

The Power structure of Shāhābād government in the 1857 rebellion

by Nobuko NAGASAKI

Many arguments have been made as to the character of the 1857 rebellion. When we consider it not a military disturbance but a national rebellion, Shāhābād where sipāhī and village inhabitants are united very tightly may stand as its typical example.

The present thesis tries to study the process of national rebellion through examination of the relations between sipāhī and village inhabitants.

Most of sipāhī of Bengal Army stationed at Shāhābād were Bhōj-pūrī speaking Rajputs from the said area. The area had been selected as the arena of native industry development, especially that of indigo, by British land holders with British capital. The local landholders of the area, however, were zamindars of old tradition, most of whom had been indebted heavily as the result of British land revenue policy, penetrating commodity economy and price hike.

Against such a background, anti-British consciousness was gradually established among the people. Kunwar Singh was one of those debt-stricken Zamindars. It was quite natural, therefore, that sipāhī established the Shāhābād government, led by Kunwar Singh, along with village inhabitants, when they revolted against the British.

The rebel government of Shāhābād was ousted by the British, but came back in power to rule the area in April 1858. The government collected land revenues from Raiyats, embarked upon land settlement and sold the estates of the pro-British zamindars. The government was supported by many small zamindars.

The community consciousness on the part of village inhabitants and sipāhī supported and strengthened the unity among them. There-

fore, the strenuous anti-British movement of the area did not spread to the rest of the country on the same basis, and Kunwar Singh who fought at many battlegrounds had no choice but to come back to his own country.