

By M M Munshi

A seventy year old lady Tetra Devi who claims to be descendent of Mangal Pandey has rightly stated that nobody bothered to remember him but now his name is being exploited for commercial as well as political reasons. Mangal Pandey's role in detronating India's war of Independence of 1857 and even his name was hardly known to most of the Indians till Aamir Khan's movie "Mangal Pandey- rising" directed by Ketan Mehta was advertised on the electronic media.

Contradictory comments on the story of Mangal Pandey in the film have been reported by the media for which we

Mangal Pandey, the martyr

cannot fully blame the producer/director. The truth is that hardly anything about Mangal Pandey's family history or early life exists except that he was born in Wagda Village in Balia district of UP and his role in the first skirmish of the uprising of 1857 at Barrakpore against the East India Company and his execution by hanging. Vir Savarkar has described Mangal Pandey as pure in private life and undaunted in battle" on the contrary, his character has been damaged in the movie by showing him drinking in a kotha which is not fare on the part of the producer/ director of the film. Of all, the surprising incidents connected with uprising of 1857 the most striking was the secrecy with which the vast movement was organized. The shrewd British administrators had very little information about the roots/source of the movement even a year after open mutiny had broken out. Most of them unwittingly persisted in the belief that it was due to the issue of greased cartridges. The European historians, however, subsequently understood that the issue of cartridges was a

it was the holy love for their religions and country that inspired the heroes of the war of 1857.

Malleson in his book (Red Pamphlet) says that did the cartridge produce the mutiny. They were instruments used by the conspirators, and those conspirators were successful in their use of instruments only because, in the manner I have endeavored to point out, the mind of the Sepoys and certain sections of populations had been prepared to believe every act testifying bad faith on the part of their foreign masters". Medley in "A years campaigning in India from March 1957 to March 1958" But in fact the greased cartridges was merely the match that exploded the mine which had owing to a variety of causes been for a long time preparing".



Disrali dismissed the greasing of cartridges with the remark that "no body believed that to have been the real cause of the out break"- (Charles Balls Indian Mutiny Vol. 1) The author goes further in saying "That the fear of the cartridges was merely pretext with many is shown beyond all the questions. They did not hesitate to use freely when fighting against us."

We have not sufficiently recognized the skill of the leaders like Nana Sahaib Peshwa, Molvie Ahmad Shah, Kumar Singh, Tantia Tope. Aim Ullah Khan, Ali Nakkai Khan, Rani of Jhansi and others who perfected the noble organization under the very nose of British Officials in India and successfully taught mutual and united action to the Hindus and Muslims and infused the revolutionary spirit among all classes of people, sepoy police, civil officials, zamindars peasants and others without letting the British have much suspicion of the impending upheaval.

Just when this conspiracy was going on the East India Company began to

sepoys (Indian Soldiers) in Bengal. It appeared that first issue would be made on 19th native infantry regiment of Bengal Presidency Army. Of all the regiments located in Bengal, the 34th native infantry was most anxious to start the rebellion. The regiment being stationed at Barrakporam, Wazir Ali Khan, who stayed near Calcutta had bound the whole regiment by Oaths in favour of uprising. Some sepoy of the 34th regiment had brought the whole of 19th regiment to their side. The British had hardly any idea of this and decided to issue the greased cartridges first to the 19th regiment on an experimental basis. But this regiment boldly refused to accept the new cartridges and made clear their intention of drawing their weapons if necessary. The British had to quietly swallow the insult, as hardly any white troops were available in the province of Bengal to suppress the sepoy. Consequently white troops were moved from Burma and other places to Calcutta and orders were issued for the disbandment of the 19th regiment at Barakpore for 29th March 1857. But the 34th regiment was in no mood to see the 19th regiment being disbanded on the parade ground. Men of the 19th and 34th regiments wanted to give up the service of the East India Company. Hence all the sepoy thought it best that the Company itself disband the 19th. The rebel leaders counselled patience for one month until all other regiments were consulted and a single day fixed. But Mangal Pandey's sword would not stay in the sheath.

Mangal Pandey was a Kankujia Brahmin by birth from a small village Nagwa in east UP, had taken the duties of a Kshtriya and was a valiant young soldier undaunted in battle but pure in his private life. The love of his religion and country had entered and electrified his blood. The idea that his brethren would be insulted before him on the Parade Ground that day fired his emotions, he began to insist that his own regiment the 34th should rise on that very day. When the leaders of the conspiracy did not give their consent, the young soldier's spirit became uncontrollable. He seized and loaded a weapon and ran on the Parade Ground shouting "Rise brethren, rise! Why do you hold back, come and rise, come and rise and bind you by the oath of your religion" with such words he called upon the fellow soldiers to follow him. When sergent major Hughson saw this, he ordered the sepoy to arrest Mangal Pandey. Not a single sepoy moved to arrest or over power him and a shot from Pandey's weapon killed the sergent major. Suddenly, Lieutenant Baugh came on a prancing horse, another bullet from Pandey struck the horse and brought the horse as well the rider to the ground. While Pandey was reloading

aiming his pistol at Pandey who drew his sword. Bagh fired but missed his mark, he also drew his sword but before he could use it Pandey struck him down. While another White Soldier was attacking Pandey, a sepoy smashed his head with firearm, a shout rose among the sepoy "Do no touch Mangal Pandey". Immediately Col. Wheeler came and ordered Mangal Pandey's arrest. Another shout rose in chorus from the sepoy "We will not touch the hair of this Brahman. Col. Wheeler seeing the blood of Whiteman and mood of Sepoy's galloped to the residence of the General Hearsay. On the parade ground Pandey continued waving his hands and shouting "Rise brethren, rise" When General Hearsay hurriedly collected White soldiers and Officers and rode hastily towards Mangal Pandey. Seeing that he would fall into the hands of White Soldiers, Mangal Pandey shot himself preferring death than to falling into the hands of white men and lay wounded on the parade ground. The wounded soldier was overpowered and taken to hospital. He survived and was tried in a court of law, he was condemned to be hanged. During the enquiry, he utterly refused to reveal the names of conspirators. He also said that he had no personal ill will against the officers he killed. His sword came out of its sheath to defend his religion, honour of his brethren and country. The 8th of April was fixed the day for his execution.

What must have been the effect of his martyrdom over those who believed in him. It is no wonder that love for him inspired all those who saw him in flesh and blood ready to sacrifice his life. No man could be found in whole of Barrakpore to act as a handman at last four had he brought from Calcutta. Mangal Pandey was carried to the scaffold on the morning of 8th April surrounded by British soldiers. He repeated once more that he would not give the names of the conspirators before the moose dropped and brave soul of Mangal Pandey left his body.

This was the first skirmish and so died the first martyr of the rebellion, Mangal Pandey was gone but his spirit spread throughout the rank of the Bengal Presidency Army from Barrakpore to as far as Ambala, Multan and Peshawar, he gave not only his life but his name to the rebellion. According to Lord Roberts "Pandey's name was the origin of sepoy who joined India's first war of Independence in 1857 being called Pandey's (Lord Robert-Forty one years in India)".

The rising at Barrakpore on 29th March was followed by the eruption at Merrut on 10th of May and what followed for the next two years need not be retold.