

# **ASSASSINATION OF ASHE, COLLECTOR OF TIRUNELVELI**

**By A.R. VENKATACHALAPATHY**

Ashe came from an Anglo-Irish family that traced its origins to the 16th century. Until the disestablishment of the Church in Ireland, the Ashes were all Protestant Reverends. One St George Ashe had even been the provost of Trinity College, Dublin, in 1692. A certain Sir George Ashe was a member of Jonathan Swift's Trinity-based intellectual circle.

Robert William d'Escourt Ashe was born on November 23, 1872, to Dr Isaac and Sarah Ashe at Sprackburn, Letterkenny, Ireland. His father was resident medical superintendent of Central Criminal Asylum, Dundrum, until he was killed, in 1891, by an inmate. Ashe studied at the High School, Dublin. In 1892 he entered Trinity College, Dublin, winning the First Entrance Prize and also the Vice-Chancellor's Prize for a poem "On the Tercentenary of Trinity College, Dublin. In 1894 Ashe passed fortieth among 61 successful candidates in the Indian Civil Service (ICS) examination. On December 4, 1895, he arrived in India, where he began his career as an Assistant Collector and rose up to be District Magistrate and Collector.

In 1907, Ashe found himself posted in the southernmost corner of the Presidency, in Tirunelveli. After a period of long leave he rejoined duty on February 17, 1908. The two months he spent officiating in the Tuticorin division were to be fateful. Tuticorin, a major port in the Presidency, also had a major spinning mill, the Coral Mills, managed by the European firm A. & F. Harvey. The Harveys were also the agents of the British India Steam Navigation Company, which had a virtual monopoly over the trade between Tuticorin and Colombo. After the eventful months in Tuticorin, Ashe was posted out to Godavari. He took charge of Tirunelveli district on August 2, 1910, as Acting Collector.

Tirunelveli, where Ashe arrived in February 1908 was no ordinary district. The Swadeshi movement had burst out in 1905 in the wake of Lord Curzon's ill-advised move to partition Bengal in an effort to stem the rising tide of nationalism. As a response, the nationalist movement, after decades of constitutional efforts, began to take on the proportions of a mass movement with genuine popular participation. Madras, for long derided as "the benighted province", soon joined the swadeshi fray. In December 1906, the government found out that "the only district from which any suspicion of anti-British feeling is reported is Tinnevely district and there only in the town of Tuticorin".

Ashe was stationed in Tuticorin. While the swadeshi enterprise across India was limited to such tokenisms as making candles and bangles, in Tuticorin it took the spectacular form of running nothing less than a steam shipping company. The man behind this, Chidambaram Pillai, was closely aligned to the extremist faction of the Congress and was a follower of Bal Gangadhar Tilak. VOC galvanised local merchants to launch the Swadeshi Steam Navigation Company. For VOC, the shipping company was a patriotic venture, a step on the road towards shaking off the colonial yoke. The company gave the British India Steam Navigation Company a run for its money.

Shortly after his return from the Surat Congress at the end of December 1907, VOC organised political meetings on Tuticorin beach and in Tirunelveli. A particularly fiery orator, Subramania Siva spoke in these meetings. Emotionally charged speeches directed against the European ruling classes and calling for a free and representative government were made. By all accounts - even

those of the police and the CID - the effect was electrifying.

On February 27, 1908, about 1,000 workers struck work in the Coral Mills of Tuticorin. Section 144 of the CrPC was imposed and additional police were brought in. Ashe, as the divisional officer in charge, called for a meeting with VOC. In the face of a united workforce and strong leadership, the workers' demands were met and they returned to work. It is likely that Ashe took this as a personal defeat.

The daily swadeshi meetings continued, with thousands of people attending them. When the movement's leaders planned to celebrate the release from prison of Bipin Chandra Pal, the Bengali swadeshi leader, as "Swarajya Day", the district administration swung into action. VOC, along with his swadeshi colleagues Subramania Siva and Padmanabha Iyengar, was arrested on March 12, 1908.

On June 17, 1911, Ashe boarded the 9-30 a.m. Maniyachi Mail at Tirunelveli junction. With him was his wife, Mary Lillian Patterson, who had arrived from Ireland only a few days earlier. They had married on April 6, 1898, in Berhampore; Mary was about a year older than Ashe. They were on their way to Kodaikanal where their four children, Molly, Arthur, Sheila, and Herbert, lived in a rented bungalow.

At 10-38 the train pulled in at Maniyachi. The Ceylon Boat Mail was due to arrive at 10-48. As the Ashes sat facing each other in the first class carriage, waiting for the Boat Mail to arrive, a neatly dressed man with tufted hair and another young man wearing a dhoti approached the carriage. The former boarded the carriage and pulled out a Belgian-made Browning automatic pistol. The bullet hit Ashe in the chest and he collapsed. The sound of the pistol shot was absorbed by the howling wind.

After the shooting the assassin ran along the platform and hid in the latrine. Sometime later he was found dead, having shot himself in the mouth. In his pocket was found the following letter:

“The mlechas of England having captured our country, tread over the sanathana dharma of the Hindus and destroy them. Every Indian is trying to drive out the English and get swarajyam and restore sanathana dharma. Our Raman, Sivaji, Krishnan, Guru Govindan, Arjuna ruled our land protecting all dharmas and in this land they are making arrangements to crown George V, a mlecha, and one who eats the flesh of cows. Three thousand Madrasees have taken a vow to kill George V as soon as he lands in our country. In order to make others know our intention, I who am the least in the company, have done this deed this day. This is what everyone in Hindustan should consider it as his duty.”

Sd/- R. Vanchi Aiyar, Shencottah

The contents of the letter indicated that the murder was political and caused great apprehension. The timing of the assassination indicated a protest against the impending coronation.

A massive manhunt followed the assassination. Vanchi, born c. 1886, was the son of Raghupathy Iyer, a former employee of the Travancore temple board. He was married to Ponnammal, and his infant daughter had died recently. The father and son were estranged; Raghupathy Iyer even refused to perform his last rites. The investigation showed that Vanchi had been a forest guard in Punalur and had been to Baroda (now Vadodara) and Pondicherry (now Puducherry) in the recent past. In Senkottai, Ottapidaram and Tuticorin, seized correspondence indicated the existence of a secret society, complete with blood oath and Kali puja. Also found was extremist literature, especially two pamphlets printed in the Feringhee Destroyer Press, calling on Indians to kill Europeans. It was clear that the society had links with other secret societies based in Bengal.

Investigations also indicated that the assassination had a direct link with the political events in the district in 1908.

Fourteen persons were arrested and charged with conspiracy to murder Ashe. Two others committed suicide - Dharmaraja Aiyar took poison, while Venkateswara Aiyar slit his own throat. Madasamy, widely believed to be Vanchi's accomplice and who was seen running away after the assassination, was never traced.

As can be expected in conspiracy cases in the colonial context, testimony of approvers formed the backbone of the prosecution's case, which revealed the intent of the crime. O. Somasundaram Pillai, one such approver, testified that in a conversation Vanchi had stated that "English rule was ruining the country and that it could only be removed if all white men were killed, [and] went on to suggest that Mr Ashe should be first killed as he was the head of the district and an officer who had taken a leading part in the suppressing of the Swadeshi Steam Navigation Company [founded by the freedom fighter V.O. Chidambaram Pillai; Madasamy was one of his staunch supporters] and the events of 1908".

