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GHALIB AND THE REVOLT OF 1857

THE ORTHODOX HISTORIAN may have heard of Ghalib (Mirza Asadullah Khan) as a celebrated Urdu poet but not as a fellow historian who was commissioned by Bahadur Shah to write the official history of the Moghul dynasty. In any case, he is probably unaware of the fact that the great national poet not only chose to live in Delhi under the rule of the rebels but also kept a diary of day to day events of this memorable period in Persian, entitled *Dastambo*. The entries in this diary begin with the arrival of the Meerut Sowars on May 11, 1857, and go up to September 20 when the British troops succeeded in overpowering the resistance of popular forces in Delhi. In some respects, this diary covers the developments up to the fall of Lucknow (July 1853).

What actually prompted the author to compose this unique document is not very celear.[1] But in any case, it saw the light of day after the British were in full possession of Delhi. and we shall not be very far wrong in assuming that the original was suitably revised to meet the requirements of the situation. As it now stands, the record of events in Ghalib's diary is all too brief and does not mention some important matters which were common knowledge. It is particularly inadequate in its treatment of all significant

49. July 26, 1857.
50. December 6, 1857.
51. October 11, 1857.
52. Ibid.
53. See *Ernest Jones: Chartist.* Selections from the writings and speeches of Ernest Jones with introduction and notes by John Savile.
54. *People's Paper,* May 7, 14, 21, 28; June 11, 18; July 2, 1853.
55. Ibid., August 15, 1857.
56. Ibid., December 19, 1857.
57. Ibid., January 23, 1857.
58. Ibid., April 10, 1858.
59. W.E. Adams, *Memoirs*, vol. II, p. 230, quoted by Saville, *op. cit.*

22. Morely, *op. cit.*, p. 208.
23. G.M. Trevelyan, *Life of John Bright*, p. 261.
24. F.D. Maurice, *op. cit.*, p. 11.
25. House of Commons, July 27, 1857.
26. January 29, 1858.
27. February 4, 1858.
28. August 6, 1857.
29. September 29; October 5; October 7, 1857.
30. October 6, 1857.
31. October 8, 1857.
32. September 5, 1857.
33. July 17; August 7; October 23, 1857.
34. June 27; June 30; July 27, 1857.
35. *The Times,* November 2, 1857.
36. Penrith, October 29, 1857.
37. *Weekly Despatch*, August 23, 1857.
38. Jne 29, 1857.
39. July 1, 1857.
40. November 20, 1857.
41. *Weekly Despatch*, July 26, 1857.
42. House of Commons, July 27, 1857.
43, Queen Victoria to King Leopold, September 2, 1857.
44. Queen Victoria to Lord Panmure, June 29, 1857.
45. Lord Canning to Queen Victoria, July 4, 1857.
46. Prince Albert to Prince Wilhelm of Prussia, July 26, 1857.
47. *The Times,* August 19, 1857.
48. *London Commonweal*, March 1, 1885.

NOTES

1. Entry, May 1, 1857.
2. December 2, 1857.
3. October 7, 1857.
4. October 8, 1857.
5. John Morley, *Life of Cobden*, vol. II, p. 205. Letter to Ashworth. October 16, 1857.
6. *Charles Kingsley: His letters and memoir of his life*, ed. by his wife, vol. II, pp. 34-5. Kingsley to Maurice, September 3, 1857.
7. September 21, 1857.
8. Ibid.
9. F.D. Maurice, *The Indian Crisis: Five Sermons*, p. 10.
10. J.M. Ludlow, *Thoughts on the Policy of the Crown towards India*, 1859, p. viii.
11. Morley, op. cit.
12. S. Macoby, *English Radicalism*, vol. 2, p. 356.
13. August 23, 1857.
14. October 7, 1857.
15. October 9, 1857.
16. September 16, 1857.
17. *Greville Diary*, ed., Philip Witwell Wison, vol. II, p. 563.
18. Wimborne, October 30, 1857.
19. *The Times* January 7; February 4, 1858.
20. Derek Hudson, *Martin Tupper: His Rise and Fall*, p. 185.
21. Ibid., p. 186. Shaftesbury to Tupper, November 10, 1857.

