The Revolt of 1857 Through the Eyes of the Socialists: An Unforgettable Scenario of Colonial India

Joydeep Pal

Assistant Professor, Department of History, Sukanta Mahavidyala, Dhupguri, Jalpaiguri

Before going to discuss on the above mentioned issue here at first it need to include that what is the proper meaning of Socialism? What kind of role it is actually played in a society? Here it deserve to mention that Society is a man made institution and be a part of it socialistic thought or views explain the nature of the exploiter and the exploited. However, socialist pattern have the following characteristics, which are interlinked with one – another. According to the planning Commission "Socialist pattern of society", means, "that the basic criterion for determining the lines of advance must not be private profit but social gain, and that the pattern of development and the structure of socio-economic relations should be so planned that they result not only in appreciable increases in national income and employment but also in greater equality in incomes and wealth". Socialism is a technical term, which, in its economic aspect, signifies a structure of society in which factors of production other than labours are socialized. Public ownership of the material means of production is the basic condition of socialism, the condition that distinguishes it and puts it in contrast with capitalism. This reminder is called for in view of the loose manner in which people talk of socialism these days. The widely quoted statement "We are all socialists now" is true only if the term 'socialism' is loosely applied, as it is so often done, to cover any scheme of social reform.

One suspects that it is this loose use of the term of which advantage was taken by the Avadi Congress when it enunciated the doctrine of socialistic pattern of society. Nobody knew what precisely was the connotation of the doctrine.³ The framers of the doctrine had apparently a vague feeling in their minds that they were out to secure a better standard of living for the masses by providing more employment, wider social service schemes and so on. Indeed, when pressed for a precise definition, nobody could be supposed to know better, disposed it of by just equating it with welfare state. When 'socialistic pattern of society' is transformed into 'socialism' by the Indore Congress, it was argued that our socialism is not to be of the Western variety, that the sort of socialism that the Congress has in mind is more akin to Sarvodaya.⁴

Let us now explain the nature of the Colonial rule in India as explained by the socialist and at the same time to conclude views of socialist on the revolt. The true commencement of the East India Company cannot be dated from a more remote epoch than the year 1702, when the different societies claiming the monopoly of the East India trade, united together in one single Company . Till then the very existence of the original East India Company was repeatedly endangered , once suspended for years under the protectorate of Cromwell .The East India Company excluded the common people from the commerce with India, at the same time that House of Commons excluded them from parliamentary representation. The year of 1783 and 1784 were thus the first and the only years for the Indian question to become a ministerial one. 5 The bill of Mr. Pitt been carried, the Character of the East India Company was renewed and the Indian question set aside for twenty years. But in 1813 the Anti – Jacobian was and in 1833 the newly introduced Reform Bill superseded all other political question. This then is the first reason of the Indian question's having failed to become a great political question, since and before 1784 that before that time East India Company had first to conquer existence and importance that after that time the oligarchy absorbed all of its power which it could assume without incurring responsibility and that afterwards the English people in general were at the very epochs of the renewal of the Charter, in 1813 and at 1833, absorbed by other questions of overbearing interest. In this connection it can be conclude that the British Government had been fighting under the Company's name for two centuries. 6 During all this time all parties in England, connived in silence, even those which had resolved to become the loudest with their hypocritical peace – cant, after the arrondissement of the Indian empire should have completed. Firstly, of course, they had to get it, in order to subject after wards to their sharp philanthropy. From this point of view it was clear that the altered position of the Indian question in the year 1833, compared with all former periods of Character renewal. Again let's take a different view. According to the socialists the formation of the Colonial rule in India had a background history. It can be trace back to the medieval period. The Paramount power of the great Mughals was broken by the Mughal viceroys. The power of the Viceroys was broken by the Marathas. The power of the Marathas was broken by the Afghans and while all were struggling against all, the Colonial Masters rushed in and was enabled to subdue them all. If any researcher readout the history of the formation of the Colonial powers they can find the following objects.⁸

Colonial Power had to fulfill a double mission in India: One destructive and the other regeneration ---the annihilation of old Asiatic society and the lying of the material foundations of the Western Society in
Asia. The Colonial powers 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 leveling all that was great and elevated in the native society. The historic pages of their rule in
India report hardly anything beyond that destruction. The aristocracy waned to conquer India, the
moneylenders to plunder it and the millocracy to undersell it. The millocracy had discovered that the
transformation of India into a reproductive country had became of vital importance to them. During
the entire period of the 18th and 19th century the dominant rule of the alien power was more or less
visible in every sphere.

