

THE INDIAN WAR OF INDEPENDENCE 1857

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PHOENIX
PUBLICATIONS
BOMBAY

Rupees Fifteen

PUBLISHER'S NOTE

Most historians, British as well as Indian, have described and dismissed the rising of 1857 as a 'Sepoy Mutiny' or at best 'The Indian Mutiny'. Indian revolutionaries on the other hand, and national minded leaders and thinkers have regarded it as a planned and organised political and military rising aimed at destroying the British power in India.

Mr. Savarkar's is an attempt to look at the incidents of 1857 from the Indian point of view. A leading revolutionary himself, he was attracted and inspired by the burning zeal, the heroism, bravery, suffering and tragic fate of the leaders of 1857, and he decided to re-interpret the story and to relate it in full with the help of all the material available to him at the time. He spent days and months at the India Office Library studying the period. Finally, his work was published in 1909, under the title "The Indian War of Independence—1857". The full story of its publication and eventual fate is related, at length, elsewhere in this volume. We shall only mention here that its entry into India was banned by the Government even before it was published. This ban was finally lifted by the Congress Government of Bombay in May 1946, and this is the first authorised edition of the book to be published in India.

As the publishers of this edition we take here the opportunity of recording our sense of gratitude to Mr. G. M. Joshi, editor of the Marathi weekly journal *Agrani*, for making this work available to us, and for his continued interest in it while

PUBLISHER'S NOTE

it was going through the press. But first of all, we are indebted to Mr. Savarkar himself for letting us publish this book. For, ever since the ban on it was lifted the public has been eagerly waiting for it to reappear. We consider it a matter of pride that we should be permitted to present it to the public.

The publication of this edition in the present form would hardly have been possible but for the hearty co-operation of many of our friends. First among these is our artist friend Mr. D. G. Godse, who not only planned and supervised the entire lay-out and get-up of the book, but took more than mere professional interest in the whole work.

The value of this edition is further enhanced by the many rare photographs and pictures kindly lent by Mr. R. M. Athawale from his special "Sattavani Collection" which is intended for his forthcoming work, in Marathi, on 1857. He has spent years in studying the subject, and has taken a good deal of trouble to collect the material for his work. It is because his high respect for Mr. Savarkar and his special regard for Mr. Savarkar's history of 1857 that he has lent this material to us. Among the pictures lent by him, the one of Maharaja Jayaji Rao Scindia of Gwalior, and those of two of Rani of Jhansi's cannons were given him by the Archæological Department of Gwalior State for suitable use. We are thankful to Mr. Athawale for allowing us the use of these also.

We are also thankful to Mr. Purav, photographer ; Mr. H. S. Dhargalkar, of India Block Co. ; Mr. D. D. Neroy, Block-maker ; Mr. M. V. Kamat, of Bombay Process Studio ; and to the Industrial Art Studio, Bombay. They all went out of their way to execute our work at the shortest notice and without the least hesitation. Last of all, we must thank the printers and other workers of the Karnatak Printing Press for the care and despatch with which they handled the work.

THE STORY OF THIS HISTORY

"An honest tale speeds best
By being plainly told."

—*Shakespeare*

Apart from the splendid merits of the subject matter dealt with in the warlit pages of this history of "The Indian War of Independence of 1857," the story of the thrilling vicissitudes through which this book had to pass does by itself entitle it to be placed on the classical shelf in any world library.

The Object and the Name of the Book

Veer Savarkarji, the famous author of this book, did himself explain in an article in the "Talwar," an organ of the Abhi Nava Bharat Revolutionary Society, which was started by him and published in Paris, that his object in writing this history was, subject to historical accuracy, to inspire his people with a burning desire to rise again and wage a second and a successful war to liberate their motherland. He also expected that the history should serve to place before the revolutionists an outline of a programme of organisation and action to enable them to prepare the nation for a future war of liberation. It would never have been possible to preach such a revolutionary gospel publicly throughout India or carry conviction so effectively as an illuminating illustration of what had actually happened in the nearest past would do. So he invoked the warriors of 1857 to deliver his message through their own mighty words and mightier deeds.

