

The Revolt of 1857 and the History of the British Capital of India

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Abstract: The Sepoy mutiny of 1857 was the biggest uprising against the rule of the East India Company since its inception. The rebellion began on May 10, 1857 in Meerut, forty miles away from Delhi and spread over many places of the country. The rebellion was the result of resentment that had developed against the elements of British rule which included social reforms, excessive land taxes, ill treatment of princes and rich landlords. The Rebel soldiers showed exceptional cruelty which was encountered by the British officers as well. It threatened the existence of the British rule in India. The British community as well as other Europeans was so frightened this time that the memories of the great rebellion could not be faded away for long time. Calcutta, presently known as Kolkata, was then the capital of the British India. Endeavour has been made in this paper to reconstruct the history of the city during this revolt.

Keywords: Sepoy mutiny, Calcutta, Rumour and Panic, protection of the city, Government initiative, European community, Indian citizens, Trade and commerce, Press law

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I. INTRODUCTION

A mutinous attitude was first noticed among the soldiers of the 19th Native infantry of Berhampore cantonment of Bengal in February 26, 1857. The discontented sepoys first showed their grievances against the use of the new rifle cartridges made out of fat content of pigs and cows. These rebellious soldiers were brought to Barrackpore cantonment and they were disarmed and dismissed. The next incident occurred in Barrackpore cantonment. Mangal Pandey of twenty-six years rebelled there on March 29, 1857. In May the mutiny broke out in Meerut, Delhi, Cawnpore, Allahabad, Lucknow of Northern India. The news of this outbreak started to come to Kolkata, then known as Calcutta, the capital of the then British India leading to the growing panic among the citizens of the city. The present paper seeks to through light on the condition of the city of Calcutta at the time of the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857.

During the revolt of 1857 Calcutta and its surroundings were in high panic. A sense of insecurity prevailed in the mind of almost everybody fearing that an attempt would be made by the disaffected sepoys for disturbance. *The Hindu Patriot* narrated this situation thus: "Never since the day on which Serajoodowlah sent his Pathans into Calcutta to wrest the factory from the East India Company and put every white man to the sword or in cords, was Calcutta so besiege itself with terror as at the present moment."¹ This is evident from various proposals of which were afloat for the defense of the city. Everybody felt that they were not prepared enough in case of an outbreak of mutiny. Confidence in the government, in this respect was evidently below par.² The whole European community including the Armenians and Eurasians had unanimously and with one voice demanded that they should be reorganized for the purpose of self-defense, and resist any possible mutiny of sepoys.³ The Governor-general in council had received from the inhabitants of Calcutta many offers to serve as volunteers in aid of the authority of Government and for the prevention of the security and order of the city.

Loyalty of the Inhabitants of the city:

Many meetings were held and many resolutions were passed in favour of the government and for the defense of the city. Such a meeting of the Freemasons were called in the evening of Wednesday, on May 20, 1857. In this meeting Longueville Clarke, a member proposed that the Mansions of Calcutta should offer their services to the Government for employment in any way and at any time that the Government might think proper. The speaker after expatiating on the advantage of union in such a crisis said that he was purposely refraining from laying down any distinct plan of service. He did not think that it would be proper to tell the government that the Masons wished to be organized as volunteer corps, or that they wished to serve as special constables. He

wanted to inform the government that there was a large section of the community who were ready to cooperate for the preservation of the internal peace and security of the city whenever their services would be required.⁴

P.W.I.Gyet member of the Masonic Society seconding the above motion that he did not think that there was any immediate necessity that the Masons should devote themselves to temporary military service, yet the times were troublous, their proposal would strengthen the hands of Government to know that there was a large body of their civil subjects ready to act.⁵

The first offer of assistance from the European inhabitants of Calcutta came from the Trade association. In a meeting of the Association held at Calcutta Traders Room on Wednesday, the 20th May, 1857 it was resolved that they were prepared to afford the government every assistance in their power towards the preservation of order, and the protection of the Christian community of Calcutta either by serving as special constables or otherwise, in such manner as desired by the government. This offer was accepted and the commissioner of police of Calcutta was ordered to enroll those who were willing to serve as special constables. The Association was told at the same time that there was no apprehension of disturbance in Calcutta and that unfortunately any disturbance would occur, the means of crushing it utterly and at once were at hand.⁶