During the trial, if Chief Justice Charles Arnold White and Justice Ayling of the Madras High Court accepted this approver's testimony, the third judge, C. Sankaran Nair, went even further. He narrated the sequence of events, starting from the fervent swadeshi propaganda in Tirunelveli district, and elaborated on the efforts of VOC in launching the Swadeshi Steam Navigation Company and leading the Coral Mills strike and on the eventual arrest of Swadeshi movement leaders, which led to riots. He hit the nail on the head with the observation: "The murder of Mr Ashe was a direct consequence of this bitter hostility. '85 [T]hat Mr Ashe's conduct at Tuticorin with reference to the conviction of Subramania Siva and Chidambaram Pillai and with reference to the [Swadeshi] Steam Navigation Co. was one of the main causes of the murder".

Though the conspiracy aspect of the case could not be proved to the satisfaction of the High Court bench, nine of the 14 accused were convicted and sentenced.

The Ashe murder case did not end with the trial and conviction. The government strongly suspected that the Indian nationalists who had sought refuge in the French enclave of Pondicherry were directly connected with the murder. A huge posse of policemen, spies and informers was stationed in Pondicherry. The Ashe murder remained, in the official mind, a spectacular example of what could go wrong.

News of Ashe's murder was received with outrage and disbelief. The moderates and the government-fearing intelligentsia, who thought that the events of 1908 were an aberration, panicked. A spectacular show of loyalty followed. Two memorials were planned and executed. At the English Church, Palayamkottai, where Ashe was interred, his fellow-officers erected a tombstone. The Tuticorin Municipality built an octagonal mantapam set in a garden at the eastern end of the main Great Cotton Road. The subscription of Rs.3,002 was collected almost exclusively from Indians. The 38 subscribers included a few who had backed the Swadeshi Steam Navigation Company and who had testified in VOC's favour in the Tirunelveli sedition trials.

Mary and her children returned to Exeter, her hometown, in April 1912 on a decent government pension. She never remarried. Their four children were aged 12, 10, eight and six at the time of Ashe's death. Arthur went on to become a colonel in the Indian Army and retired in 1947. It is curious that he should have chosen to work in a country that had claimed his father's life. Robert said his father had a deep love for India even though he or his family never visited Maniyachi or Tirunelveli. Herbert died in combat during the Second World War. The girls remained unmarried.

Janet thought that their spinsterhood had much to do with Mary. Apparently, Mary, who died in 1954, never let people forget the tragedy she had suffered, of seeing her husband being shot at point-blank range right in front of her eyes.

The Ashe murder and Vanchi remain etched in Tamil memory. In some narratives it is seen as a watershed in the freedom struggle in Tamil Nadu. In a region short of patriotic martyrs, Vanchi, evoking the image of a selfless young man who laid down his life for a nationalist cause he believed in, secured a sacred halo. His name has been given to many radical characters in Tamil fiction and cinema.

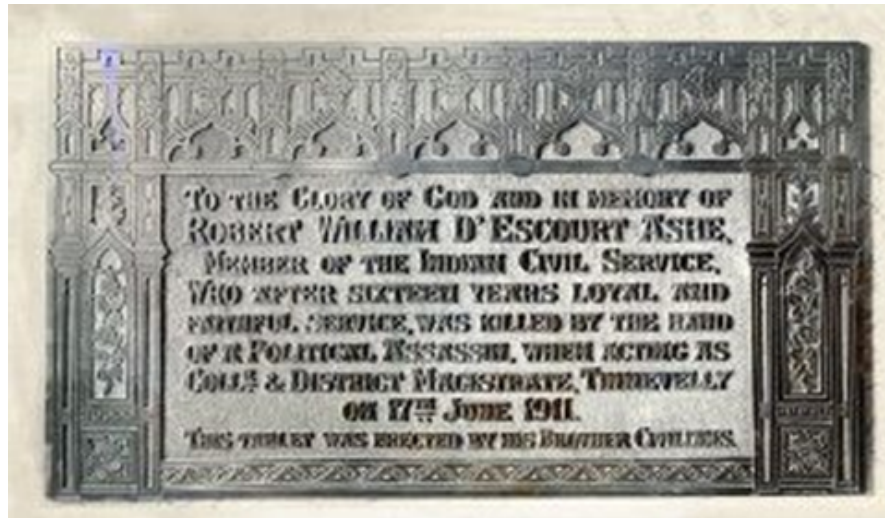
As the centenary of the Ashe assassination approaches, it is likely that there will be some commemorative events. As he saw me off, Robert expressed the wish to visit Maniyachi in June 2011, but remarked in jest that he too might be shot. Perish the thought, I said, but if it came to that I promised a memorial.

V.S. WASSON



**A Sketch of R. Vanchi Iyer, who killed Robert Ashe on June 17, 1911, at Maniyachi railway junction.**

**A MEMORIAL TABLET for Ashe made around 1912.**



**The Tombstone Erected in 1912 by Ashe's fellow-officers at the English Church in Palayamkottai, Tamil Nadu, where he was interred.  
(This tomb is still there in the Church)**



**A View of the memorial today. An amount of Rs.3,002 was collected as subscription almost exclusively from Indians for the memorial.**



**The Ashe Memorial established in Tuticorin in 1913. The octagonal mantapam is set in a garden at the eastern end of the Great Cotton Road.**

## **A VISIT TO ASHE'S FAMILY**

**By A.R. VENKATACHALAPATHY**

A.R. Venkatachalapathy is with the family of Robert William Escourt Ashe, the only British official to be assassinated during the freedom struggle in South India

I arrived at Dublin airport on a Ryanair flight on Bloomsday in 2006 - it commemorates events in James Joyce's *Ulysses*, all of which took place on June 16, 1904, in Dublin. My trip was to be punctuated by more than one such coincidence.

The man I had come to meet had no difficulty in spotting me; I was probably the only Indian in that crowd. He was a tall, handsome man with a grey beard and heavy spectacles. We exchanged pleasantries. After he paid for the parking ticket and jumped into the car we looked at each other, fumbling for the right words.

If I was a bit edgy and he a little inquisitive it was but natural, for the purpose of my visit was to research the man who had killed his grandfather.

*On June 17, 1911, at Maniyachi railway junction, between Tirunelveli and Tuticorin in Tamil Nadu, Collector Robert William d'Escourt Ashe was killed by R. Vanchi Aiyar of Senkottai. Ashe was the first and, as subsequent history showed, the last British official to be assassinated during the course of the freedom struggle in South India. As Subramania Bharati remarked, "The terrorist movement in the Madras Presidency was still-born." J.C. Molony, who succeeded Ashe, called it "the blackest political crime ever committed in South India".*

A chapter in A. Sivasubramanian's Tamil monograph "The Ashe Murder and the revolutionary movement in India" (1986) has a chapter titled "Who is this Ashe?" Two decades of research into colonial documents in the Tamil Nadu Archives in Chennai, the National Archives of India in New Delhi, and the India Office Library of the British Library had failed to throw much light on Ashe.

Then, in Spring 2006, I was Charles Wallace Visiting Fellow at the Centre of South Asian Studies at the University of Cambridge. Among the holdings of the centre was a box called "Ashe papers". I pounced on it and with help from the archivist Kevin Greenbank traced the source of the papers. In the correspondence file was an Ashe address in Newmountkennedy, County Wicklow of Ireland, to which I shot off a letter. A few days later, one evening, I went to the Wolfson College computer room to check my mail. "J.R. Ashe" flickered in the inbox. Janet, 87, was the wife of Ashe's son Arthur. It was a pleasure making contact, she wrote. Could I possibly visit her? Her son and daughter-in-law would also love to meet me!

Now, a month later, I was in Dublin. The Ireland I knew through literature was one of poverty. I saw none of it though, Ireland being the fastest-growing economy since its integration with the European Union.