THE STORY OF THIS HISTORY

The ideal of absolute political Independence, and the conviction that the ultimate and inevitable means to realize that ideal could be no other than an *armed national revolt* against the foreign domination,—were concepts which in those days—lay even beyond the horizon of the then political thought and action in India. The very mention of them was brushed aside as chimerical by the then extremists, was denounced as criminal by the loyal moderates and was even anathematised as immoral by the half-witted moralists! But these self-same concepts formed the two fundamental tenets of the A. N. B (Abhi Nava Bharat) Revolutionary organisation. “Reforms and a peaceful solution” formed the alpha and omega of the ambition of the then Indian National Congress itself. Independence, Revolution—let alone a War for Independence—were as a rule words almost unknown, unheard and inconceivably incomprehensible even to the highly patriotic Indian world. It was to familiarize this Indian patriotic world with at least these words in daily thought, and by their constant repetition, like that of a ‘*Mantram*’, to hypnotize the youthful political mind into a sub-conscious attraction for the noble concepts, which the words connoted—that Savarkar, who as a Historian would have called this book a history of the ‘National Rising’ or of the ‘Revolutionary War of 1857’, did, of a set design, name it the history of “The Indian War of Independence of 1857.”

Veer Savarkar always emphasized the necessity in the Indian condition of carrying politics and patriotism to the camp, to the military forces in India, for rendering any armed revolt practical. The history of the Revolutionary War of 1857 proved beyond cavil or criticism that only some fifty years previously our ancestors had aimed to achieve absolute political independence, could bring about the active and armed participation in the National struggle of the military forces and could wage an inexorable war for the liberation of our motherland. He consequently felt that this history if told viewing it through such a revolutionary perspective was most

THE STORY OF THIS HISTORY

likely to animate the rising generation of India with the faith that there was no reason why it should not be practicable and even more faithful to try again as, at any rate, there was no other way to salvation. How far this expectation of the author was realized will be seen as this story proceeds.

Originally written in Marathi

This book was written originally in Marathi, in 1908, when Veer Savarkar was about twenty-four years of age. Some select chapters used to be reproduced in English, in speeches which Veer Savarkarji used to deliver at the open weekly meetings of the Free India Society in London. Perhaps through this channel or otherwise the detectives got some scent of the subject-matter of this book which their reports dubbed as revolutionary, explosive and highly treasonous. Soon a chapter or two of the Marathi manuscript were found missing, which, it was disclosed later on, were stolen by the detective agents, and found their way to the Scotland Yard, the headquarters of the British Intelligence Department in London. Nevertheless, the Marathi manuscript was sent to India by the revolutionists so secretly and cleverly that, foiling the strict vigilance of the customs authorities of the Indian Ports, it reached safely its destination. But the leading press-concerns in Maharashtra dared not run the risk of printing the volume. At last, the owner of a printing firm who was himself a member of the Abhi Nava Bharat Secret Society undertook to publish it. In the meanwhile, the Indian police too got some vague information that the volume was being published in Marathi. They, thereupon, carried a number of simultaneous surprise raids on some prominent printing houses in Maharashtra. But fortunately, the owner of the Press, where the book was being actually printed got a hint through a sympathetic Police Officer and succeeded in smuggling out the Marathi manuscript to a safer place just before the search party arrived. The manuscript was later on sent back to Paris, instead of to London, and fell into the hands of its author.

THE STORY OF THIS HISTORY

Finding thus that it was impossible to get it printed in India, it was decided to get the Marathi book printed in Germany, where some Sanskrit literature used to be published in the Nagari script. But after a lot of waste of money and time, the scheme had to be given up as hopeless, owing to the uncouth and ugly Nagari type cast in Germany, and to the fact that the German compositors were absolutely ignorant of the Marathi language.