The British Indian Association, the then main political organization of Bengal in a meeting dated May 22, 1857 under the secretaryship of Issur Chunder Singh and in presence of Raja Radha Kanto Dev, Kali Krishna Bahadoor, Pratap chunder Singh and others resolved to support the Government against the sepoys. They sent a copy of the resolution of the Governor General as follows: "...The committee view with disgust and horror the disgraceful and mutinous conduct of the native soldiery at those stations, and the excess committed by them and confidently trust to find that they have met with no sympathetic population on this part of the country or from any reputable or influential class among them." It further added, "The committee trust and believe that the loyalty of their fellow subjects in India to the Government under which they live and their confidence in its power and good intentions are unimpaired by the lamentable events which have occurred in the detestable efforts which have been made alienate the minds of the sepoys and people of the country from their duty and allegiance to the beneficent rule under which they are placed."⁷ Another public meeting of the native community was convened on the 25th May at Metropolitan College under the presidentship of Raja Radha Kanta Dev. The natives, assembled there, expressed their sincere satisfaction to know that the sepoy dissatisfaction had met with no sympathy or encouragement from the civil population of any part of the vast empire and they wanted to render the government every aid in their power for the preservation of civil order and tranquility.⁸

The Armenians of Calcutta appreciating the parental nature of the British rule in India showed their loyalty to the government. In conformity with the resolution passed at the meeting the Armenians conveyed their willingness and readiness to tender their united services to their rulers and to co-operate with their fellow citizens for maintaining tranquility and order in the city.⁹

The Mahomedans of Calcutta showed their loyalty towards the government. In a meeting they resolved to contribute to the utmost scope of their energies and means if any situation demanded the cooperation of the natives for the support of rule and order and the preservation of lives and properties of the subject of the British Government.¹⁰ such other loyal demonstration were held in different places like Barasat, Uttarpara, Santipur.¹¹ The inhabitants of Barasat met in the Government School' premises and resolved to express their loyal gratitude to the governor-general in council condemning the behavior of the mutinous sepoys, and expressing the readiness of the Barasat people to assist government with everything in their power. In another meeting the gentlemen of the same town formed themselves into a committee, named "The committee of the preservation of peace in the district of Barasat."¹²

The French inhabitants of Calcutta were in high alarm. They offered their services at the disposal of the government for common safety of the city. On the 25th of May, the European citizens came forward altogether and tendered their services as volunteers to the Government but this offer was graciously declined and the secretary of the home department was directed by the Governor to inform them that everything was quiet within six hundred miles of the capital. There was no occasion to call for their service. He assured the mischief caused by the passing and groundless panic had been arrested, and that there was every reason to hope that in the course of a few days tranquility and confidence would be restored throughout the presidency.¹³ Cecil Beadon's assurance could not satisfy the European community.¹⁴ *The Bengal Harkaru* had criticized the government for not availing the enthusiastic offer by the whole European community including the Armenian and Eurasians. It commented, "...In their (Government) opinion the actual necessity does not exist. But who can say with any certainty that there is no danger, and always must be danger in a place like Calcutta at a time of ordinary political excitement. At a time of excitement like the present the danger is doubled, and should be guarded against with the utmost care."¹⁵

Not only civilian of Calcutta but the native soldiers also showed their loyalty towards the government. In the first week of June, 1857, the 20th regiment of the native infantry, stationed at Barrackpore had come

forward to declare its loyalty and its desire to emulate the European troops in punishing the rebellious regiment at Delhi. The Governor General proceeded to Barrackpore and personally thanked the regiment at a general parade.¹⁶ The whole of the native commissioned and non-commissioned officers and the sepoys of the 43rd and 70th corps had voluntarily come forward and petitioned to be supplied with the new Enfield rifle from the arsenal. Colonel Kennedy, the commanding officer of the 70th regiment at Barrackpore in a letter to the Assistant adjutant General, Presidency division wrote: "The regiment(70th) was paraded last evening, and the native commissioned and non-commissioned officers, and sepoys, individually invited to declare honestly and unreservedly whether did or did not wish to receive the new rifle, where upon one and all unanimously and carefully expressed their willingness to be furnished with the arms in question"¹⁷ Colonel Kennedy received the petition from the native commissioned officers of his troops where they wrote: "We beg that the new rifles, about which there has been so much said in the army and all over the country may be served out to us. By using them in its service, we hope to prove beyond a doubt, our fidelity to government, all we will explain to all we meet, that there is nothing objectionable in them, otherwise why should we have taken them? Are we not as careful of our caste and religion as any of them?"¹⁸