collaboration with its masters, picking up the crumbs which fell from their well-laden tables as they exploited half the world: the Indian people were to pass through nearly a century of foreign rule before obtaining independence. It is worth recalling in this centenary year of the revolt that the voice of the British working class was not silent in the hour of agony and defeat.

residents there, for they do not settle, but merely go to get what they can out of the poverty of the people."

Jones not only wrote articles. He addressed meetings On August 12, 1857, he spoke at "one f the largest meetings ever held in St. George's Hall, London."[55] In December, he spoke at St. Martin's Hall. "Let it not be supposed for one moment," he said, "that he sanctioned the mode by which our Indian rule had been acquired, or the conduct by which it had been retained. He considered it from beginning to end one of the blackest crimes in the annals of a civilised country."[56] In January, 1858, he spoke at a meeting at the London Tavern, at which the old Chartist, John Frost, was refused a hearing when he said that "if they took the power out of the hands of the East India Company and gave it to the Government they would put it in the hands of much worse men."[57] He also spoke at Birmingham in April, 1858,[58] and there were open-air meetings in Copenhagen Fields, the site of the present Smithfield Meet Market, of which a memory has been recorded. "I walked from a distant part of London, through miles of streets to hear him. It was during the Indian Mutiny. The old fervour and the old eloquence were still to be noted. But the pinched face and the threadbare garments told of trial and suffering. A shabby coat buttoned close round the throat seemed to conceal the poverty which a too faithful adherence to a lost cause had reduced him."[59]

The cause was not lost, only temporarily defeated. The British working class was to pass through a period of

golden link of sympathy is snapped asunder—blood and steel can never more unite what bad government, what cruelty and extortion have separated by a gulf as wide as that now yawning between England and her Asiatic Empire." On June 19 he repeated his contention that "the entire people is against us."

The later stage of the revolt coincided with increasing financial difficulties for the *People's Paper.* In June, 1858, it succumbed and although Jones, for a time, had a platform in the succeeding *London News* this paper was always in difficulties, became a far less militant paper and soon petered out altogether. It contained, however, some articles by Jones in defence of the Indian people. His last article appeared on August 15, 1858, when he dealt with the new situation of India under the India Bill, which transferred responsibility for its management from the Company to Parliament. Formerly the Company, he pointed out, stood between India and public oponin. "All this, however, is now changed, at least in hypothesis, and practically also. There is no doubt that public opinion, if intelligently and energetically exercised, may now make itself much more powerfully felt than ever it has before in the affairs of India. But will it do so? Will the great body of people recognise and appreciate the responsibility they have incurred?" Careful study and eternal vigilance would be needed. The first step was "to stop the system of sanguinary and indiscriminate severity practised on the natives of India, or rather we should say the English

remember that we tore them from possession of their land; they remember that a nation of freeholders had the soil confiscated and were forced to rent from us what had been theirs in fee simple from immemorial time. They remember that their lands were taxed, beyond the power of payment; that then they were forced to mortgage their implements of husbandry; again to dispose of their seed corn, and thus made beggars, to pay the dues exacted by the British Government. They remember that then, when agriculture became impossible, they sought to relinquish their farms, because they were unable to cultivate them, but were actually compelled to pay taxes for the land they never tilled. When unable to borrow the amount from friends, they remember how they were tortured—how they were hung by the soles of their feet in the burning heat of day; or by the hair of the head with stones attached to their legs; how wedges of sharp wood were forced up their nails—how father and son were tied together and lashed at the same time, that the sufferings of the one might aggravate the pain of the other; how the women were flogged—how scorpions were tied to the breasts of the latter, and red chilly forced into their eyes. They remember these things as proved in the Madras Petition in the Government commissioners' reports and in the British House of Lords and Commons. They remember how a police was let loose upon them, so badly paid, that they had to support themselves by robbery; they , the guardians of law forced to be thieves—and that this system was connived at.... by the British Government." On June 12 he wrote that "the

Such an act a Nero never surpassed. It is a destruction of the human body which Churchmen tell us is made in the image of the Deity!"