Apart from the above discussion, here it deserves to mention the socialistic arguments on the well known revolt of 1857. According to the socialists on the 8th June, 1857, just a month had passed since Delhi fell into the hands of the revolted sepoys and the proclamation by them of a Mughal Empire . Any notion, however, of the mutineers being able to keep the ancient capital of India against the British forces would be preposterous.¹¹ Moreover, a motley crew of mutineer soldiers who had murdered their own officers, torn asunder the ties of discipline and not succeeded in discovering a man upon whom to bestow the supreme command were certainly the body least likely to organize a serious and protected resistance. To make confusion more confused, the checked Delhi ranks were daily swelling from fresh arrivals of new contingents of mutineers from all parts of the Bengal Presidency, who as if on a pre-concerted plan were throwing themselves into the doomed city. The two sallies which on the 30th and 31st of May, the mutineers risked without the walls and in both of which they were repulsed with heavy looses, seem to have proceeded from despair rather than from any feeling of self - reliance or strength. The only thing to be wondered at is the slowness of the British operations, which to some degree, however, may be accounted for by the horrors of the season and the want of means of transport. Apart from Gen. Anson, the commander – in – chief, French letters state that about 4,000 European troops already fallen victims of the deathly heat and even the English papers confess that in the engagements before Delhi the men suffered more from the sun than the shot of the enemy. In consequence of its scanty means of conveyance, the main British force stationed at Ambala consumed about twenty - seven days in its march upon Delhi. A further delay was caused by the absence of heavy artillery at Ambala and the consequent necessity of bringing over a siege -train from the nearest - arsenal, which was as far off as Pillar on the further side of Sutlej. With all that, the news of all the fall of Delhi may be daily expected, but what next (during the entire period)? If the uncontested possession by the rebels during the month of the traditionary centre of the Indian empire acted perhaps as the most powerful ferment in completely breaking up the Bengal army, in spreading mutiny and desertion from Calcutta to Punjab in the north and to Rajputana in the west and in shaking the British authority from one end of India to the other, no greater mistake could be committed than to suppose that the fall of Delhi, though it may throw consternation among the ranks of the sepoys should suffice either to quench the rebellion to stop its progress or to restore the British rule. Of the whole native Bengal army, mustering about 80,000 men --- composed of about 28,000 Rajputs, 23,000 Brahmins, 13,000 Mahomedans, 5,000 Hindus of inferior castes and the rest of that mutiny desertion or demission from the ranks . As to the rest of that army, several of the regiments ,openly declared that they will remain faith-full and support the British authority, excepting in the matter in which the native troops were engaged :they would not aid the authorities against the mutineers of the native regiments and on the contrary assist their brothers. The truth of this had been exemplified in almost every station from Calcutta . The native regiments remained passive for a time , but as soon as they fancied themselves