Some 50 miles (80 kilometres) south of Dublin, Robert Ashe took a detour to his country house, Griesemont. We drove past a deserted Quaker village complete with an abandoned mill. Carolyn, his wife, welcomed us. The house was big, and as I wandered through it I saw books everywhere, lined on shelves, stacked on landings and even in the toilet. I began to feel at home. Curiously, for a family whose forebear had met with violent death in the line of duty in the colony, it had continued its colonial links. Robert's father had served in the Indian Army until 1947. But, surprisingly, a family with such a well-preserved cache of family papers and an evident interest in books knew little about the assassination except as family lore. David Davidar's *The House of Blue Mangoes* had kindled some interest fanned by their daughter studying history at Edinburgh.

Another coincidence struck me the next day, June 17. It was the 95th anniversary of the Ashe murder. Robert, too, remembered. I began rummaging through the papers and was fortunate to spot some real nuggets. As I pored over the manuscripts, we talked - I reconstructing the background to the assassination and Robert filling me in on family information. As the day



passed, a genuine friendship had formed and there was little trace of the edginess of the previous evening.

It is also extraordinary how time can erase historical bitterness if only people chose to. When we opened a bottle of wine that evening and toasted to Ashe's memory, Robert movingly toasted to Vanchi as well. He had died the same day, barely minutes after Ashe's killing. (When, later, I sent Robert a picture of Vanchi, he wrote, "What a lovely young face he has! Have just been reading a novel in our book club - *Bel Canto* by Ann Patchett - in which the young revolutionaries all seemed to look like that and all got shot by the government soldiers in the end. Vanchi, on the other hand, took his own life: to protect his comrades? Or to become a martyr?")



**Robert William D'escourt Ashe with his wife, Mary, and children. It is not clear when and where this picture was taken. This is probably the first time a picture of Ashe is being published.**

## **LOOKING BACK TO LOOK FORWARD**

**(RSS involvement in Gandhi's murder), The Hindu, February 03, 2017**

By Devaki Jain, a feminist writer and economist.

January 30, Martyrs' Day, is gradually losing significance just like some of the other days related to our freedom struggle. There was a time in the '50s and '60s when we truly mourned the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi. It not only seemed monstrous, but it foreboded a kind of evil, also that despite all the talk about non-violent struggle, violence was in our blood. It created not



only shock and sorrow but also fear about India's future, her civilisation and ethic, and her fame for a non-violent freedom struggle.

The day that shocked India:

I was 15 years old when it happened. We were living in Gwalior, as my father, M. A. Sreenivasan, was the Dewan. On the evening of January 30, 1948, his personal secretary rushed into our house and said: "Please stay indoors. We are putting the house under security." My mother asked: "What is happening?" He said: "Gandhi has been shot and a Hindu nationalist has shot him. We fear that they may attack this house also as Dewan Sahib has been against their communally motivated activities."

Communal hatred and violence fuelled by the Hindu Mahasabha and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, powerful organisations whose anti-Muslim and anti-Gandhi stand had won them considerable popular support, was a common feature in Gwalior. It was well known that these organisations had the sympathy and support of some of the rulers in that region. These groups hated Gandhi's concern and support for Muslims. When my father reconstituted the Gwalior cabinet in 1946 and did not include their representatives, among the banners festooning the streets of Gwalior there were two that said: 'Nehru ke agent Sreenivasan ko nikal do (Sack Nehru's agent Sreenivasan)', and 'Shanti ke poojari Sreenivasan ko hata do (Remove peacenik Sreenivasan)'. Hence the fear that our house would be targeted.

In his memoir *Of the Raj, Maharajas and Me*, written in 1991 and published by Ravi Dayal, my father recalls a visit by Dr. D.S. Parchure, a medical practitioner and a prominent leader of the RSS who came with Narayan Apte (a conspirator who was later hanged) to express his anger against the exclusion of RSS from the cabinet. "You are not a Hindu," his voice rose in anger, "You are an agent of Jinnah", "You are a betrayer of Hinduism, you and your Gandhi", "We shall finish you both. We have hand grenades."

Gandhiji had sent for my father, and the appointment was on January 29, 1948 at 2.30 p.m. at Birla House in New Delhi. My father had been an effective negotiator, as the convener of the Chamber of Princes. The negotiations were to persuade and nudge the princes to join the Republic of India.

When he returned, like most of sane India he was distraught. In his memoir he remembers his conversation:

Gandhiji asked me, 'Did you see a group of people in front of the house?'

'Yes'

'Those poor people are from Bannu. They have come all the way to see me. One of them was quite angry with me today. He told me, "Gandhi, you should die". I said I will not die until my inner voice says I should. And do you know, Sreenivasan, what he said?'

Gandhiji raised his hand in a characteristic gesture and said, 'He said, "My inner voice says you should die!"'

I was aghast.

'I pity them,' he continued. 'I am sorry for them. Would you not be angry if your house had been burnt and looted, your women beaten up or violated in your presence?' he asked. 'They think I am responsible,' he continued calmly; 'I am full of sympathy for them. I can well understand their being so angry.'

How could I have known that, on the very day I was motoring to Delhi to meet Gandhiji, Nathuram Godse and Narayan Apte were in Parchure's house in Gwalior on a secret quest, and that they had travelled by that evening's train to Delhi, carrying with them the pistol and the

bullets that killed the Mahatma — as the police found later?

A day of reflection:

It is time now for India not to remember this day only as Martyrs' Day but as a day to reflect on the spirit of the freedom movement. There should be much more discussion, public meetings, a kind of eventful day that enables the new generation to recall what was the politics, and who were those who rebelled against it at that time, and what have we landed in by forgetting those histories. Just as we have endless panels on the bickering by political parties or the fallibility of gigantic corporates, we should have discussions on January 30 invoking the history of the freedom struggle. A two-minute silence on the day and naming the road on which Birla House is located Tees January Marg are not enough.

## **HASHIMPURA AND THE ECHOES OF THE UPRISING OF 1857**

Abheek Barman, Times of India, Apr 5, 2015

The flowers around the grave are wild, bright blue and are called *spilanthes calva* DC — their extracts make analgesics and antioxidants, all very nice with the drug making industry.

The white marble angel, hands folded in prayer, with the hussar's busby, sword and cartridge pouch are engraved in stone at her feet. It's the grave of Hope Stewart. Born in England, died, age 22, in Meerut. Opposite is a mass grave with a hexangular foundation, for many English soldiers who died here.

Welcome to the graveyard at Meerut Cantonment, 72 km from Delhi, singed by the fire of the Uprising of 1857. Every grave marks a European casualty. Of the 'native' sepoys who died, there's nothing. Meerut has another distinction: it's the heart of every communal riot in north India since 1939.

So, it's an abomination to hear judges say — as they did on March 22 - that they had no evidence to convict 16 men of the Provincial Armed Constabulary (PAC) for mass murder. On May 22, 1987, a gathering of Muslims in Hashimpura, Meerut, was broken up by the army. Around 45 young men were handed over to the PAC.

Shot at night, the bodies were dumped into canals, never found again. But Amnesty International, which spoke to survivors immediately afterwards, has chilling accounts. Here is Ashraf Zulfikar, shot in the armpit: "...as I lay, feigning death, in the thicket beside the (Muradnagar) canal, I could hear the shots ringing out continuously and the sound of the bodies splashing into the canal".

And here is Mujibur Rehman: "On the way to Muradnagar some of the people were shot and thrown into a canal. I, along with my friend Mohammed Usman..., were shot and thrown into the canal but somehow we were able to swim back to the bank... and came to a bridge." (Both quoted in EPW, November 28, 1987.)

The killing also spread to Malliana, around 10 km west of Meerut. Twenty-eight years is a long time for a court to deliver a judgment: witnesses have died, evidence destroyed. After the verdict, Meerut is seething again.

