 1857-1914' in Stig Forster, Roger Chickering and manfred F Boemeke (eds), *Anticipating Total War: The German and American Experiences, 1857-1914*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1999, p 243.
- 5) Mark E Neely J R, 'Was the Civil War a total War?' in Forster and Nagler (eds), *On the Road to total War*, p 36.
- 6) *The Revolt in Central India: 1857-59*, Compiled in the Intelligence Branch Division of the Chief of Staff, Army Head Quarter, Shimla, 1908, p 91.
- 7) Tapti Roy, The Politics of a Popular Uprising: Bundelkhand in 1857, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1994, p 31.
- 8) Forster and Nagler, 'Introduction' in Forster and Nagler (eds), *On the Road to Total War*, pp5,8.
- 9) Gautam Bhadra, 'Four Rebels of Eighteen-Fifty-Seven' in Ranajit Guha (ed), *Subaltern Studies: Writings on South Asian History and Society*, Vol 4, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1985, pp 273, 275.
- 10) Robert Henry Wallace Dunlop, *Service and Adventure with the khakee Ressalah or Meerut Volunteer Horse during the Mutinies of 1857-58*, 1858, reprint, Legend Publications, Allahabad, 1974, P124-25.
- 11) Hugh Rose and the Central India Campaign 1858, Selected and (ed) by Brian Robson, Army Records Society, Sutton, 2000, pp 7-8.
- 12) Dunlop, *khakee Ressalah*, pp 110-11.
- 13) Dunlop, *khakee Ressalah*, pp 99.
- 14) S A A Rizvi and M L Bhargava (eds), FSUP, Vol 3 Bundelkhand and Adjoining Territories 1857-59, Publication Bureau, Uttar Pradesh, 1959, p 9.
- 15) George W Forrest (ed), *Selections from the Letters, Despatches and other State Paper Preserved on the Military Department of the Government of India*, Vol 4 Supdt of Government Printing, Calcutta, 1992, p 42.
- 16) Hugh Rose and the Central India Campaign 1858, p 30.
- 17) FSUP, Vol 3, p 18.
- 18) *Mutiny Records Correspondence*, Part I, Punjab Government Press, Lahore, 1911, p 39.
- 19) Lord Roberts of Kandahar, *Forty One Years in India: From Subaltern to Commander-in-Chief*, Vol 1, Richard Bentley and sons, London, 1897, p 411.
- 20) Telegram no 364, Fategarh, June 16, 1858, Originals of Daily Bulletins issued by E A Reade, Agra, Uttar Pradesh State Archives, Lucknow.
- 21) Thomas H Thornton, *General Richard Meade and the Feudatory states of Central and Southern India*, Longmans, London, 1898, p 306.
- 22) Thornton, Meade, pp 259, 261; Punjab Government Records, Correspondence, Part II, Punjab Government Press, Lahore, 1911, p 100.