strong enough, they mutinied. An Indian correspondent of the London Times leaves no doubt as to the loyalty of the regiments which had not yet pronounced and the native inhabitants who had not yet made common cause with the rebels. In the Punjab, open rebellion had only been prevented by disbanding the native troops. In Oudh, the English can only be said to keep Locknow, the residency, while everywhere else the native regiments revolted, escaped with their ammunition, burned all the bunglows to the ground and joined with the inhabitants who had taken up arms. The real position of the British army is best demonstrated by the fact that it was thought necessary in the Punjab as well as the Rajputana to establish flying corps. This means that the English could not depend either on their sepoy troops or on the natives to keep the communication open between their scattered forces. The actual insufficiency of the British forces further proved by the fact that for removing treasures from disaffected stations, they were constrained to have them conveyed by sepoys themselves, who without any exception, broke out in rebellion on March and absconded with the treasures confined to them. As the troops sent from England, in the best case, not arrive before November and as it would be still more dangerous to draw off European troops from the Presidencies of Madras and Bombay --- the 10th Regiment of Madras sepoys. In this connection it need to conclude that the Burmise would not improve the occasion that the Maharaja of Gwalior would continued supporting the British and the rulers of Nepal commanding the finest Indian army, remain quiet that disaffected Peshwar would not combine with the restless hill tribes and that of Shah of Persia would not be silly enough to evacuate Heart still, the whole Bengal Presidency must be re - conquered and the whole Anglo - Indian army remade. The cost of this enormous enterprise would altogether fall upon the British people. As to the notion put forward by Lord Granville in the House of Lords of the East India Company being able to raise by Indian loans the necessary means, its soundness might be judged from the effects produced by the disturbed state of the north - western provinces on the Bombay money market . An immediate panic seized the season and the total want of means of transportation might oppose to the movements of the British forces, the rebels at Delhi were very likely to succumb without any prolonged resistance. ¹² Socialists were sharp enough to monitoring the condition of India from August to September 1857. What really happened during these days which more or less most productive one, can be summaries in the following way: 13 In discussing the State of the Indian revolt they were full of the same optimism which they have cultivated from the beginning . A successful attack upon Delhi was to take place, but that it was to take place on the 20th of August. The first thing is to ascertain the strength of the besieging force. An artillery officer, writing from the camp before Delhi on the 13th August, gives the following detailed statement of the effective British forces on the 10th of that Month: 14

	British	British	Native	Native	
	Officers	Troops	Officers	Troops	Horses
Staff	30				
Artillery	39	598			
Engineers	26	39			
Cavalry	18	570			520
1 st Brigade					
Her Majesty's 75 th Regt	16	502			
Hon. Co.'s 1 st Fusiliers	17	487			
Kumaon Battalion	4		13	435	
2 nd Brigade					
Her Majesty's 60 th Rifles	15	251			
Hon. Co. 's 2 nd Fusiliers	20	493			
Timur Battalion	4		9	319	
3 rd Brigade					
Her Majesty's 8 th Regt	15	153			
Her Majesty's 61st Regt	12	249			
4 th Sikhs	4		4	365	