The inhabitants of Calcutta were so worried that a humble petition from C. Williams and other 252 inhabitants of Calcutta and its suburbs was sent to the Governor General in Council where it was suspected that a disturbance would extend in all over the quiet portions of Bengal, even to Calcutta itself. The petitioners had no confidence in native police either the mofussil or of Calcutta, but on the contrary distrusted them. They were in belief that the executive civil authorities did not then command sufficient dread to prevent and were not sufficiently powerful to quell a disturbance of any magnitude. They urged upon the Governor General to impose martial law which they believed could alone afford protection to the lives and property of the loyal subjects of the government. But the Governor General was not convinced that the circumstances of the lower Bengal and especially of Calcutta were not such as to require the proclamation of the Martial law or that such a measure would any way expedient or useful. In reply to the petition C. Beadon, Secretary to the Government of India said: "As respects Calcutta, where English law prevails, the direct effect of proclaiming Martial Law would be to suspend the functions of the ordinary court of judicature. There is a proposal which the Governor General in Council Cannot entertain. To substitute the jurisdiction of Courts martial for that of the Supreme Court would infallibly be accompanied by much private inconvenience uncertainty and hardship, in accompanied such as that of Calcutta, and his lordship is not aware of any commensurate public gain which in the present state of affairs, would be derived from the change."¹⁹ Besides many other suggestions were given to the Viceroy by the Europeans to curb the revolt but when those were ignored they appealed to the Queen to recall Lord Canning for his hopeless policy of conciliation towards the rebels and mutineers²⁰ which, they thought, had strengthened the enemy.

Security arrangements by the natives

The natives could not believe in government's assurance and took initiatives for their defense. Such initiatives were taken at Bhowanipore, Chuckerberia in the suburbs of Calcutta to keep peace. In a meeting in presence of Babu Gooroo Charan De, Essan Chuder Mullick, Umesh Chunder Mitter, Rasik Chunder Dutta it was resolved that some of the volunteers should be enlisted to guard the locality. Among them some volunteers were vested with the duty to take round at every night in view of catching or detecting any wrong doer who could be found in the work of abetting some such malicious tales or rumours, as the town would be looted and plundered by the sepoys on some certain day, and its inhabitants be cut down to pieces. And the volunteers were expected by every means in their power to impress on the mind of the timid and credulous people the idea of the mightiness of the power of the British government to repeal aggression of any foreign enemy, however powerful and indomitable, or put down any internal disturbance and disorder.²¹

The rich natives of Calcutta were not seated idle. They shared the general panic in the north Calcutta near Sinthi, Rajah Pratap Chandra Singh Bahadur and Raja Iswar Chandra Singh of Paikpara Rajbari deployed in front of their residence nearly two thousand armed men including 40-50 European guarded with arms, spear and armour in their hands. The Sovabazar Rajbari at central Calcutta too was guarded with armed men. The house of Dutta family of Mongala and the residence of Rani Rashmoni at Janbazar were protected by European armed soldiers. In central Calcutta from Kalutala to Bagbazar every rich family like Sen, Seal, Dutta, Mullick, Thakur Mitra, Singh, Ghosh, Basu, Debadi deployed European as well as Native armed forces. Those who were not so rich deployed native guards armed with swords, armour, stick, lance etc. It is known from the *Sambad Bhaskar*, a contemporary Bengali daily that the natives of Calcutta tried their best for self-defense. In fact the panic of the attack by the sepoys united the poor and the rich altogether. Some of the rich natives travelled throughout the city for whole night by riding horses or by vehicles or on foot to see if any attack by the sepoys was made.

