

CHAPTER I

SHAHID MANGAL PANDAY

Of all the marvellous incidents connected with the Revolution of 1857, the most marvellous was the secrecy with which the vast movement was organised. The clever English administrators had so little information about the source of the movement, even after the tremendous revolutionary upheaval all over Hindusthan, that, even a year after open mutiny had broken out, most of them still persisted innocently in the belief that it was due to the greased cartridges! English historians are now beginning to understand that the cartridges were only an incident and they themselves now admit that it was the holy passion of love of country and religion that inspired the heroes of the war of 1857.¹ We cannot sufficiently admire the skill of the

¹ Malleon says: "In this lesser sense, then, and in this only, did the cartridges produce the mutiny. They were instruments used by the conspirators, and those conspirators were successful in their use of the instruments only because, in the manner I have endeavoured to point out, the mind of the Sepoys and of certain sections of the population had been prepared to believe every act testifying bad faith on the part of their foreign masters."

Medley says: "But, in fact, the greased cartridge was merely the match that exploded the mine which had, owing to a variety of causes, been for a long time preparing."

"Mr. Disraeli dismissed the greasing of the cartridges with the remark that nobody believed that to have been the real cause of the outbreak."—Charles Ball's *Indian Mutiny*, Vol. I, page 629.

One author goes further and says: "That the fear about the cartridges was mere pretext with many is shown beyond all question. They have not hesitated to use freely when fighting against us the cartridges which, they declared, would, if used, have destroyed their caste."

leaders like Nana Sahib, Moulvie Ahmad Shah, and Vizier Ali Nakkhi Khan, who perfected that organisation with such secrecy under the very nose of the English officials in Hindusthan. It is difficult to find a parallel to the capacity for secret organisation displayed by these men, who successfully taught the necessity of mutual help and united action to the Hindus and Mahomedans, and infused the revolutionary spirit among all classes of the people—sepoys, police, zemindars, civil officials, peasants, merchants, and bankers; and who harmonised all these conflicting elements into an army filled with the sacred purpose of freeing the motherland; and all this, without letting the English have even the shadow of a suspicion of this vast upheaval. Just as this secret organisation was becoming ripe, the Government began to force the greased cartridge on the soldiers in Bengal. It appeared probable that the first experiment would be made on the 19th regiment. It was the month of February. Of all the regiments stationed in Bengal, the 34th was most anxious to start the Revolution. This regiment being stationed at Barrackpore, Vizier Ali Nakkhi Khan who stayed near Calcutta had bound the whole regiment by oaths in favour of the Revolution. Some companies of this regiment had been sent to the men of the 19th, and these had brought over the whole of that regiment to the national cause. The English had no notion of this and decided to force the cartridges first on the 19th regiment as an experiment. But the regiment openly refused to accept them and made plain their determination even to draw their swords, if necessary. Seeing this, the English, in pursuance of their policy, began to put down the "natives". But the English officers soon saw that they were not the "natives" of past days. The clashing of swords soon convinced them of that. But they had quietly to pocket this insult, because, in the whole province, they had no white troops with which to overawe the Sepoys. To remove this difficulty, an English regiment was ordered from Burma to Calcutta in the beginning of March. The order went forth that the 19th regiment was to be disarmed and disbanded. It was decided to execute this order at Barrackpore!

But Barrackpore was not going to see quietly the spectacle of its countrymen being dishonoured. The flame of liberty was flashing from every sword there. But, out of all these, the sword of Mangal Panday positively refused to rest in its scabbard. The 34th regiment wanted to leave the Company's service

quite as much as the 19th. Hence all patriots thought it was best that the Company itself disbanded the 19th. The wiser leaders counselled patience for one month until all were consulted. And letters had already been sent from Barrackpore to various regiments to fix the signal day. But Mangal Panday's sword would not wait!