Guide Corps Coke's Corps	4 5		4 16	196 709	
Total	229	3,342	46	2,024	520

The total effective British force in the camp before Delhi amounted, therefore on the 10th of August to exactly 5,641 men. From these it must deduct 120 men (112 soldiers and 8 officers), who according to the English reports, fell on the 12th of August during the attack upon a new battery which the rebels had opened outside the walls, in front of the English left. There remained, then the number of 5521 fighting men when Brigadier Nicholson joined the besieging army with the following forces from Ferozpore, escorting a second class siege - train: the 52nd Light Infantry(900 men), a wing of the 61st (4 companies, 360 men), Boucher's field battery, a wing of the 61st Punjab Regiment (540 men) and some Multan horse and foot; altogether a force of about 2,000 men, of whom somewhat more than 1,200 were Europeans . Further reinforcements , said to have been dispatched by Sir Jhon Lawrence , the Governor of Punjab, consisting of the remaining wing of the 8th foot, three companies of the 24th, with three horse – artillery guns of Captain Paton's troops from Peshawar, the 2nd Puniab Infantry, the 4th Punjab Infantry and the other wing of the 6th Punjab. This force which consisted of 3,000 men at the utmost and the bulk of the which consists altogether of Sikhs had not arrived. Suppose even the expected 3,000 men to have joined the camp and the total English force to have reached the number of 10,000, the loyalty of one - third of which was more than doubtful. The ludicrous idea of investing with 10,000 men a strongly – fortified city, more than seven miles in extent, the English must first turn the Jumna from its regular course before they thought of investing Delhi . If the English entered Delhi in the morning, the rebels might leave it in the evening, either by crossing the Jumna and making in the direction of Mathura and Agra . At all events, the investment of a square one of whose sides was inaccessible to the besieging forces, while affording a line of communication and retreated to the besieged . If the desperate obstinacy with which Muslims were accustomed to fight behind walls be considered it became a great question indeed whether the small British Army, rushed in through 'a decent breach' would be allowed to rush out again. In fact there remains only one chance for a successful attack upon Delhi by the British forces that of internal dissensions breaking out among the rebels, their ammunition being spent, their forces being demoralized and their spirit of self - reliance giving way. But it must confess that their uninterrupted fighting from the 31st of July to the 12th of August seems hardly to warrant such a supposition. Denuded as it had been by Sir Jhon Lawrence, the Punjab itself rose in rebellion, while the troops in the cantonment before Delhi were likely to be laid on their backs and decimated by the pestilential effluvia rose from the soil at the close of the rainy season. The position of the English on the Upper Ganges, in fact, desperate, General Havelock threatened by the operations of the Oudh rebels , moving from Lucknow via Bithur and trying at Fatehpur, to the South of Kanpore, to cut off his retreat , while simultaneously the Gowalior continent marching on Kanpore from Kalpi, a town situated on the right bank of the Jumna. This concentric movement, perhaps directed by Nana Saheb, who said to wield the supreme command at Locknow, betrays for the first time some notion of strategy on the part of the rebels, while the English seem anxious only to exaggerate their own foolish method of centrifugal warfare . According to the ordinary rules of war, the immensely weaker army, which instead of trying to concentrate its scattered members, cut itself up into two portions separated by the whole breadth of the hostile army, had spread the enemy the pains of annihilating it. General Havelock was no longer to save Lucknow, but to save the remainder of his own and General Neill's little corps. He would likely to fall back upon Allahabad. Allahabad indeed a position of decisive importance, point of junction between Ganges and the Jumna and the key to the Doab, situated between the two rivers. On the first glance at the map, it would be seen that the main line of operations for an English army attempting the re-conquest of the north – western provinces runs along the valley of the Lower Ganges. The positions of Dinajpur, Beneras, Mirzapur, and above all of Allahabad from which the real operations must commence would therefore had to be strengthened by the withdrawal to them of the garrisons of all the smaller and strategically indifferent stations in the province of Bengal proper. That this main line of operations itself was seriously threatened at this moment, might be seen from the following extract from a Bombay letter addressed to The London Daily News: The late mutiny of three regiments at Dinajpur had cut off communications (except by steamers on the river) between Allahabad and Calcutta. The mutiny at Dinajpur was the most serious affair that had happened lately, in as much as the whole of the Bihar district within 200 miles of Calcutta. Today a report has arrived that the Santals had again risen and the state of Bengal overrun with 150,000 savages, who delight in blood, plunder and repine, would be truly terrible. The minor lines of operation as long as Agra holds out were those for the Bombay army, via Indore and Gwalior to Agra and for the Madras Army, via Sagar and Gwalior to Agra with which latter place the Punjab army as well as the corps holding Allahabad, require to have their lines of communication restored. The wavering princes of Central India should openly declare against the English and the mutiny among the Bombay army assume a serious aspect, all military calculation at the end for the present and nothing would remain certain but an immense butchery from Kashmir to Cape Comorin .15 In the best case, all that could be done to delay decisive events until the arrival in November of the European forces . Whether even this be effected would depend upon the brains of Sir Colin Campbell . The ultimate decision lies with the Bombay army during the period . After the arrival of Nicholson's reinforcements, socialists were estimated the army before Delhi at a total of 7,521 men, an estimate fully confirmed since. ¹⁶ After the subsequent accession of 3,000 Kashmiri troops, lent to the English by the Raja Ranbir Singh, the British forces were amounted in all to about 11,000 men. On the other hand, the diminished in numbers to about 17,000 men of whom 5,000 were cavalry; while the British news paper 'The Friend of India' computes their force at about 13,000 including 1,000 irregular cavalry. 17 As the horse became quite useless after the breach was once effected and the struggle within the town had begun and consequently on the very entrance of the English they made their escape, the total forces of the sepoys whether the computation of The Mutiny Spectator or of 'The friend of India', could not be estimated beyond 11,000 or 12,000 men. The English forces, less from increase on their side than from a decrease on the opposite one had therefore, become almost equal to those of the mutineers; their slight numerical inferiority being more than made up by the moral effect of a successful bombardment and the advantages of the offensive enabling them to choose the points on which to throw their main strength, while the defenders were obliged to disperse their inadequate forces over all the points of the menaced circumference.