On October 31 he again dealt with the question of the "atrocities," saying that "the conduct of the 'rebels' throughout the mutiny has been in strict and consistent accordance with the example of their civilised governors."

On November 14 he made a fresh "acknowledgement of the heroic bravery of the Hindhu force." On November 21 he pointed out that "blood breeds blood and cruelty begets cruelty." On December 5 he tried to persuade his readers that they need not yet despair of the Hindu cause, but his hopes of a successful blow against British imperialism was now beginning to fade. His references to the revolt became less frequent.* On April 3, 1858, he wrote of "the final struggle between Indian patriotism and British aggression," but his reference on April 10 to his hope for the "success of our Hindhu brethren" was based on future and not immediate prospects. "At some not far distant period," he wrote, "the development of Indian greatness will be found most consistent with India's freedom from British rule, and its thorough, uncontrolled and unshackled independence." On May 1, he declared that "India is lost to England" whatever the result of the revolt, and on May 8, he wrote that "If we want to reconquer India, we must do so with the olive, as much as with the sword. The people remember the past and, as far as we are concerned, dread the future. They

* He was also preoccupied with organising a Chartist Conference.

that now proposed for the Anglo-Indians, and referred to the large sums provided for the royal family and their marriages. "Just consider these princely magnificent fortunes with the starving lot bequeathed to the unfortunate decayed tradesmen of this country—the proletarian poor. Think, thrown into a bastille called a union-house, man and wife parted as soon as they enter, young children sent miles away, fed on skilly and weak broth, not fit for human food, according to reports from St. Pancras workhouse last week." He concluded with an appeal to the working men to keep their money for political activity. "Look at home—look to your own interests—subscribe and organise."

On October 19 he dealt with the "atrocities," expressing his belief that they were "fearfully exaggerated." But "even if they were proved.... they must remember they had heard only one side," and they should recollect the British record in the American War of Independence when we "employed Indians and paid those Indians a fixed sum for every scalp of man, woman or child, they brought into the British camp....well knowing by what horrid torture the miserable victims had been put to death. That was not an act of the dark ages but perpetrated even within the memory of living man," and he pointed out that the "British in India... have invented a mode of death so horrible that humanity shudders at the thought. They, the merciful Christians... have hit on the refined expedient of tying living men to the mouths of cannons, and then firing them off, blowing them to atoms, scattering a rain of blood—a shower of quivering fragments of human flesh and intestines on the bystanders.

right and truth is truth.' The Hindhus have right on their side—be victory on their side as well. The English people are great and mighty enough to be just and consistent in their aspirations and acts."

On October 3 Jones wrote sarcastically on the forthcoming National Day of Fast and Intercession.* "The fast day was nothing better than a hypocritical solemnity only calculated to pinch the stomachs and bare the cupboards of the poor." He commented on the fact that the railway companies "announce excursion trains would run the same as on Sundays" thus giving the people the choice of "Spurgeon at the Crystal Palace or a trip to Greenwich." This issue also contained a letter over the signature "Time Tries All," which appears to have been written by Jones. It dealt with the Relief Fund in aid of the British victims of the revolt. "I emphatically declare it would be a crime on the part of the working man if he were to subscribe a single farthing on their behalf—you have no voice and interest in the diabolical system of plunder and deceit so treacherously carried on by a company of self-interested imbeciles and land sharks; let the subscriptions be confined to those who hold Indian scrip—Indian bonds—to those who have profited by the Indian invasion and robbery." He contrasted the treatment of the sufferers from the Crimean War with