A week before the Hashimpura judgment, we went there to look at remains of the Uprising. Our guide was Akhil Pathak, radiologist by profession, passionate chronicler of the Meerut Uprising. There, it became clear that if Meerut, or Hashimpura, is the heart of India's communal darkness, its roots lie in the aftermath of the Uprising.

Rewind 158 years, to March, 1857: Barrackpore, Bengal. Sepoy Mangal Pandey shoots and misses two Europeans, fails to kill himself, and is hanged. By April, the fire of Pandey's Uprising has scorched north India and reached Meerut, the second-largest East India Company garrison.

Here, Europeans and native sepoy were evenly balanced, with a little more than 2,000 on each side. The European cantonment was separated from the 'native lines.' Close by were Sadar Bazar and Lal Kurti Bazar, the latter named after the red uniforms worn by Company soldiers.

On 24 April 1857, Meerut's commander, Colonel Carmichael Smyth, paraded 90 Indian sepoy of the Bengal Cavalry, hired mostly from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. He ordered them to fire the new Enfield cartridges: 85 refused. The cartridges were covered with paper that had to be torn off: Muslims believed the paper was greased with pig and Hindus, with cow fat.

All 85 were stripped of their uniforms, imprisoned and shackled. Pathak says this was a major humiliation. The rebels were from the cavalry: they owned their horses, and were the upper-caste elite. If they could be shackled, what could others expect from the Company? The Uprising started the next day, Sunday Sabbath for Europeans, who were caught off-guard and slaughtered. By May 10, when the British regrouped, the sepoy had left for Delhi. Pathak says that the Uprising was the first time that one cause united all Indians. Gurjars, tyagis, rajputs, bhumihars — mostly upper castes — fought shoulder to shoulder with Muslims.

Local prostitutes egged on sepoy questioning their manhood, in the face of European officers. But the merchants of the bazaars and middle-castes, who'd gained from Company rule, hedged their bets and ducked. The Uprising was brutally quelled by the Company. And that cleared the path for the Hashimpura, Muzaffarnagar and Shamli riots, based on 19th century hurts. The mutineers were led by upper-caste Hindus from the Gangetic plain, with Shia and Sunni elite. The former were resentful of the Europeans' social 'reforms' which threatened age-old caste privileges and biases. The latter were aggrieved by the loss of prestige as the Company slowly digested the Mughal empire. They became restive as the Company's relentless expansion forced them to fight in unfamiliar places like Burma; and there were persistent rumours that pay and perks might be cut.

After 1857, the mutineers and their families lost everything. Those who sided with the British became powerful. Rebels were executed, jailed for life or exported overseas in chains. Worse: their women, land and livestock were handed over to Company loyalists. Their world turned upside down.

The biggest gainers from this upending were Jats, an intermediate caste, which fought for the British. Wealth snatched from mutineers in western UP was handed over to them. Some Brahmin collaborators and merchant castes also became the new nobility. Pathak claims that there's been no communal riot in Meerut after Hashimpura, 1987. He's incorrect.

The 'love jihad' propaganda, which sparked riots in nearby Muzaffarnagar and Shamli, originated from Meerut three years ago. Paul Brass, at the University of Washington at Seattle, has spent his life analysing communal conflict in India, including Meerut. He says that the first fights began in 1939. Between 1939 and 1991, Brass records 14 instances of rioting in Meerut. The official death toll is 290; unofficially it's a few hundred more. The toll in UP doesn't end there. From Kanpur, 1992, Lucknow, 2006 and Gorakhpur, 2007 the Uprising echoes today.

During the Uprising, rumour of revolution travelled fast across north India. Legend says one harbinger of revolution was a pack of five chapatis, going hand to hand. Another is a mysterious 'fakir' sighted in almost every centre of the Uprising: Awadh, Cawnpore, Jhansi, Meerut and Delhi. Now, social media does the job, faster. The Muzaffarnagar-Shamli riots were triggered by

a photo of a thief lynched in Sialkot, Pakistan, passed off as a Hindu lynched by Muslims, on apps. Brass thinks that violenceprone places have riotpreneurs, whose stock goes up during communal tension. But historical grievances have a long shelf life. On March 17, Surendra Jain of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), one of the RSS offshoots which guide this government, made headlines in this paper: "The 1857 Uprising was communal."

He was trying to justify recent attacks on Christians. But 1857 was no 'communal' — read, Muslim — uprising. Its leaders, Mangal Pandey, Nana Saheb, Tantia Tope, Lakshmibai, were high-caste Hindus. The Muslims were led by the remnants of their aristocracy. Unfortunately, the vengeance extracted by the Europeans turned north Indian society upside down, creating animosities that persist today. Hashimpura and the echoes of 1857 The vengeance extracted by the Europeans in the aftermath of the Uprising turned the north Indian society upside down, creating animosities that lie at the heart of every communal riot.

### **1857 MUTINY: MEMORIAL AT HINDON VIHAR**

Abhijay Jha, Times of India, Jul 15, 2017

GHAZIABAD: The Ghaziabad Municipal Corporation plans to develop a war memorial in the memory of those who fought the first war of independence on the banks of the Hindon river.

The memorial will be developed in a 32,000 sqm area in Hindon Vihar where presently lies a cemetery, proof of the bloody war fought in May 1857.

A sum of Rs 15 crore will be spent on the memorial which is expected to be complete a year.

"Ghaziabad has a rich history and during India's first freedom struggle our city played its part which people are not aware of," said mayor Ashu Verma. "In Hindon Vihar, there lies a cemetery of British soldiers which finds mention in the Archeological Survey of India (ASI) list but due to neglect, the place is in shambles. So we have decided to develop the area as a war memorial from which future generations could draw inspiration from," he added.

Initially, the GMC had planned to develop the memorial in a 12,000sqm area but recently allotted more land to it and now it will come up in 32,000sqm area. "The estimated cost for the project has been pegged at Rs 15 crore and the memorial will have no concrete structure except for plaque informing about the historical importance of the place," he said.

"To gather information about the event we are in talks with the historians who could elucidate on the importance of this place," Verma added.

M Hasan, a veteran journalist has chronicled the event in a form of book titled 'Wo Tees May'.

"A fierce battle was fought on 30-31 May in 1857 between British forces and local soldiers. The cemetery belongs to the British general and soldiers who died fighting here," Hasan said.

The cemetery lies in ruins now and major part has encroached but fortunately, the main structure has been spared. "The ASI has put up a board saying it's a 'protected monument' but it's a pity that authorities did not pay heed to it but now when GMC has taken up the task of developing the area into a war memorial. I hope this will help current generation connect with its past," he added.

For more than a century and a half this place withstood the vagaries of nature and man alike, but today it has crumbled to the neglect of authorities. But, with GMC's new-found sense of duty, one just hopes that the place will live to tell the tale of city's glorious past.

## **Women Rebels Who Shook British Roots in Avadh:**

(Shailvee Sharda, Times of India,| Updated: May 10, 2017)

The 1857 Uprising is remembered, among other things, for the dauntless participation of women. In a battle where the valour and conventional artillery of the natives could not withstand the modern cannons and guns of the British, women still stood tall. On the eve of the revolution's 160th anniversary, TOI salutes the sheroes of Avadh.

The fortitude of Begum Hazrat Mahal stands out in the annals of Avadh. "She was way ahead of her times and displayed great strength, strategy, grit, balance and vision - all needed to be the rule a kingdom and heart of people alike," says Lucknow-based historian Roshan taqui.