The decrease on the part of the rebel forces was caused still more by the withdrawal of whole contingents in consequence of internal dissensions than by the heavy losses they suffered in their incessant sorties for a period of about ten days. While the Mughal spectra himself like the merchants of Delhi and become averse to the rule of the sepoys who plundered them of every rupee they had amassed the religious dissensions between the Hindu and Mahomedan sepoys and the quarrels between the old garrison and the new reinforcements, suffered to breakup their superficial organization and to insure their downfall. Still as the English had to cope with a force but slightly superior to their own, without unity of command, enfeebled and dispirited by dissensions in their own ranks, but who yet, after 84 hours bombardment, stood a six days cannonade and street fight within the walls and then quietly crossed the Jumna on the bridge of boats, it must be confessed that the rebels at last with their main forces made the best of a bad position. The fact of the capture appear to be, that on September 8 the English batteries were opened much in advance of the original position of their forces and within 700 yards of the walls. Between the 8th and the 11th British heavy ordinance guns and mortars were pushed forward still nearer to the works a lodgment being effected and batteries established with little loss, considering that the Delhi garrison made two sorties on the 10th and 11th and made repeated attempts to open fresh batteries and keep up an annoying fire from rifle - pits. On the 12th the English sustained a loss of about 56 killed and wounded. On the morning of the 13th the enemy's expense magazine, on one bastion was blown up as also the wagon of a light gun, which enfiladed the British batteries from the Talvara suburbs; and the British batteries effected a practicable breach near the Kashmiri gate. On the 14th the assault was made on the city. The troops entered at the breach near the Kashmiri gate without serious opposition, gained possession of the large buildings in its neighborhood and advanced along the ramparts to the more bastion and Kabul gate, when the resistance grew very obstinate and the loss was consequently severe . Preparations were being made to turn the guns from the

captured bastions on the city and to bring up other guns and mortars to commanding points. On the 15th the Burn bastions and Lahore bastions were played upon by the captured guns on the more and Kabul bastions, while a breach was made in the magazine and the palace began to be shelled. The magazine was stormed at day night, Sep. 16, while on the 17th the mortars continued to play upon the palace from the magazine in closure. At this date, owing it is said by the news paper 'The Bombay Courier' tot the plunder of the Punjab and Lahore mails on the Scinde frontier, the official accounts of the storm break off. In a private communication addressed to the Governor of Bombay, it is stated that the entire city of Delhi was occupied on Sunday, the 20th, the main forces of the mutineers leaving the city at 3 a.m. on the same day and escaping over the bridges of boats in the direction of Rohilkhand. Since the pursuit on the part of the English was impracticable until after the occupation of Selimgurh, situated on the river front, it is evident that the rebels slowly fighting their way from the extreme north end of the city to its south – eastern extremity, kept, until the 20th the position necessary for covering their retreat. As to the probable effect of the capture of Delhi, a competent authority, 'The Friend of India', remarks that it is the condition of Bengal and not the state of Delhi that ought at this time to engage the attention of Englishmen . The long delay that has taken place in the capture of the town has actually destroyed any prestige that we might have derived from an early success and the strength of the rebels and their numbers are diminished as effectually by maintaining the siege as they would be by the capture of the city. Meanwhile, the insurrection is said to be spreading north – east from Calcutta through Central India up to north – west; while on the Assam frontier, two strong regiments of Poorbeahs, openly proposing the restoration of the ex - raja Parandur Singh had revolted; Dinapur and Rungpur mutineers, led by the Kunuwar Singh were marching by Banda and Nagod in the direction of Jabbulpore and had forced through his own troops , the raja of Rewa to join them . At Jubbulpore itself the 52nd Bengal Native Regiment had left their cantonments , taking with them a British officer as a hostage for their comrades left behind. The Gwalior mutineers, reported to have crossed the Chambal and encamped some where between the river and Dholpur. The most serious items of intelligence remain to be noticed. The Jodhpur Legion had, it appears, taken service with the rebel raja of Arwah, a place 90 miles south - west of Beawar. They have defeated a considerable force which the raja of Jodhpur had sent against them, killing the General and Captain Monck Mason and capturing three guns . General G. St. P. Lawrence made an advance against them with some of the Nasirabad force, and compelled them to retreat into a town against which however, his further attempts proved unavailing. The denuding of Scinde of its European troops had resulted in a widely extended conspiracy attempts at insurrection being made at no less than five different places among which figure Hyderabad, Karachi and Shikarpur. There is also an autonomous ward symptom in the Punjab, the communication between Multan and Lahore having been cut off for eight days.