Mangal Panday was a Brahmin by birth. He took up the duties of a Kshatriya and was a valiant young soldier. Into the heart of this young and brilliant Brahmin who loved his religion more than his life, and who was pure in his private life and undaunted in battle, the idea of the freedom of his country had entered; and it had electrified his blood. How could his sword be patient? The swords of martyrs never are. The crown of martyrdom shines only on the head of those, who, regardless of success or failure, bathe their cherished ideals with their hot blood. And from this apparently useless waste of blood does the sacred image of victory spring forth. The idea that his brethren were going to be insulted before him fired Mangal Panday's heart, and he began to insist that his own regiment should rise on that very day. When he heard that the leaders of the Organisation would not consent to his plan, the young man's spirit became uncontrollable, and he at once snatched and loaded his gun, and jumped on the parade-ground, shouting, "Rise! ye brethren, rise! Why do you hold back, brethren? Come, and rise! I bind you by the oath of your religion! Come, let us burst forth on the treacherous enemies for the sake of our freedom." With such words, he called upon his fellow-soldiers to follow him. When Sergeant-major Hughson saw this, he ordered the Sepoys to arrest Mangal Panday. But the traitor-Sepoys whom the English had been used to count upon up to now were nowhere to be found. Not only did no Sepoy move to arrest Panday at the orders of the officer, but a bullet from Panday killed the officer, and his corpse rolled on the ground! Just at this time, Lieutenant Baugh came upon the scene. While his horse was prancing forth on the parade, another bullet from Panday struck the horse and sent both the horse and the rider to the ground. While Panday was loading his gun again, the officer got up and aimed his pistol at Panday; but the latter, undismayed drew out his sword. Baugh fired but missed his mark; he then drew his sword, but before he could use it Panday sent him rolling again. While another white man was charging

Panday, a Sepoy smashed his head with the barrel of his gun; and a shout arose from among all the Sepoys, "Do not touch Mangal Panday!" Immediately, Colonel Wheeler came and ordered Mangal Panday's arrest. Another shout arose, "We would not even touch the hair of this sacred Brahmin." The colonel, on seeing the blood of Englishmen flowing and the Sepoys in such a mood, speedily retreated to the bungalow of the general. On the parade Mangal Panday continued waving his hands full of blood in the air, shouting tremendously all the time, "Rise! Brethren, rise!" When General Hearsey heard this, he took some European soldiers and rode hastily towards Panday. Seeing that he would soon fall into the hands of Feringhis and preferring death to falling into the hands of the enemy, Mangal Panday turned the gun towards his own breast, and immediately his sacred body lay wounded on the parade ground. The wounded young soldier was taken to the hospital, and the English officers returned to their tents, amazed at the bravery of this Sepoy. This was on the 29th of March, 1857.

Mangal Panday was, then, tried before a court-martial. During the inquiry, attempts were made to make him reveal the names of other conspirators. But the valiant youth bluntly refused to do so. He also said that he had no personal malice against the officers whom he shot. If there had been any personal malice, Mangal Panday's name would have been in the list of assassins and not of martyrs. But Mangal Panday's brave deed was done through devotion to a high and noble principle. His sword came out of its scabbard to defend country and religion, "thinking alike of victory and defeat," as the Bhagavat Gita enjoins. He came out with the firm resolution to die rather than face the insult to his country and religion. In this his bold attempt, his bravery as well as his patriotism are worthy of the highest praise. He was condemned to be hanged. The 8th of April was the day fixed for the execution. Whatever might be the inspiring splendour in the actual blood of martyrs, the very names of martyrs inspire us with noble sentiments! What, then, must be the power of the martyr over those who believed in him when he was before them in flesh and blood, ready to undergo martyrdom? It is no wonder that a divine love for him inspired all those who saw Mangal Panday. Not even a low-class man could be found in the whole of Barrackpore to act as executioner! At last four hangmen had to be brought from Calcutta to do the dirty work! Mangal

Panday was carried to the scaffold on the morning of the 8th, surrounded by soldiers. He walked with a steady step through the ranks and ascended the scaffold. While he repeated once more that he will never give out the names of any of the conspirators, the noose dropped and the glorious soul of Mangal Panday left the body and went to Heaven!

This was the first skirmish of the Revolutionary War, and so died the first martyr. We always ought to remember with pride in our heart the name of Mangal Panday, whose blood was the source of the river of martyrdom! The seed of freedom that had been sown for the last three years and more, was first watered with hot blood from the body of Mangal Panday! When the time comes to get its crop, let us not forget who first boldly came forward to nourish it!

Mangal Panday is gone, but his spirit has spread all over Hindusthan; and the principle for which he fought has become immortal! He gave not only his blood but his sacred name also to the Revolution! It has become the custom to call all those who fought for religion and country in the war of 1857 by the appellation of "Panday."¹ Let every mother teach her son the story of this name with pride!

¹ "The name has become a recognised distinction for the rebellious Sepoys throughout India"—Charles Ball.

"This name was the origin of the Sepoys generally being called *Pandays*"—Lord Roberts's *Forty-one years in India*.