The History translated into English

The A. N. B. Revolutionary Party resolved thereupon to publish, at least, the English translation of this History of the Indian War of Independence of 1857 with a view to enabling the English speaking public, both in India and outside, to know its contents. A few highly intellectual Maratha youths in London, members of the A. N. B., distinguished graduates of Indian Universities studying Law, and candidates for the I.C.S. Examination, volunteered to translate the voluminous work into English. After the translation was complete under the supervision of Sriyut V. V. S. Aiyer, efforts were made to get it printed in England. But the British detectives, too, were not idle, and made it impossible for any British printer to undertake the publication of it for fear of being prosecuted forthwith. The English manuscript was then sent to Paris ; but the French Government at that time was so thoroughly under the thumb of England, with whom France had to ally herself in order to face combinedly the impending danger of a German invasion that the French detectives were working hand in hand with the British police to suppress the A. N. B. revolutionary activities in France ; and under their threat, even a French printer could not be found ready to run the risk of printing this history. At last by a successful ruse, the revolutionists persuaded a printing firm in Holland to print the book. The British Intelligence Department continued to grope in the dark, as the revolutionists publicly gave it out that the English translation was being printed in France. Before

THE STORY OF THIS HISTORY

the British detectives could get any inkling, the volume was printed in Holland and the whole edition of the English translation was smuggled into France and kept secretly ready for distribution.

In the meanwhile, before the book was sent to Holland for getting it printed, the British and the Indian Governments got so nervous, and dreaded so much the effects of Savarkar's writings that they proscribed the book which they admitted was not yet printed ! This was so high-handed a step on their part that the English papers themselves resented this action of proscribing a book before its publication—a case almost unprecedented in a land which boasted of its Freedom of the Press. Veer Savarkar also did not spare the Governments and poured vials of ridicule on the proscribing order in a spirited letter which he wrote to "The London Times." He challenged in it, "It is admitted by the authorities that they were not sure whether the manuscript had gone to print. If that is so, how does the Government know that the book is going to be so dangerously seditious as to get it proscribed before its publication, or even before it was printed ? The Government either possess a copy of the manuscript or do not. If they have a copy, then why did they not prosecute me for sedition as that would have been the only course legitimately left to them ? On the contrary, if they have no copy of the manuscript how could they be so cocksure of the seditious nature of a book of which they do not know anything beyond some vague, partial and unauthenticated reports ?" The "London Times" not only published the letter, but added a note of its own that the very fact that the Government should have felt it necessary to have recourse to such presumably high-handed and extraordinary executive steps proved that there must be "Something very rotten in the State of Denmark."

After getting the English translation printed in Holland, the revolutionists smuggled into India hundreds of its copies by ingenious devices. Many of them were wrapped in

THE STORY OF THIS HISTORY

artistic covers specially printed with such innocuous and bogus names as "Pickwick Papers," "Scot's Works," "Don Quixote" etc. Several copies got smuggled in boxes with false bottoms. It will be interesting to note that one such box, containing a number of copies under a false bottom, was taken into India by a youthful member of the Abhi Nava Bharat named Shikandar Hayat Khan who later on was known to fame as Sir Shikandar Hayat Khan, the chief minister of the Punjab. Even the vigilance of the Argus-eyed monster of the Bombay Customs House failed to spot these devices and thousands of copies did thus reach their destinations in India addressed to many prominent leaders, members of Abhi Nava Bharat, leading libraries, colleges and especially to secret sympathisers who had access to several military camps throughout India. All these copies of this first edition of this history were sent free, even the postal charges being defrayed by the A. N. B. Revolutionary Society. It was then openly published in France, was freely circulated and widely read by leading English historians, politicians and revolutionary circles especially in Ireland, France, Russia, America, Egypt and Germany.

The "Gadar" in America and the second English Edition

In the year 1910, the British and the Indian Governments launched a violent campaign of persecutions and prosecutions with a view to crushing the Abhi Nava Bharat Secret Society. Several Indian revolutionaries were hanged; several transported for life; hundreds sentenced to terms extending from ten to fourteen years of rigorous imprisonment. The heroic story of Veer Savarkar's arrest, escape, re-arrest, persecutions, prosecutions and consequent transportation to the Andamans for two life-sentences amounting to at least fifty years' imprisonment, is well-known to be recited here.

