By M.M. Munshi

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

Contradictory comments on the story of Mangal Pandey in the film have been reported by the media, for which we it was the holy love for their religions and country that inspired the heroes of the war of 1857.

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

Mangal Pandey, the martyr

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

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

We have not sufficiently recognized the skill of the leaders like Nana Sahib Peshwa, Movic Ahmad Shah, Kumar Singh, Tanilra Topa, Aim Ulah Khan, Ali Naik Khan, Rani of Jhansi and others who preferred the noble organization under the veryrose of British Officials in India and successfully taught mutual and united action to the Hindus and Muslims and infused the revolutionary spirit among all classes of people, sepoys, police, civil officials, zamindars peasants and others without letting the British have much suspicion of the impending upheaval.

Just when this conspiracy was going on the East India Company began to
sepoys (Indian Soldiers) in Bengal. It appeared that first issue would be made on 19th native infantry regiment of Ben-
gal Presidency Army. Of all the regiments located in Bengal, the 34th native infantry was most anxious to start the
rebellion. The regiment being stationed at Barrakpore, Wazir Ali Khan, who stayed near Calcutta had bound the
whole regiment by Oaths in favour of uprising. Some sepoys of the 34th regi-
ment had brought the whole of 19th regi-
mant to their side. The British had hard-
ly any idea of this and decided to issue
the greased cartridges first to the 19th regiment on an experimental basis. But
this regiment boldly refused to accept the
new cartridges and made clear their
intention of drawing their weapons if nec-
essary. The British had to quietly swallow
the insult, as hardly any white troops
were available in the province of Bengal
to suppress the sepoys. Consequently
white troops were moved from Burma and
other places to Calcutta and orders
were issued for the disbandment of the
19th regiment at Barrakpore for 29th
March 1857. But the 34th regiment was
in no mood to see the 19th regiment
being disbanded on the parade ground.
Men of the 19th and 34th regiments
wanted to give up the service of the East
India Company. Hence all the sepoys
thought it best that the Company itself
disband the 19th. The rebel leaders
counselled patience for one month until
all other regiments were consulted and a
single day fixed. But Mangal Pandey’s
sword would not stay in the sheath.
Mangal Pandey was a Kankuja Brahmin by birth from a small village
Nagwa in east UP, had taken the duties of a Kshatriya and was a valiant young sol-
der and undaunted in battle but pure in his
private life. The love of his religion and
country had entered and electrified his
blood. The idea that his brethren would be
insulted before him on the Parade
Ground that day fired his emotions, he
began to insist that his own regiment the
34th should rise on that very day. When
the leaders of the conspiracy did not give
their consent, the young soldier’s spirit
became uncontrollable. He seized and
loaded a weapon and ran on the Parade
Ground shouting “Rise brethren, rise!
Why do you hold back, come and rise,
come and rise and bind you by the oath
of your religion” with such words he
called upon the fellow soldiers to follow
him. When sergent major Hughson saw
this, he ordered the sepoys to arrest
Mangal Pandey. Not a single sepoys
moved to arrest or ever power him and a
shot from Pandey’s weapon killed the
sergent major. Suddenly, Lieutenant
Baugh came on a prancing horse, anoth-
er bullet from Pandey struck the horse
and brought the horse as well the rider to
the ground. While Pandey was reloading
aiming his pistol at Pandey who drew his
sword. Bagh fired but missed his mark,
he also drew his sword but before he
could use it Pandey struck him down.
While another white soldier was attack-
ing Pandey, a sepoy smashed his head
with firearm, a shout rose among the
sepoys “Do no touch Mangal Pandey”.
Immediately Col. Wheeler came and
ordered Mangal Pandey’s arrest. Anoth-
er shout rose in chorus from the sepoys
“We will not touch the hair of this Bra-
man. Col. Wheeler seeing the blood of
Whiteman and mood of Sepoy’s gal-
loped to the residence of the General
Hearsay. On the parade ground Panday
continued waving his hands and shout-
ing “Rise brethren, rise” When General
Hearsay hurriedly collected White sol-
diers and Officers and rode hastily
towards Mangal Pandey. Seeing that he
would fall into the hands of White Sol-
diers, Mangal Pandey shot himself
preferring death than to falling into the
hands of white men and lay wounded on
the parade ground. The wounded soldier
was overpowered and taken to hospital.
He survived and was tried in a court of
law, he was condemned to be hanged.
During the enquiry, he utterly refused to
reveal the names of conspirators. He
also said that he had no personal ill will
against the officers he killed. His sword
came out of its sheath to defend his reli-
gion, honour of his brethren and country.
The 8th of April was fixed the day for his
execution.

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

This was the first skirmish and so
ended the first martyr of the rebellion, Man-
gal Pandey was gone but his spirit
spread throughout the rank of the Bengal
Presidency Army from Barrakpore to as
far as Ambala, Mullan and Peshawar, he
gave not only his life but his name to the
rebellion. According to Lord Roberts
“Pandey’s name was the origin of
sepoys who joined India’s first war of
Independence in 1857 being called
Pandeys (Lord Robert-Forty one years
in India”).

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