History books pay glowing tributes to her military skills and statesmanship. The Begum had mobilised masses to turn the revolt into a people's movement. Indians captured British residents for 87 days and scared them with constant efforts of re-capture. According to Edward Henry Hilton, who penned an eyewitness account, "Those were the toughest days we (British) faced." Author Anand Swarup Mishra in his book on 1857 martyrs notes that Begum herself appeared on the battlefield to encourage the troops who also included women.

But Begum's descendants feel she should also be remembered for her principled life and honesty. "British tried to lure her to come back (from Nepal where she took refuge) for a hefty pension (Rs 15 lakh) but she refused to bow down," says Manzilat Fatima, great great grand-daughter of Begum Hazrat Mahal.

In the battle of Sikander Bagh, Uda Devi fought gallantly till her last breath, killing many European soldiers. Sergeant Forbes Mitchell, an eyewitness to the battle, wrote in his diary *Reminiscences of the Great Mutiny*: "In the centre of the inner court of Sikander Bagh there was a large peepal tree with a very bushy top, round the foot of which set a number of jars full of cool water...Many of our men both of the 53rd and 93rd (regiments)...lay dead. The bodies...drew the attention of captain Dawson....he noticed that in every case, the men had evidently been shot from above.... he called Quaker Wallace to look up...."

The book adds, "Wallace had his rifle loaded and stepping back he carefully scanned the top of the tree. He almost immediately called out, "I see him sir!"...He fired and down fell a body...It was a woman. She was armed with a pair of heavy old pattern cavalry pistols, one of which was in her belt, still loaded and her pouch was still about half full of ammunition."

Azizan, a dancing girl in Kanpur, was a star among the men of the second cavalry. She is said to have motivated Indians during the revolt. British statesman and author Sir George Trevelyan, who penned *Cawnpore - an account of the massacre during 1857*, compared her to Theroigne de Mericourt - singer, orator and organizer in the French Revolution and called her Demoiselle (Young lady) Theroigne of the revolt. On the day of action in Kanpur, she was seen atop a horse dressed as a male, wearing uniform decorated with medals and armed with a brace of pistols.

Srinivas Balaji Hardikar, author of *Sann 1857 ki Chingariyan* (Sparks of 1857), notes that Azizan instigated the murders in Bibighar in Kanpur. Author and blogger Rana Safvi, who has translated a book on 1857, showers praise on Azizan. "She had personally nothing to gain and no personal grudges, unlike many other women who had joined the uprising. She was simply inspired by Nana Sahib. Her memory is still alive among the people of Kanpur. She dressed in male attire like Lakshmi Bai and rode on horseback with the soldiers, armed with a brace of pistols," says Safvi.

Rani Lakshmi Bai's valour needs no introduction. The widow of Maharaj Gangadhar Rao, Laxmi

Bai is called India's Joan of Arc. A victim of British policy of Doctrine of lapse, Rani was asked to move to another place after the British fixed her pension. "Initially it was thought that Lakshmi Bai was behind the killing of British natives residing in the Fort of Jhansi, but that was not proved," says Roshan Taqui.

### **A walk through the ruins of 1857:**

(Manimugdha S Sharma, Times of India, Updated: May 12, 2017)

May 11, 1857. Mughal Emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar was fishing in the Yamuna in the morning when he was told about some disturbance breaking out in the city. He rushed back into the fort.

Sowars of the 3rd Bengal Native Cavalry, after mutinying at Meerut the previous day, had reached Delhi after riding overnight. The Revolt of 1857 was at Delhi's doorstep. And the octogenarian head of the house of Timur, given to poetry and not soldiering, was thrust into the command of an epic struggle that was not just political but also cultural: one that would change Delhi and India forever.

On May 5, TOI approached India's foremost military historian, Squadron Leader Rana T S Chhina (Retd) of USI-CAFHR, to walk us through the landmarks of the Revolt in Delhi: the ruins, the battlefields, the memorials. The trigger for it was obvious: it's the 160th anniversary of the Revolt, which people variously refer to as the Indian Mutiny, Sepoy Mutiny, and First War of Indian Independence, depending on which side of the ideological or cultural spectrum they are located.

We, along with a delegation from the British High Commission, assembled outside DU vice-chancellor's residence, facing the road to Flagstaff Tower. It was a hot May morning, like the one that troubled Jim Corbett when he hunted down the Mohan man-eater. But we endured it as we were hunting for history.

In 1857, the rebel troops started killing Christians, both white and brown, once they were in the city. Europeans who managed to escape flocked towards Flagstaff Tower—our first stop.

One just has to peek inside to imagine how in this rat hole of sorts, scores of people—many of them women and children—huddled together in the searing heat, waiting for help to arrive from Meerut.

We turned left from the Flagstaff Tower into Bonta Park. A little ahead, we arrived at a 19th-century guard house, one of the two that still exist and which would have had an Indian picket when the Revolt began—Delhi was garrisoned by the 38th, 54th and 74th Bengal Native Infantry regiments.

By early June, however, the British reinforcements came and a counterattack began. Flagstaff Tower had a rebel battery by then, which rained down fire and hell on the approaching Anglo-Indian troops. "Despite the bitter animosity that existed then between the British and the rebels, the British officers were appreciative of the gunnery of the rebels. Indian guns were serviced very well, and the English noted that an Indian gunner would rather die defending his gun than give it up," Chhina said.

Some English officers also heaped praise on the rebels for orderly retreat under fire and took pride in training the men well.

The Tower was taken and it became the left flank of the British position on the Ridge; the centre of the position became the Mosque Picket, our next halt. It's actually the Chauburja Masjid or the four-domed mosque built by Sultan Ferozeshah Tughlaq in the 14th century. Chhina showed us

how it appeared to European photographer Felice Beato in 1858 while we tried to capture the mosque from the same angle as Beato did. Only one dome exists now—a sorry testament to the conservation story of modern India.

Next we went to a palace of Ferozeshah Tughlaq, which is now called Pir Ghaib but may have been the Kushk-i-Jahanuma or Kushk-i-Shikar, a hunting lodge of the Delhi sultan. Even Tamerlane may have visited it. In 1857, this was the scene of bitter fighting between rebel troops and British-led troops. The baoli right next to it is a wonder in itself with flights of stairs on all sides. English troops back in 1857 reported seeing a step well with several leafy trees near Hindu Rao's house. Only the stumps of some of those trees remain today.

Hindu Rao's house was the next halt. In June 1857, it was held by the Sirmoor battalion of the Gurkhas (later 2nd Gurkha Rifles, Indian Army and now Royal Gurkha Rifles, British Army), supported by Queen Victoria's Own Corps of Guides (now split as 2 Frontier Force and Guides Cavalry, Pakistan Army) and other British units.

On September 14, the British stormed Delhi with their full might. The Siege of Delhi ended amid mind-numbing carnage. "Passions were excited on both sides. And it was Delhi that suffered." Chhina said.

As one contemporary observer noted, Delhi became a "ghost city" with abandoned homes and bloated corpses lying all over.

Our final stop was the Mutiny Memorial on the Ridge, now called Ajitgarh or Fatehgarh. Today, it's a nationalised memorial to both Indians and the English killed during the Siege of Delhi.

"Something must be done to make these places more familiar to tourists. And these must be preserved," said Lieutenant Colonel Simon de Labilliere, the military adviser at the high commission.

### **At Aligarh village, shrine to British soldiers killed in 1857:**

(Arvind Chauhan, Times of India, Aug 9, 2015)

Shairpur (Aligarh): In a strange twist of fate, nine British soldiers who died fighting rebels in the 1857 freedom struggle near this village are now worshipped by the descendants of the villagers. The locals, who believe the souls of the nine soldiers protect them from evil spirits, have turned the memorial plaque into a shrine with lit candles, incense sticks and red sacred thread.