No sooner did the Abhi Nava Bharat organisation recover from this stunning blow than Madam Cama, the well-known brave Parsi lady, Lala Hardayal, Chattopadhyaya and other

THE STORY OF THIS HISTORY

leaders of the A. N. B. Revolutionary Party decided to bring out the second English edition of this book. Lala Hardayalji organised the American branch of the A. N. B. and started his well-known newspaper "The Gadar"—(Rebellion) in America. Not only was the second English edition of this Indian War of Independence of 1857 published this time for regular sale to replenish the party funds ; but translations of this History were published regularly in Urdu, Hindi and Punjabi languages secretly through the 'Gadar.' It aroused the Sepoys in the Army, as the "Gadar" reached several camps in India and especially the large number of the Sikh agriculturists settled in America. Soon after that, the First World War broke out. How the Indian revolutionists in India and outside joined hands with the Germans against England, how large amounts of arms and ammunitions were smuggled into India, how the '*Komagatamaru*' succeeded in landing revolutionary forces in India, how the Emden bombarded Indian ports, how mutinies broke out in Indian regiments stationed at Hong Kong, Singapore, and Burma under the leadership of Gadar party and how this attempt by the Indian revolutionaries to invade India to liberate her was at last frustrated owing to the defeat of the Germans, is now a matter of history. Nevertheless, this revolutionary campaign proved to be a veritable rehearsal of the recent Military Invasion attempted on a mightier scale by Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose with the I. N. A. Throughout this later revolutionary movement, it became evident from the trials of hundreds of leaders and followers that this history of the first Indian War of Independence of 1857 proved to be a perennial source of inspiration, and even provided a detailed sketch of the programme of action. The demand for its copies was so great that they used to be sold and resold, in cases, for such fabulous prices as 300 Rupees each. Thousands of the arrested revolutionaries were found in possession of them, and possession of a copy of this book was taken to be a proof by itself of the complicity of the possessor in the revolutionary activities.

THE STORY OF THIS HISTORY

"The Original Marathi Book is Dead!—Long live the Book!!"

After the arrest of Veer Savarkar the manuscript of the original Marathi book was handed over to Madam Cama in Paris. She kept it in her safe in the Bank of France with a view to placing it beyond the reach of the Agents of the British Intelligence Department. But the invasion of France by the Germans threw the Government of France itself into a hopeless disorder. Madam Cama too, passed away. Consequently, when a searching enquiry was made regarding the whereabouts of the book no trace of the manuscript could be found. The great Marathi *tome* was lost—no hope of its recovery was left. Marathi literature had thus suffered an irreparable loss.

The Third Known English Edition of the History

As we are noting down only those editions of which we have definite knowledge, leaving out of count those of which rumour alone informs us, the next English edition we must take cognizance of, is that which, after the re-emergence of the revolutionary party on an all India basis, was printed and published in two parts, of course secretly, under Veer Bhagatsing's lead. It was sold widely at high prices and the proceeds went to swell the party funds. The few copies, almost religiously preserved even at the risk of prosecution and persecution, which can be rarely found even today, belong, in the main, to this edition. The conspiracy cases which followed the arrest of Veer Bhagatsing and his leading comrades revealed the fact that copies of this book were found in searches in the possession of almost all the accused and that this History animated them to face martyrdom and guided them to chalk out the revolutionary programme—to organise an armed revolt to liberate our motherland!

The Indian National Army organised by Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose and the Fifth English Edition

The well-ascertained fifth edition came to light in the days

THE STORY OF THIS HISTORY

when the last and the most determined effort was made to organize an army on the largest scale, yet recorded, to invade India to free her from the British bondage, by Rash Bihari Bose, the President of the Hindu Maha Sabha branch in Japan, and which army was later on commanded by Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose. Unimpeachable evidence recorded by patriots and warriors who took an actual part in the invasion shows that this 'History' was read and re-read in their camps and was looked upon as a veritable text-book for the soldiers and officers in the army. A stray copy of a Tamil edition was also ransacked. Its tattered pages were glued and the volume was rebound and circulated in the army. But it is not known when or by whom the Tamil translation was made and published.