Apart from the above explanation another statement is deserve to mention that since June 18, 1857 the days of arrival of the respective vessels being calculated by the socialist on official statements and therefore in favour of the British Government. From that list it would be saw that apart from the small detachments of artillery and engineers sent by the overland route, the whole of the army embarked amounts to 30,899 men, of whom 24,884 belong to the infantry, 3,826 to the cavalry and 2,334 to the artillery. It would also be seen that before the end of October no considerable reinforcements were to be expected.

During the entire period (September, 1857 to January 1858) the Colonial Government sent a considerable number of troops from England to India, which was as follows: 19

Date of Arrival	Total	Calcutta	Ceylon	Bombay	Karachi	Madras
September 20	214	214				
October 1	300	300				
October 15	1,906	124	1,782			
October 17	288	288				
October 20	4,235	3,845	390			
October 30	2,028	479	1,544			

Total for October	8,757	5,03	5,036 3,721						
November 1	3,495	1,234		1,629				632	
November 5	879	879							
November 10	2,700	904		340		400		1,056	
November 12	1,633	1,633							
November 15	2,610	2,1	32	478					
November 19	234							234	
November 20	1,216			278		938			
November 24	406			406					
November 25	1,276								1,276
November 30	666			462		2	04		
Total for November	15,115	6,78	32	3,593		1,5	542	1,922	1,276
December 1	354					354			
December 5	479					201			258
December 10	1,758			607				1,151	
December 14	1,057					1,057			
December 15	948					647		301	
December 20	693	185				300		208	
December 25	624							624	
Total for December	5,893	18	35	607	. 2		59	2 ,284	258
January 1	340						0		
January 5	220								220
January 15	140								140
January 20	220								220
Total for January	920					340			580
Sep. to Jan., Grand	30,899	12	,217	7,921		4,431		4,206	2,114
Total									
Troops dispatched by overland route:									
October 2	235 R.E		117					118	
October 12	221 Art.		221						
October 14	224 R.E		122					122	
	+							1	1

Mon en route from Cape, partly arrived ----- 4,000

460

240

700

Total for Oct.

In conclusion it can be say that revolt of 1857 through the eyes of the socialist showed an explanation of the activities of the Colonial Government and their counter parts the Natives . Such an issue vividly described what really happened around the Capital of Delhi and what ultimately achieved in this insurrection by the British. The Alien Masters showed a well formed institutional movement on their part and proved that they were unstoppable in every stages of insurrection. Indian protest viz native protest crushed very smoothly during this period. At last it need to include that the Socialist arguments in connection with the revolt of 1857 ushered an era of new vision on 1857 which helped to know the unknown issues on the much said Mutiny of 1857.

Notes and References

- 1. The Economic Weekly Annual, January, 1957, p. 91. 2. ibid. 3. ibid.

- 4. ibid.
- 5. The New York Daily Tribune, No.~3816~of~July~11,~1853,~p.~2~.
- 6. ibid. 7. ibid. 8. ibid.

- 8. *ibid.*9. *The New York Daily Tribune*, No. 3840 of August 8, 1853, p. 2.
 10. *ibid.* "As the case stands, says Mr. Dickinson, as it would ruin England to lose her Empire in India, it is stretching our own finances with ruin, to be obliged to keep it."
 11. *The New York Daily Tribune*, No. 5065 of July 15, 1857, p. 3.
 12. *ibid.*

- 13. The New York Daily Tribune, No. 5151 of October 23, 1857, p. 2-4.
- 15. *ibid*.
- 16. *The New York Daily Tribune*, No. 5170 of November 14, 1857, p 3. 17. *ibid*.
- 18. *ibid*.
- 19. *ibid*.