Formation of the Calcutta Volunteer corps

In the mid June it had become clear that service as special constable was distasteful and a general desire was felt that a volunteer corps should be enrolled. This was done through a notification dated June 12, 1857 by Colonel R.J.H. Brich, secretary to the Government of India, Military department who invited persons willing to serve in the corps of Volunteer Guards of Calcutta to enroll their names and places of residence at the office of the town Mayor in Fort William and Lieutenant Colonel Orfeur Cavenagh was appointed to the command of the Volunteer guards.²³ Arms, accouterments and a plain uniform had been provided to each volunteer. These volunteer guards had been welcomed and honoured by Felix Von Goldstein, Band Master of the 10th Native Infantry with the dedication of an acceptable piece of music entitled the "Calcutta Volunteer's March. The corps composed of a battery of four guns, five troops of cavalry and seven companies of infantry. It was dismissed on June 1, 1859, when the crisis had disappeared and peace of the town had been restored.

Though this volunteer corps was the result of the aspiration of many *The Hindoo Patriot* ridiculed at this measure and rejected its efficacy. It wrote, "There is a Bengali proverb 'Don't put a spade into the hand of a monkey.' We believe that the putting off authority into the hands of amateur soldiers is as much more flagrant act of imprudence. A good many of the members of the volunteer guards have for the first time in their lives been brought into handling acquaintance with firearms. They may have seen them displayed in the Marton's almirah, but we question if they ever tried their fingers on a trigger. It is natural therefore that such men should look peculiarly big and affect omnipotence when by a lucky hit they find themselves rigged out as soldiers with muskets, bayonet, cartouche-box, belt and all the etceteras. The panoply of war is a very sensible display before enemy; it is dangerous and ridiculous in a peaceful town."²⁴

However meanwhile every European who could afford had provided himself with revolvers. As a result the sale of arms went high and the guns, pistols and rifles had turned up to a famine price. There was hardly a house inhabited by Christians in Calcutta which did not contain one or more muskets or pistols. Many of these weapons had been purchased in Calcutta and taken into the interior for the use of indigo planters, Zaminders and others who were dread of the unsettled state of the country.²⁵ *The Hindoo patriot* described the situation thus: "...many a portly citizen who never before in all his life was guilty of the least insight into the mechanism of these murderous weapons, may now be daily observed to look as pierce as a hussar, screw up his mouth, twinge his eyes, and pull away at the trigger till he grew red in the face and the smart crack upon the cap 'warranted not to miss fire' told the fettering tale of his invincibility."²⁶

The increased sale of arms frightened the government to such an extent that it warned the sellers not to sell the arms to suspicious looking natives.²⁷ The Magistrate of Twenty four Parganas was asked to keep a close and strict watch on the sale of arms in the district and take precautionary measures to prevent the vendors from selling arms to persons likely to make a bad use of them.^{27a} Dwarikanath Biswas, a renowned firearms seller of Calcutta was asked not to sell any weapon to anybody without government order.^{27b} It is known from a reporting of the *Bengal Harkaru* that several European firms and private individuals of Calcutta who imported revolvers and other firearms by the P. & O. Company's steamer of Bengal were refused delivery of the same by the Customs authority. The importers were informed that they would delivery if they could produce "special orders" from Cecil Beadon, the Secretary to the Government of India.²⁸

By this time the Government noticed that private persons had been in the habit of patrolling the streets in and around Calcutta bearing arms under the impression that they were thereby contributing to the public safety. To bring this situation under control the Government asked the Commissioner of Police, Calcutta and the Magistrate of 24 parganas (adjacent district of Calcutta) to take measure to prevent this practice and aware the people that none but persons duly authorized by the government or belong to the police or some military body permitted, to carry arms in the public streets.²⁹ In consequence to this order it was notified for the concern of all that the police had been vested with the duty to disarm all persons, European and Native, found armed in streets of Calcutta with the exception of those authorized by the Government or the Commissioner of Police. All arms taken from the persons were subjected to the confiscation and persons discharging firearms were liable to pay fine of twelve rupees.³⁰