* "The day was wet and dreary, and the labouring classes the only people who really fasted—not willingly but because they could not that day earn their daily bread—wandered disconsolately about the streets giving vent to exclamations that were exactly the opposite of prayer" (*Newcastle Chronicle*, October 9, 1857).

the commercial outlook. "The expenses of putting down the Revolt would came from taxes—from the pockets of the English working classes." He asked: "Have the English working classes an interest in the payment of that money? Have they ever gained one iota of our Indian rule? Not they. Then who have been the gainers? The aristocrats and plutocrats—the landlords and the moneylords—the young scions of the aristocracy who there learnt in the school of cruelty and lust of rapine and extortion .... Have we not impoverished India since it belonged to England, ruined it, beggar'd it? What would the commerce, what would the market of India have been, had we traded there as a friendly power with friendly independent powers?"

In this article he also asked in a reference to atrocity stories: "Who is the torturer?" He quoted from an Irish newspaper evidence from the Commission for the investigation of alleged cause of torture at Madras, 1855.

On September 19 he answered suggestions that his attitude might be mistaken. "Democracy," he replied, "must be consistent. God is doubtlessly and man should be undeniably on the side of right and justice. No man can say: 'I am for Hungary and against India.' If he does he lies against himself, against principle, against truth, against honour. If it is 'un-English' to be on the side of the Hindhus, it is more'un-English' to be on the side of tyranny, cruelty, oppression and invasion.... It is time that England change—or rather that England make her veritable voice be heard—the voice of the English people—and cry: 'right is

attention as they were a fine body of men. They have recently returned from India, having enlisted under the warrant for ten years' service, and therefore they claimed their free discharge, and notwithstanding the inducements held out to them, by the bounty of £2 and a new kit, they declined having anything more to do with the service."

On August 29, Jones made another survey of the military position. He was still hoping the revolt might be successful. He pointed out the effects of the struggle on "a highly artificial state of society which depends on credit, and wherein depends on quiet and security." Other nations would threaten British commercial supremacy and, "as an unavoidable result, dear food, low wages, and distress among the producing classes are the infallible sequence."

On September 5 he repeated that the revolt was 'one of the most just, noble and necessary ever attempted in the history of the world... The wonder is, not that one hundred and seventy million of people should now rise in part –the wonder is that they should ever have submitted at all. They would not, had they not been betrayed by their own princes, who sold each other to the alien... Thus Kings, princes and aristocracies have ever proven the enemies and curses of every land that harboured them in every age." He emphasised that the English working people should have, "sympathy... for their Hindu brethren. Their cause is yours—their success indirectly yours as well."

On September 12 he referred to "short time" as a result of the events in India, and made gloomy forecasts of

covered himself against these sanguine views by warning that "the insurgents may quarrel among each other; they may display unexpected imbecility of conduct... Of one thing we are certain—that whether this insurrection be suppressed or not, it is the precursor to our loss of India...Our advice is.... recognize the independence of the Indian race... One hundred years (ago) .... a foreign tribe, the pedlars of the earth, the merchant-robbers of Leaden-hall Street, stole on a false pretence into the heart of this mighty galaxy of empires and robbed it of its jewel—independence.... Within that reign of 100 years a millenium of guilt has been compressed." He admitted that atrocities might have been committed by the rebels, but emphasised the provocation and recalled British military slaughters during the Peninsular War. "Did *The Times* inveigh then? No, not with a single word." He warned against the plan to "cast all blame" of Indian misrule on the East India Company. "To abolish the Company and substitute the Home Government is but substituting one plunderer for another." He declared again that "The Hindu cause is just—the Hindu cause is noble... God save the Hindu cause." He listed reprisals described by *The Times* and commented: "There is a specimen of Christianity and civilization. Let none talk of Indian cruelty after this."