The Sixth English Edition to Challenge the Ban on the Book

While throughout the last thirty or forty years the revolutionists were thus bringing out secretly, edition after edition of this history, an open public agitation was also going on in India demanding the raising of the Governmental ban not only on this history but on several other books written by Veer Savarkar. Public meetings and protests made by literary societies went unheeded by the British Government in England as well as in India. Even when the so called National ministries formed by the Congressites came to power some ten years ago, they too did not raise the ban on Savarkarite literature as perhaps, it not only did not countenance but positively denounced the vagaries of the half-witted and even immoral doctrine of absolute non-violence to which the Congressites swore only verbal allegiance. But when the recent World War II was over and the present Congressite ministries came into power, the public demand for the raising of this ban grew so unruly that some enthusiastic patriots threatened to challenge and break the ban. They raised funds and secretly printed a new English edition in Bombay with a view to selling it openly and publicly courting arrests. They

THE STORY OF THIS HISTORY

even informed the Congressite ministers of their intention.

The Ban Raised at Last after some Forty Years of Proscription

When matters came to this pass and as the Government too was inclined to reconsider the question, the ban on Savarkarite literature as a whole, which continued to be proscribed for some forty years in the past, was raised by the Congressite ministry at long last, upon which sane act they deserve to be congratulated.

“The Book became the Bible of the Indian Revolutionists”

It will be evident from the story as recited above that the book continued to be regarded as a veritable Bible by the Indian Revolutionists ever since the armed struggle for Indian Independence initiated by the Abhi Nava Bharat bands down to recent times when full-fledged armies marched to the battlefields under Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose. Directly and indirectly the book has influenced, animated and guided at least two generations in India in their struggles to free the Motherland. That is why the Nation itself made it a point of honour to keep the book alive as a national asset in defiance of the violent efforts of the foreign government to suppress and kill it. Its survival despite of it all is almost miraculous.

Miraculous too is the survival of its illustrious author who, in spite of untold sufferings and sacrifices, trials, tribulations and transportations, has been spared by Providence to witness the triumphant march of the Revolutionary principles and programmes which he as a SEER preached and as a WARRIOR fought to carry out.

The Book Pays our National Debt to the Memory of the Warriors of 1857

We cannot do better than to quote Shrijut Subbarao, the gifted editor of the ‘Gosthi’ to illustrate the above truth :

THE STORY OF THIS HISTORY

"The British Raj in India has treated Savarkar's book as most dangerous for their existence here. So it has been banned. But it has been read by millions of our countrymen including my humble self. In trying to elevate the events of 1857, which interested Historians and Administrators had not hesitated to call for decades as an 'Indian Mutiny', to its right pose of 'Indian War of Independence'. All be it a foiled attempt at that! It is not a work of a Patriotic Alchemist turning base mutineering into noble revolutionary action. Even in these days what would the Mahatmic school have called the efforts of Subhas Bose's Azad-Hind-Fouj if Savarkar's alchemy had not intervened? True. Both the 1857 and 1943 'Wars' have ended in failure for our country. But the motive behind—was it mere Mutineering or War for Independence? If Savarkar had not intervened between 1857 and 1943, I am sure that the recent efforts of the Indian National Army would have been again dubbed as an Ignoble Mutiny effectively crushed by the valiant British-cum-Congress arms and armlessness. But thanks to Savarkar's book Indian sense of a "Mutiny" has been itself revolutionised. Not even Lord Wavell, I suppose, can now call Bose's efforts as a Mutiny. The chief credit for the change of values must go to Savarkar—and to him alone. But the greatest value of Savarkar's Book lies in its gift to the Nation of that Torch of Freedom in whose light an humble I and a thousand other Indians have our dear daughters named after Laxmibai, the Rani of Jhansi. Even Netaji Bose in a fateful hour had to form an army corps named after Rani of Jhansi. But for Savarkar's discovery of that valiant heroine, Rani of Jhansi should have been a long-forgotten 'Mutineer' of the nineteenth century."