The Commissioner of Police of Calcutta in a letter to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal, Judicial Department urged to take the opportunity of the situation to introduce a legislative enactment for the registration of arms not only in Calcutta but throughout India. He wrote, "Such an enactment will I imagine be necessary throughout all the disturb districts when peace is happily restored throughout the country, and I have been for many years the opinion that a law by which the Magistrates in lower Bengal could enforce the registration of all weapons and disarms those persons they might consider unworthy of possessing them, would led greatly to decrease the crime of robbery and affray so prevalent in the Lower Provinces."³¹

In such circumstances a Bill was passed for the registration and licensing of arms and ammunition. In the legislature it was demanded that this law should be implemented only in case of the native races but the Governor General and his council refused to draw any such distinction, and the Act was made applicable to the Christian as well as native races. As a result numerous signed protests against this Act, as both highly offensive and dangerous, had been sent to the Governor General in Council by the Christian population.³²

Rumours and Panic:

The fear of Sepoy aggression led to the rumours and panic which made the inhabitants of Calcutta miserable. The fear of aggression by the Sepoys always haunted them day and night. It is evident from different incidents happened in those days. Such an incident was reported in *The Bengal Harkaru* and the *Indian Gazette* where we find that at half past ten o'clock on May 27, 1857 the railway station of Dum Dum was startled by a loud explosion that took place in the Magazine, followed by a loud cries and shouts from hundreds of voices, a heavy column of white smoke was seen rising from the magazine, followed by a fitful flashes of light. A scene immediately presented itself, that showed that everyone was ready in case an attack was intended upon the Europeans; for in less than two minutes from the time of the explosion the whole of the European artillery, together with their Colonel, Adjutant and staff were on the spot, fully armed, ready for any emergency. But latter it appeared that a laboratory man, in boring a rocket, managed to make it ignite, which failing among a hundred other rockets and about 200 pounds of loose gunpowder and twenty carcasses caused the explosion. The excitement and alarm that showed at Dum Dum were on the *qui vive*.³³

In the mid June in consequence of intelligence from Barrackpore of a plotted revolt by the native army, general preparations were made for resistance. A panic prevailed at Calcutta on Sunday, the 14th June, 1857 in consequence of absurd rumours to which the above gave rise. A large European force, the 78th Highlanders, were sent to Barrackpore from Chinsura and the safety of Dum Dum amply secured. Colonel R.J.H. Brich, asked Major General Harsey to order the soldiers, stationed at Chinsura to proceed to Dum Dum and stay there until further order. Several government pensioners, residing at Dum Dum, who were fit to bear arms had been asked to be supplied with muskets, and were placed under the order of the officer commanding the station. Harsey was asked to make arrangements for the charge of the families left at Dum Dum.³⁴ Besides the European force which had been sent to the north India by Railway on Sunday were called back by a telegraphic message through the night.³⁵ On the very same day the whole Brigade at Barrackpore were quietly and peacefully disarmed simultaneously with the entire Native Force in Calcutta. A Correspondent from Barrackpore reported the incident in the *Bengal Harkaru* as follows:

“At half past Four o'clock this evening (14.6.1857) all the troops paraded, the wing of the 36th and 78th Highlanders and guns facing the natives troops who were disarmed. The European troops formed three sides a square and the native troops in contiguous columns at quarter distance they gave up their arms with a few murmurs. All quiet here. No official murdered. All the ladies went to the Brigadier's Mess-room, guarded by fifty very loyal sepoy. However, I did not commit myself to their charge and had no native troops to guard my wife or self.”³⁶

In Calcutta though the Sepoys attached to the Calcutta Police and Medical College were disarmed, yet allowed to guard the same.³⁷ Lord Canning, the Governor General, did not want to disarm the native force. He relied on their loyalty. But he had been induced to sanction this proceeding with an exception in case of his own bodyguards. Later in August his native bodyguards were disarmed and only European soldiers were vested with the duty to guard the government house.³⁸ It is interesting to note that the Governor General's bodyguards were subjected to the process entirely at their own request. They informed their commandant that finding themselves objects of suspicion and aversion in Calcutta, they wished to resign their arms. The request was compiled with and transaction was effected with the greatest politeness on both sides. However the precaution taken by the Government was known only to a few connected with Government House and their friends. So the panic throughout Sunday (June 14, 1857) “rose to an inconceivable height.”³⁹ Unable to bear the pressure of panic many people went to pass the night of the 14th in central places of rendezvous of the town; some went into the fort and some went on board the ships, steamers in the river.⁴⁰