This same issue of the *People's Paper* also contained an interesting reflection of the attitude of the working class to the revolt. "About 200 non-commissioned officers and privates... marching through the towns of Chatham and Rochester... occasioned a great deal of

now prevailing in the stock market, in the face of the uninterrupted augmentation in the Bank bullion and the prospect of a great harvest, is almost unprecedented. The anxiety with regard to India overpowers all other considerations, and if any serious news were to arrive tomorrow, before the conclusion of the settlement, it would probably produce a panic." He also drew attention to the reception of the Queen of Oudh by Queen Victoria. "Why was an audience refused before? Because it was said the Queen of Oudh had been guilty of certain little peccadilloes, which shocked the tender morality of Buckingham Palace. Now the dethroned Queen is received, the moral scruples go to the winds and the dusky royalty hob-nobs with the pallid. The real state of the case is: money-jobbers had robbed a royal house of its inheritance (as vilely gotten as it was vilely inherited), and the sovereign of the money-jobbers' land, of course, sets her face against the Indian Queen, Now the money-jobbers stand a fair chance of being driven out of their spoil and, accordingly, the Queen is induced to conciliate the royal wanderer, as the robbers hope she may be made an instrument and a tool."

On August 1, Jones wrote that "The revolt turns out to be, as we assured our readers from the commencement, not a military mutiny but a national insurrection," and he wrote hopefully that it appeared to show signs of careful preparation. "Is this merely 'a war with a monarch' such as we have had many of? Far from it, this is a war with a people and one embracing greater numbers than any we have ever yet had warlike arbitration within India." He

while in prison in 1851 had composed a long poem *The Revolt of Hindostan or The New World*, which was reissued when the revolt occurred. In its preface Jones makes his celebrated amendment to the Imperial slogan: "The British Empire on which the sun never sets." "On its colonies," he wrote, "the sun never sets, but the blood never dries."

Jones was now almost alone in carrying on the militant tradition of the Chartists. Soon he would himself give up the struggle and make his peace with the bourgeoisie. His last fight—for the people of India—was a magnificent climax to his revolutionary career.

On July 4, Jones opened his campaign. "A policy of Justice and conciliation might have long postponed the final rising of the men of Hindostan," he declared, and he warned: ".... You working men of England will be called on to bleed and pay for the maintenance of one of the most iniquitous usurpations that ever disgraced the annals of humanity. Englishmen! The Hindus are now fighting for all most sacred to men. The cause of the Poles, the Hungarians, the Italians, the Irish, was not more just and holy...you men of England will be called on to spend you blood and treasure in crushing one of the noblest movements the world has ever known... Fellow countrymen! You have something better to do than helping to crush the liberties of others—that is, to struggle for your own."

On July 11, he referred hopefully to signs of fear among the ruling class. *The Times* City page had contained an alarmed comment: "A continued depression like that

majority of the persons, in their discourses, were warlike and revengeful; they asked for blood and money, but said very little about mercy." Particular reference was made to "Mountebank Spurgeon," the non-conformist spell-binder who preached to over 20,000 people in the Crystal Palace, all of whom had paid for the performance. "Spurgeon preached blood and, in order to excite the passions of his congregation, perverted fact and ignored history. He told them that the sepoys were rebels not patriots because they had voluntarily surrendered their liberties into the keeping of the English! Yes! they surrendered their liberties in the same fashion as a traveller does his purse with the highwayman's pistol levelled at him."[51] The denunciation was uncompromising, but it is also true that *Reynold's* was now beginning to succumb to the infection of imperialism. It was concerned with retaining India by reforming British management. "India will never be quieted and safe in our hands, unless we alter our policy of rapine, annexation and cruelty—and by letting the natives have a guarantee of mercy and justice in the future, disarm the frenzy of their despair and the resentment of the present. India may be a vast field for British enterprise and trade—if retained by England and the native population—and therefore it behoves the British people to see that no vile mismanagement and aristocratic guilt lose the last opportunity we have of retaining the golden garden of the east."[52]

Ernest Jones[53] had long been interested in India. He had written a series of newspaper articles in 1853,[54] and