—*Free Hindusthan, Special, 28th May, 1946*

This history has literally resurrected from continuing to be entombed in oblivion the spirits of the bravest of the leaders, warriors and martyrs who fell fighting in 1857, and taught us to pay our admiring and loyal tribute to Nana Sahib, Bala

THE STORY OF THIS HISTORY

Rao, Kumar Singh, Mangal Pande, Ahmad Shah, the Queen of Jhansi, Senapati Tatia Topé and hosts of our warriors. The names could never have been on the lips of millions today but for the researches of Veer Savarkar guided by a gifted intuition and on a par with such excavations as at Mohenjodaro.

It cannot but be a source of satisfaction to Veer Savarkarji that the expectations he cherished about this History, when he wrote it in his youth, should have been realised before his eyes. But we are afraid that his satisfaction in this case must be only partial. For he never could conceive that the 'Rising of 1857' was an event complete by itself. He looked upon the war of 1857 as but a campaign in the war of Independence in its entirety. He did not, therefore, mean the book to serve as merely the annals of the past but also as a source of inspiration and guidance to the Future. Consequently he must be expecting this History to continue to discharge its mission yet further till the end in view is accomplished. This end is clearly marked out by Veer Savarkar himself as the following passage will show.

The special tribunal, which tried him in 1910 for waging war against the King (of course of England!) and sentenced him to transportation for life and forfeiture of his property, quotes in its judgment as an overwhelming proof of his 'guilt' the following statement issued by Savarkar in 1908 from London :

"The war begun on the 10th of May 1857 is not over on the 10th of May 1908, nor can it ever cease till a 10th of May to come sees the destiny accomplished and our Motherland stands free!"

G. M. JOSHI

Bombay : 10th January, 1947

THE ORIGINAL PUBLISHER'S PREFACE

This book on the history of 1857 was originally written in an Indian vernacular. But owing to the unique nature of the book which, for the first time ever since the great War was fought, proves from the English writers themselves that the rising of the Indian people in 1857 was in no way an insignificant chapter in, or a tale unworthy of, a great people's history, pressing requests were made from many quarters to translate the work into the English language, so that, by translations into the other vernaculars, the whole of the Indian nation might be enabled to read the history of the ever memorable War of 1857. Realising the reasonableness and importance of these requests and with the kind permission of the author the publishers undertook the translation of the original into the English language. With the patriotic co-operation of many of their countrymen, they are able to-day to place this work in the hands of Indian readers.

The work of translating an Oriental work into a western tongue has ever been a task of immense difficulty, even when the translator has all the facilities which leisure and training could afford. But when the translation had to be done by divers hands and within a very short time, it was clearly foreseen by the publishers that the translation would be defective and unidiomatic. But the main point before the publishers was not to teach the Indian people how to make an elegant translation nor to show them how to write correct English—points to which they were supremely indifferent—but to let them know how their nation fought for its Independence and how their ancestors died “for the ashes of their fathers and

THE ORIGINAL PUBLISHER'S PREFACE

the temples of their Gods." So, the publishers decided to run the risk of publishing the book as soon as it could explain the facts it had to tell, though none could be more conscious of the faults of the language than they themselves. Fifty years have passed and yet those who died for the honour of their soil and race are looked upon as madmen and villains by the world abroad ; while their own kith and kin for whom they shed their blood, are ashamed even to own them ! To allow this state of public opinion, born of stupid ignorance, and purposely and systematically kept up by a band of interested hirelings, to continue any longer, would have been a national sin. So, the publishers have not waited till the language of this translation could be rendered elegant. Which would be more shameful—to let hideous calumny hover over and smother down the spirit of martyrdom, or to let some mistake creep into a book admittedly translated into a foreign tongue ? The first, at the best, was a crime, and the second at the worst a venial literary offence. Therefore, the publishers owe no apology to, nor would one be asked for by, the Indian readers for whose special benefit, the work is published.

But, to those sympathetic foreign readers who might be inclined to read this book, we owe an apology for the faults of the language and crave their indulgence for the same.

THE PUBLISHERS

LONDON, May 10, 1909