Meanwhile a sepoy of the 43rd Regiment had given information to the authority regarding a man, said to be a follower of the King of Oudh who was residing at Garden Reach with his family by this time after being dethroned, had tried to tamper with the sepoy in the fort. Arrangements were made to secure the man who promised the sepoy to come again on the night of the 13th. The man came and was arrested. He was tried by a court martial on the 14th and sentenced to death. But during the night of 14th, the man escaped.⁴¹ This led to the arrest of the ex-King of Oudh, his Prime Minister and others early on Monday morning, the 15th June. Since then many relatives of the King's family and other Mahomedans had been arrested and several important seditious documents were found on them which revealed that natives were convinced that at the end of hundred years

from its commencement of British Raj on the plains of Plassey, it was destined to be terminated in a terrible over-throw. This assured the Government of a general rise which was to be taken place on the 23rd of June 1857, on the anniversary of the battle of Plassey in which all Europeans were destined to be massacred. In reaction to this revelation the Government and the whole European community made preparations to meet the threatened outbreak of exterminating violence. Alexander Duff, the Scott missionary, was at this time residing in Calcutta. During the revolt he wrote a bunch of letters to his friend Dr. Tweedie in England describing his practical experience. He had narrated this preparation to Dr. Tweedie in a letter dated 18th June, 1857, "...Guns have been planted in some of the more dangerous neighbourhood, as well as small companies of British troops. At night the streets are guarded by soldiers of armed horsemen. Places of rendezvous have been appointed in case of a sudden outbreak in any quarter. All Europeans who could not get arms have been liberally supplied from the fort-arsenal. In fact the town had been in a state of siege. Not a single person was allowed to enter it from the suburbs a little after evening till daylight, not one to traverse the streets without giving a full account of himself and his purpose. The Mahomedans had been frightened with stories of soldiers being let loose against them and they sent away their families to where they thought safety was to be found. The regular Police was paralysed by Volunteer guards and extensive arrests were made on the least sustainable and sometimes unascertainable grounds."⁴² But no such invasion which was assumed, appeared on the scene. The day passed away smoothly except the only disturbance which occurred at Agarpara near Dum Dum. In the afternoon of Tuesday(23rd), a body of between two and three hundred Musalmans rushed into the Government and Missionary schools shouting that the Company's reign was at an end and ordering the teachers to destroy their English books and teach no more English 'in the schools, but only the Koran. A violent affray with sticks, bamboos and bricks was the result, but though a great many heads were broken, no lives were lost.⁴³

There was a repetition of the sense of panic on March 3, 1858. The rebellion had been all but crushed, but the slightest cause was still enough to produce excitement and alarm. A telegraph from Barrackpore reached Calcutta to the effect that the sepoy of the two native regiments stationed there were deserting in bodies of ten and twelve and were making their way to the capital. No one stopped to be ascertained that the sepoy had been disarmed, or the volunteer guard would be more than a match for them if they venture to put in an appearance. The news was received with consternation, and the inhabitants of the suburbs in particular, consisting principally of Eurasians, gave way to the most exaggerated fears. Pickets of infantry volunteers were promptly posted at the points supposed to be threatened. The streets were patrolled by the volunteer cavalry, and the guns manned by the volunteer artillery. The regular troops in the Fort stood to their arms. But no enemy appeared, and the panic evaporated even more speedily than it had arisen.⁴⁴

Government's Initiatives :

The government was so alert in Calcutta that it did not give offenders or sepoy any chance to rebel. Any possibility of conspiracy was curbed down immediately and harsh steps were taken against the suspected offenders. Thus a Naik of the 43rd regiment N.I. was hung on a tree outside the Chowringhee gate of the Fort William on July 1, 1857. He had been convicted of desertion, and of not reporting a secret combination against the state.⁴⁵