Nearly 121 km from Agra, in the Gangiri block of Aligarh district on its border with Kasganj, the memorial plaque at Shairpur village commemorates British cavalymen from two highly decorated regiments — the 6th Dragoon Guards, also known as the Carabiniers, and the 9th Queen's Royal Lancers, who for their participation in the events of 1857 came to be called the Delhi Spearmen.

Engraved on the plaque are their names — Captain George Wardlaw, Lieutenant John Hudson, Lieutenant Sydney Vyse, Privates Joseph Barrett, Robert Chapman, Walter Cossar and Allen Eastwood of the Carabiniers, and Privates John Dyson and Henry Frampton of the Delhi Spearmen. Surrounded by rice fields, tall shrubs and several trees including a peepal, the ramshackle memorial silently narrates the story of a bloody battle fought here on December 14, 1857.

The structure for the nine soldiers, known locally as 'Kalajar' since the war was fought near the Kaali river, has shrunk to its current size of 20 sq ft after villagers took up the surrounding land for cultivation.



However, what remains is of occult significance for locals. "On every holy occasion, local villagers, particularly women, worship this stone plaque. They tie sacraments at the peepal tree behind it, light earthen lamps and incense sticks and offer flowers to the dead soldiers' souls," said Jai Vir Singh, headmaster of the primary school at the village, just 30m from the grave. "It is certainly ironic that the descendants of the rebels who fought and killed these men offer them prayers today," Singh added.

Others assign specific powers to the dead men. "We offer prayers here as we believe the souls of these men protect our village from evil spirits. Every year, the families of these soldiers also visit our village from Britain to pay homage to their ancestors who were buried here," said Pushpender, a local villager.

BD Rana, son of the former local MLA Netram Singh, believes that the place is of historical importance and the government should take steps to conserve it. "During the Raj, this entire area was part of the Gungeree cantonment. Some five kilometres away, there is another tombstone protected by the ASI, but not much information is available on it," Rana said.

Experts, however, play down the historical significance of the site. "As the tombstone indicates, there must be a graveyard of British soldiers in the area, but that doesn't mean it is of historical significance. Scores of Britishers were killed by Indians and their bodies were buried at several places during the events of 1857," remarked MK Pundhir, medieval archaeologist from the Centre of Advance Studies in History, Aligarh Muslim University. "Worship of the tomb is a mere superstition. Since there is a peepal tree behind it, villagers over the years must have started worshipping the tombstone as well," he added.

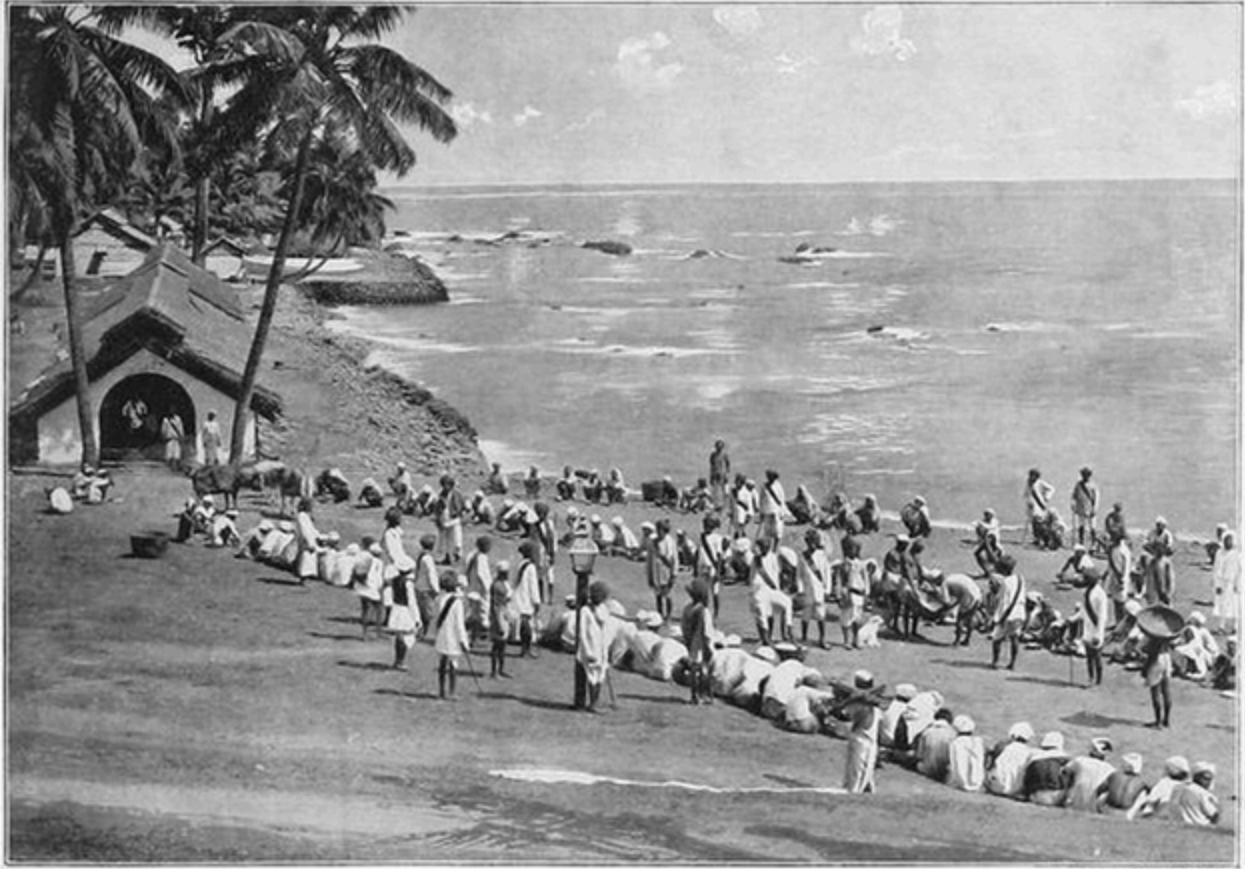
### **A battle and a betrayal:**

The Hindu, August 12, 2017

This is the story of Convict No. 276 and the Battle of Aberdeen. Fought between the Andamanese and the British, it finally pushed the tribe to extinction.



Primitive Andaman tribes



Prisoners in Andaman Islands

In April 1858, Aga, a convict gangster at the Ross Island penal settlement in the Andaman Islands shared an escape plan with his fellow prisoners incarcerated on the isolated island by the British after the 1857 rebellion.

The gangster, with his limited geographical knowledge, reasoned that once they reached the shore opposite Ross Island, it would at most be a ten-day march to Myanmar, the capital of Burma, where the convicts could seek refuge.

The plan seemed infallible and the prisoners quickly accepted it.

The great escape:

On April 23, 90 convicts boarded rafts made from felled trees bound with tent ropes and escaped Ross Island. After a two-day voyage, 40 convicts from the stations at Chatham Island and Phoenix Bay also joined them. When they landed, it was on the shores of Andaman Island, and a contingent of 130 convicts marched into the unfamiliar jungles under Aga's command.

Everything seemed in order until Aga's limited geographical knowledge was soon exposed. The convicts walked through thick jungles for 13 days with no sense of direction. Sometimes, Aga led them back to the same place they had passed days before.

Soon, they ran out of food and water. Those who could, climbed the tall and branchless trees to get some fruit resembling the Indian plum. Water, equally scarce, was only found in the form of small springs oozing from the hills. Twelve convicts succumbed to starvation and were left behind to perish.

On the 14th day, when the contingent had penetrated about four miles into the jungle, it suddenly found itself encircled by some 100 armed indigenes. The convicts did not offer any resistance but only implored mercy through signs that the indigenes completely disregarded. In no time, the entire contingent was massacred. Only a few convicts escaped, and fled into the dense surrounding jungle.

