The Trial of Bahadur Shah Zafar

Red Fort, Delhi-1858

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"Not a word came from his lips, in silence he sat day and night with eyes cast on the ground, and as though utterly oblivious of the conditions in which he was placed.."

An English lawyer in an English court of justice might show that it would be very difficult for our government to draw an indictment against the King of Delhi for treason, for levying of war against us as lords paramount...."

--Willliam Howard Russel, The Times correspondent.

After a four-month siege of Delhi during the Sepoy Mutiny, the city had been recaptured by the British in September 1857. Russel, from the Times newspaper in London was visiting Delhi at the time of the trial at the Red Fort of the last of the Great Mughals. He was taken through "a dark and dingy back passage" of the fort to see Bahadur Shah Zafar, who was detained in a small cell, accused of being the mastermind of the uprising. He wondered whether the old and feeble man with dim eyes could conceive the vast plan of restoring a great empire and fomenting the most gigantic mutiny in the history of the world.



Bahadur Shah Zafar-1854

William Dalrymple's book, "The Last Mughal" published in 2007, gives a detailed and vivid account of the Mutiny-city by city and battle by battle. He exposes the weaknesses of the rebels and treacheries by some of them, the vacillation of Bahadur Shah and the operation of the pro-British faction in the palace led by Queen Zinat Mahal- the King's favourite wife. He also depicts the brutalities of the British in their craze for a total retribution for the cruelties and excesses of the rebel army. Along with thousands of people directly or remotely associated with the Mutiny or