To secure the protection of the town some of the most important points of the same European guards had been posted in addition to the usual native guards. Having received the news from upcountry about the plunder of treasury by the sepoy there, a troop of European soldiers had been sent from Fort William to protect the Mint and Treasury of Calcutta and a steamer named *Zenobia* had been stationed at the Mint Ghat.⁴⁶ A troop of soldiers had been posted to guard the suburbs of Alipore and Garden Reach. Another party of greater strength had been placed on the north of the town where the roads bifurcated towards the cantonments of Dum Dum and Barrackpore. In the suburbs of the town protection was strengthened. Extra police was posted to assist the existing police personnel in guarding the town of Barasat. Initiatives were taken to make the waterways safe. The Government had sanctioned an additional officer and gunner on each of the company's steamer on river, as long as the country remained in a disturbed state.⁴⁷ A detachment of Madras sepoy and a large detachment of artillery and infantry from England had been brought to Calcutta. The Calcutta Madrasah, the Presidency College, Town Hall, Pleaders' Chamber and Orphan School building had been taken up for the accommodation of these European troops ⁴⁸ and the Presidency College was shifted to the residence of Sri Krishna Mallick. The Sanskrit college at this juncture was transformed into a military hospital for nursing the wounded soldiers.⁴⁹ The mutiny-affected people of Upper Province took refuge in Calcutta. A committee had been formed for their reception and a house had been provided in Chowringhee and a portion of Bishop's college had been set apart for the lodgment of those women and children who had no friends in the city.⁵⁰ Prasanna Kumar Thakur, Ramgopal Ghosh, Ramaprasad Ray and others formed a committee to raise subscriptions for helping the families of those who suffered by the mutinies and all Calcutta had most liberally contributed.⁵¹

It is noteworthy here that the European troops, came from abroad, created disturbances in and around Calcutta. They were insulting men as well as women. In consequence many natives of the city being extremely irritated left Calcutta for places where there was less possibility of being insulted by those soldiers.^{51a} Some serious affray took place due to their activity. Sir Frederick James Halliday, the first Lieutenant Governor of Bengal in a minute dated the 30th September, 1858 recorded his observation about them as follows: "It is no doubt difficult to exercise an efficient control over the troops, scattered as they were over the whole town, at intervals of miles, the facility for procuring liquor were also very great. Under the order of the Governor General in Council all possible means were taken to lessen the latter evils. The Commissioner of Police caused all liquor shops to be closed at 5pm, whilst the military authorities opened a temporary place of amusement in a central position, where books and papers were provided for the men, and good and wholesome liquor was obtainable. Whilst I am on this subject, I must mention that, as late as in the first week of May, 1858, very serious disturbance have occurred in the town; these have been caused by the recruits for the Hon'ble Company's cavalry who have recently arrived in India, and it has even been necessary to have a large mounted patrol on duty every night. The recruits have now all left Calcutta, and order has been consequently restored."^{51b}

In 1857 the *Durga puja*, the worship of the Goddess Durga, the biggest festival of the Hindu residents of the city was scheduled to be held in the month of September. The Government offices used to be closed on this occasion for some days. But this time a government order was issued to keep the offices attached to military departments remain open during Puja days as many soldiers were expected to come from abroad. Military pay office, Marine office and Office of the Accountant General were ordered to be remaining open. The Government order declared that other offices would remain closed only for eight days from September 23 to 30 instead of twelve days which was appealed by the Government employees. The Puja festival this time passed without grandeur.^{51c}

Trade and Commerce:

The Sepoy mutiny left a deep impact on business. Sales and deliveries were at a stand. The disturbed state of affairs in the north-western Provinces and other places caused considerable sensation amongst both buyers and sellers. In June, 1857 the money market was so unsettled that it was impossible to determine the actual value of accommodations in the market, much indisposition existed to part with funds. The Bank of Bengal had raised its rate of interest on loans on company's paper by 2 per cent.⁵² In the second week of June the company's paper or Government's securities fell to 40 per cent.⁵³ If the import market business was at a stand, neither buyers nor sellers considered the situation safe to resume operation till the receipt of some more authenticated favourable news from the Upper Province in the month of June. Stocks of all descriptions of goods were accumulating and transactions were to a very small amount, and entirely for local requirements.⁵⁴ The produce market was very down. The business had been on the most limited scale owing to the paucity of supplies and the price went extremely up. The price of rice had increased by thirty to forty per cent in the mid June.⁵⁵ The government stored and supplied food grains from Calcutta to different parts of the disturbed area where soldiers were stationed. Besides rich people stored grains in large quantity in fear of the dearth of food in future. These led to the hike in food price.⁵⁶ To cope up with this situation Raja Radhakanto Deb and other responsible natives of Calcutta forwarded a memorial to the Government praying that in consequence of the contemporary high price of food, the government would represent to the legislative council the necessity of imposing a preventive duty on the exportation of rice, *dal* and mustard seed, and suggested such other remedy as might lead to relieve the then distress of the people. But the Government remained unconvinced and thought that increased difficulties would be caused by the Government's intervention and therefore declined to comply with the prayer of the memorial.⁵⁷