Sepoy from the mutiny:

Among these convicts was Dudhnath Tewari. A sepoy of the 14th Regiment of the Native Infantry, he had been convicted of mutiny and desertion. The Commission at Jhelum sentenced him to transportation for life and labour in irons. On April 6, 1858, Tewari was received at the British Penal Settlement at Port Blair when he arrived from Karachi. He was labelled Convict No. 276. The escape was planned less than 20 days after Tewari's arrival on Ross Island.

During the encounter with the indigenes, Tewari was hit by three arrows. He managed to escape and reach a creek, where he spent the night with two other convicts.

The next morning, a band of 60 indigenes, embarking upon canoes from the shore, spotted them. They chased them again into the jungle and shot at them. Two convicts died on the spot, but Tewari lay down and pretended to be dead.

The indigenes pulled him by the leg from his hiding place. He begged for mercy but the archer shot at him, wounding his hip and wrist. Tewari feigned death a second time, but the relentless archer pulled the arrow out from his hip and aimed another shot. Tewari pleaded again, and was surprisingly granted mercy this time.

The indigenes put Tewari into their canoe, smeared medicinal mud all over his body, and took him to the nearby Tarmugli Island.

While Tewari's survival was itself a miracle, his inclusion in the community was most unimaginable. The indigenes who had accepted him belonged to the Termugu-da sept of the Aka-Bea-da tribe—one of the ten Andamanese groups.

On the islands:

Before the British colonised the Andaman Islands, four fiercely hostile communities—the Andamanese (now called the Great Andamanese), the Jarawa, the Onge and the Sentinelese—had exclusively inhabited these remote islands.

In 1789, the British established a penal settlement on Chatham Island in the southeast Bay of Great Andaman. It was moved to the northeastern part of the island in 1792 and eventually abandoned in 1796 due to the inhospitable climate.

After the 1857 scare, the British set up a penal colony on Ross Island the next year to incarcerate Indian political prisoners. The advent of the British led to large-scale deforestation and destruction of indigenous resources.

“The Andamanese were naturally alarmed and enraged at the manner in which their country was being cleared and appropriated on all sides, and conflicts with the convicts and with the Naval Guard, in which the latter were the aggressors, only increased that alarm,” wrote Maurice Vidal Portman, the officer in charge of the Andamanese, in *A History of Our Relations with the Andamanese* (1899). The Andamanese resisted the colonisation of their islands and retaliated by undertaking numerous raids in 1858 and 1859.

The inside story:

Tewari, whom the Andamanese had admitted into their community, enjoyed their warmth. Within a couple of months, his wounds had healed completely and he was in the best of health.

Initially, the community had looked at Tewari with great suspicion, never trusting him with

weapons or permitting him to pick up a bow and arrow, even in sport. Soon, however, Tewari became an insider. He discarded clothes, shaved off his head, got used to Andamanese food habits and language, and actively participated in various indigenous ceremonies and rituals.

After four months of his stay in the community, an elderly Andamanese named Pooteah married off his 20-year-old daughter Lipa to Tewari. The Andamanese did not demand any work or role from Tewari. For a year and 24 days, he wandered with them from one island to another, coming in contact with some 15,000 indigenes who lived near the sea shores and on the banks of salt water creeks in the interior jungles.

Meanwhile, the British were aggressively expanding their base in the Andamans, which led to frequent confrontations. The Andamanese, unless resisted, refrained from attacking the convicts, who bore marks such as iron ankle rings.

They primarily targeted the authorities—the British officers, or the section, sub-division and division gangsmen who donned red turbans, badges and coloured belts.

The Andamanese undertook three major raids in 1859. On April 6, 200 armed indigenes raided 248 convicts who were clearing the jungle at Haddo, on the mainland opposite Chatham Island; on April 14, about 1,500 Andamanese attacked the convicts at Andaman; and on May 17, a large number of indigenes attempted a well-organised raid on the Aberdeen convict station, on the south of Port Blair, with the aim to exterminate the British.

The Quisling:

The last raid, known as the Battle of Aberdeen, proved devastating for the Andamanese. Tewari, who had now spent a little more than a year with the community, had enough information about the attack being planned by the indigenes. He travelled with the attacking party along the coast and forewarned the superintendent of the penal settlement.

When the Andamanese warriors faced the pre-warned British soldiers, it was an unequal battle.

The former fought with knives, axes, bows and arrows against a larger and well-armed enemy. While the British suffered hardly any losses, a large number of the Andamanese were annihilated in a single day.

“The Battle of Aberdeen was the most serious collision with the Andamanese... None of the convicts were wounded, but several of the savages are supposed to have been... Had not Dr. Walker received notice regarding it from Life Convict Dudhnath Tewari, No. 276... who had become cognizant of the arrangements for the fight which had been arranged in detail for some time previously, very serious damage might have been caused,” wrote Portman.

The aftermath:

The battle was to prove decisive. It quelled organised resistance from the Andamanese forever, and established the colonial Empire firmly in these remote islands. The British obtained a first-hand and rare account of Andamanese society from Tewari, which helped them to contain a hostile community and further expand their penal colony.

The British set up the ‘Andamanese Homes’, where the Andamanese were kept and provided medicines and free rations such as sugar, rice, tea and tobacco. The islanders were also deployed to capture runaway convicts and protect the settlement against other hostile indigenes.

Soon, the Andamanese were overtaken by alien diseases, with outbreaks of syphilis and measles in 1870 and 1877.

Measles alone wiped out half of them, their population diminishing sharply from 3,500 in 1858 to 2,000 in 1888 and 625 in 1901. Their numbers kept dwindling—455 (1911), 209 (1921) and 90 (1931).

After independence in 1947, a large number of refugees and migrants were also sent to the Andamans for resettlement, which pushed the native community to the margins. In 1949, the entire community was relocated to the tiny Bluff Island, after which their population declined to 23 in 1951 and reached an all-time low of 19 in 1961.

In 1969, they were again relocated, this time to the slightly bigger Strait Island, where they now live on government doles.

The Andamanese are today listed as a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group. In 2013, their population was recorded at 57, a large portion of which, however, is mixed race. Within less than two centuries of their contact with outsiders, the once strong and assertive Andamanese had been fully subdued and pushed to the verge of extinction.

A memorial:

While the Battle of Aberdeen is yet to receive due mention in history of indigenous resistance, there is a memorial in Port Blair that commemorates it. 'This monument is built in the memory of those Andamanese aborigines who bravely fought the Battle of Aberdeen in May 1859 against the oppressive and retaliatory policy of the British regime,' reads the inscription. Every year on May 17, islanders visit the memorial to pay tribute to the Andamanese warriors who, with simple bows and arrows, took on the largest empire of all time.

Postscript:

For his 'good service' to the British Empire, Convict No. 276 was granted pardon on October 5, 1860, and sent home. In December 1866, Tewari was sailing from Calcutta to Rangoon with Major Wroughton, and the ship halted at Port Blair.

The officer in charge of the Andamanese, one Mr. Homfray, took Tewari to the Andamanese Home in great excitement. The indigenes immediately recognised the familiar face of Convict No. 276.

The women abused him for deserting Lipa, who had been in her final stages of pregnancy and later had a miscarriage.

Tewari remained unmoved. He made no move to meet his wife. Since her husband was alive, Andamanese men too did not approach Lipa.

The community changed her title to 'Modo Lipa', signifying a 'deserted bride' or a woman who has lost her husband while still young and without children.