Press Regulation:

When the mutinous sepoys rebelled in different cantonments the European editors of the English press tried to make the Government understand that it was due to the anti-British attitude of the native press. Besides the government found some extracts from certain native newspapers published in Calcutta in which falsehoods were uttered and facts grossly prevented for seditious purpose, the objects and intentions of the government were misinterpreted, the government was vituperated, and endeavour was made to excite discontent and hatred towards it in the minds of the natives. Two of these papers like the *Doorbeen*, and the *Sultan-ul-Akhbar*, both in Persian, published a traitorous proclamation said to had been put forth by the leaders of the revolted troops at Delhi, inciting the Hindoos and Mussalmans to murder all Europeans, offering rewards to those who would join and assist them in rebellion and the *Samachar Sudhabarshan*, a Bengali journal of 10th June containing remarks calculated to promote the false belief that the government, in spite of its assurance, had intended to interfere with in the religion of the native soldiers. The Governor General in Council resolved to direct the law officers to

take out a warrant against the printers and publishers of these three newspapers so that they might take them for trial before the Supreme Court on a charge of publishing seditious libels.⁵⁸ The resolution expressed the determination to vest the executive government with the control over the press, and the power to suppress publications containing treasonable or seditious matter.

On the next day in the Legislative Council a Bill was placed in this regard and was transformed into Act XV of 1857 by which the government restricted the freedom of the Indian press for the period of one year without any discrimination between European and native press. Inspired by Charles Metcalfe, the Governor General giving reason for making the Act applicable to both the European and native press alike said in the council "I do not see any reason, nor I do any consider it possible in Justice, to draw a line of demarcation between European and Native publication. The Bill accordingly, applied to every kind of publication, whatever the language in which it may be printed, or the nations of the person, who are responsible for what is put forth in it."⁵⁹ The Act empowered the government to prohibit the publication or circulation of any particular newspaper, book or other printed papers of any particular description and possession of printing press or types or other materials or articles for printing without having obtained the sanction and license of the government. The violation of the Act was subjected to a fine not exceeding 5000 rupees or to imprisonment not exceeding two years or both.

The new Act was subjected to sharp criticism by both the Native and the European press. It caused great alarm and offence in the English and Christian community of whom many were desirous of protesting strongly against it.⁶⁰ In view of them the only excuse for enactment of Act XV of 1857 namely, seditious writing was not pretended to exist as regards the English press, though it was charged against the native press. The Englishmen were entitled to have the distinction drawn between loyalty and sedition and thought the Act, if necessary for the native press should have been applied and confined to it. The native press had a mixed repercussion. One of the leading native papers *The Hindu Intelligencer* of Kashi Prasad Ghosh stopped its publication with the notice: "the editor would not work under the restraint, such as the new press law imposed on public writers."⁶¹ But the first warning under the new press law was given to *The Friend of India* for the last two paragraphs in an article headed "The Centenary of the Plassey" which were full of mischief and calculated at that time to spread disaffection towards the British Government both among its natives subjects and among dependent and allied states.⁶² The government was determined to withdraw its license but abstained from adopting this course in consequence of an assurance on behalf of the proprietor of the paper who was then in England that the newspaper would be "carried on so as to avoid all cause of complaint on the part of the Government and within the terms of the license."⁶³

Thus Calcutta witnessed rumour, panic among the mass and suppression by the government and on the other hand loyalty and anger towards the authority of the administration at a time during the revolt of 1857. It is interesting to note that this loyalty of the natives was no longer in existence some days after when the Blue Mutiny broke out in 1859-60.

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