**AAPstaged PM must heed a Mughal prince:** (Mughal history – interesting anecdote)

(Gurcharan Das, Times of India, February 15, 2015)

Note: Gurcharan Das was the former CEO of Procter & Gamble India. He was VP & MD, P&G Worldwide.

On the fateful day that the Aam Aadmi Party won a stunning victory in Delhi's state election, I was captivated by the tragedy of 'Dara', a superb play by Pakistani writer Shaheed Nadeem, which opened recently at the National Theatre in London. Schoolchildren across India know all about the murderous rivalry between Aurangzeb and Dara Shikoh for the Mughal throne but this play is not only about a war of succession; it is about what India was, what it became, and what it might have been. It speaks to us today and offers some sobering advice both to unhappy Pakistan and to Prime Minister Modi, including how to avoid shocking reverses such as the one delivered by Delhi's voters this week.

There are turning points in human history. One of the most poignant in India's history was the beheading of the Mughal emperor Shah Jahan's eldest son and heir-apparent, Dara Shikoh. Ever since then Indians have been haunted by the tantalizing question: what would have been the course of our history had Dara become emperor instead of his orthodox and intolerant younger brother, Aurangzeb? The seeds of the violent partition of India in 1947 — carried out with disgraceful lack of responsibility by the last viceroy of India, Lord Mountbatten — were planted by events in Dara's life, which led to the greatest mass migration in human history.

'Dara' is not only about the past. Like all great historical plays, it is about our present. While Londoners were drawing parallels with Islamic extremism of the IS in Syria, I was thinking about Mohan Bhagwat and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh's project to convert India into a 'Hindu rashtra'. Whereas Modi, like Dara, wants to rule India for all Indians, Bhagwat wants to change India into ill-fated Pakistan. All of the RSS, indeed the entire Sangh Parivar, should see this play.

No one quite understands the tsunami unleashed in Delhi by AAP, least of all Arvind Kejriwal. It is certainly a victory for India's fickle democracy. But the nub is how will politicians interpret it. Prime Minister Modi should not learn the wrong lessons. It is not a negative verdict on his development and reform agenda — he should resist the temptation to turn populist. Instead, it is a rejection of the Sangh Parivar's divisive politics. The magnitude of AAP's victory suggests that many Delhi voters (especially the minorities), who had voted for Modi in May, deserted the BJP now. Hence, Modi needs to heed Dara.

Dara Shikoh (1615-1659) was a gentle Sufi intellectual, who believed that the search for God is the same for everyone and devoted his life to synthesizing Vedantic and Islamic spirituality. Thinking that the 'hidden book' in the Quran, 'Kitab al-Maknun', is in fact the Upanishads, he learned Sanskrit and translated the Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita, and Yoga Vasishtha into Persian with the help of the pundits of Banaras. Following in Akbar's footsteps, he cultivated the Sikh guru, Har Rai, and was invited to lay the foundation stone of the Golden Temple in Amritsar. All this did not go well with the orthodox bigot Aurangzeb, who declared Dara a threat to public peace and a traitor to Islam. And so, Dara was put to death and Aurangzeb succeeded to the throne to establish a harsh Sharia rule over an overwhelmingly non-Muslim India. Ironically, today it is Aurangzeb — the killer of his brothers, nephews, and his own children — who is a Muslim hero in Pakistani history while Dara has been reduced to a footnote. Fortunately, liberal writers both in Pakistan and India keep his wonderful legacy alive by coming up with a new play or a book on his life every few years.

In a couple of weeks the government will announce its budget and we shall find out the sort of lessons that Modi has drawn from AAP's victory. It would be a shame if he saw it as a victory for giveaways and handouts, and backs off from the difficult path of reforms and infrastructure building — the only sure way to create jobs and secure India's economic future. If he does not want another repeat of what happened in Delhi, he must muzzle the Hindu right, teaching it not to emulate the intolerant, fanatical Aurangzeb but to be inspired by Dara's idea of India.

**Note:**

### **Who were the Mughals?**

The Mughals were a Sunni Islamic dynasty that ruled Northern and Central India from 1526 to 1858. The early Mughal emperors successfully ruled the largely non-Muslim population of their empire by encouraging a culture of religious tolerance. Jahangir and his father Akbar promoted

Hindus and Shi'ite Muslims to prominent roles in government and allowed people to worship freely. The first Mughal emperor, Babur, conquered northern India in AD 1526 and was descended from Genghis Khan and Tamerlane.

## **FRENCH REGIMENT IS BACK IN INDIA AFTER 232 YEARS**

Manimugdha S Sharma, Times of India, Jan 27, 2016

NEW DELHI: As the 124-member French military contingent marched down Rajpath amid loud cheers, they became the first foreign soldiers to take part in the Republic Day parade. But here's a fascinating fact — the moment brought the French Army, Indian Army, Pakistan Army, Tipu Sultan and the Swedish monarchy on the same side of history for the first time.

The French marching contingent included 76 personnel from the 35th Infantry Regiment of the French Army (35e regiment d'infanterie). This regiment had served in India from 1781 to 1784 in its previous avatar as the 35 Aquitaine Regiment. As part of the Franco-Mysore alliance, it took part in the Second Anglo-Mysore War (1780-84), fought between the forces of the East India Company and the kingdom of Mysore under Hyder Ali and his son Tipu Sultan. The war ran parallel to the American Revolutionary War where the English were fighting their American colonies that were supported by the French.

During the war, Hyder Ali died and Tipu Sultan was forced to retreat to his capital in March 1783 when the Bombay Army invaded Mysore. The British decided to seize the opportunity to retake Cuddalore, which had been seized by Hyder from them earlier. The English advanced on Cuddalore with 1,600 European troops and 8,000 Indian troops and were joined by 1,000 cavalry of the Nawab of Arcot. Facing them were nearly 12,000 French and Indian troops, including 2,000 cavalry left behind by Tipu, under the command of Marquis de Bussy.

On June 25, 1783, the French tried to dislodge the British. At 3pm, the Aquitaine Regiment exchanged musket volleys with British and Indian troops and then conducted a bayonet charge. Facing this charge were Indian troops of the 24th Bengal Native Infantry and Madras Army. The charge was repulsed and the French withdrew with 450 men killed or wounded and 150 taken prisoners. Among those captured was Chevalier de Damas, who led the charge, and a young wounded soldier, Jean Baptiste de Bernadotte who later became a marshal in Napoleonic France and eventually became the king of Sweden. Interestingly, the House of Bernadotte still rules Sweden.

Meanwhile, the gallant action of the Indians was acknowledged and praised in England. "It was held as equally singular and extraordinary that the 24th battalion of the Bengal Sepoys, with another belonging to Madras, fought some of the oldest and best troops of France with the bayonet, and foiled them at that favourite European weapon, which is supposed to be the most trying test of the firmness and excellence of soldiers. It will probably then afford no small satisfaction to many who read this narrative, to be informed, that the general, in his address of thanks to the army, gave an assurance to those brave sepoy, that he would recommend their distinguished services to the governments of Bengal and Madras, that they, and their families, should be ever supported and rewarded according to their merit," reported the Annual Register of 1783 edited by none other than Edmund Burke.

The 24th Bengal Native Infantry later mutinied in 1857 and was disbanded, only to be re-raised in 1861. Today, it continues as the 6 Punjab Regiment of Pakistan Army.



The Aquitaine Regiment was withdrawn in 1784, while Mysore itself fell in 1799. Tipu's cavalry, which aided the French, later became the Mysore Lancers. After Independence, the Mysore, Gwalior and Jodhpur lancers were amalgamated into 61 Cavalry. On Tuesday, they marched immediately behind the French troops, as if it were a tribute to their former allies. Further back marched the brass band of the Madras Regimental Centre, the former nemesis of the French.