

# Study on Effects of 1857 Revolt on Haryana and Its Adjacent Region

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With such atrocities committed by the British on the people of Punjab, they deserved no sympathy, or assistance from the Sikhs. But, the cis-Sutlej Sikh Rajahs, jumped on their band wagon, because they were treaty bound. The British did receive reinforcements from England later, and might have survived, but even before their arrival the tide had turned in their favor.

Mostly because of the help provided by these cis-Sutlej Sikh Rajahs the British were able to suppress the great rebellion – which till today, Indians are debating, whether it was “First Indian War of Independence” or not?

In the words of Karl Marx, Maharaja Patiala's role was “a shameful act” [Marx and Engels, First Indian War of Independence, Moscow, 1960].

But, as noted above, one noble thing that the Sikhs did was to save the lives of many women and children, who were in eminent danger of being slaughtered at the hands of the Poorbias.

## THE SIKHS AND THE MUTINY

It is often asked, “Why did the Sikhs help the British? Why did they not help the mutineers, and possibly bring an end to the British rule in India?”

Here is a brief answer:

Most important thing in this matter is to separate the Sikhs in general, or the Sikh community, from the cis-Sutlej Rajahs, who did not side with the Sikhs, during the Anglo-Sikh Wars – because they were Treaty-bound.

The Sikhs in general did not come to the rescue of the British, as testified by Philip Mason:

“Very few Sikhs from the Punjab proper came to the colours till Delhi had fallen.” (Philip Mason, The Men Who Ruled India, p. 170.)

“The Sikhs were never any time privy to the cause of

mutiny of 1857. They had never been consulted.” The Poorbias who had helped the British in the two Anglo-Sikh Wars had no guts to ask for Sikh help.

Cis-Sutlej Sikh states helped the British with men, money and materials. They were bound by their Treaties. Besides, they had always been lackies of the British. It was only due to them that the Amritsar Treaty of 1809 was signed. The Treaty divided the Sikhs into two camps. They sided with the British during the Anglo-Sikh Wars.

“The pro-British leanings of the Sikh princes were not even shared by their civil and military populations, still less by the general mass of the rest of Panjab.” (Salahuddin Malik, The Panjab and the Indian Mutiny, Punjab Past and Present, VIII, i-ii.)

Sikhs had recently been defeated and demobilized. Their forts had been razed to the ground. Their arms had been confiscated.

Manufacture or sale of arms and ammunition was prohibited

During the first year of Administration 8,000 people had been arrested. Above all, the Sikhs were leaderless.

## Mughals or the British?

The mutineers had placed Bahadur Shah on the throne – giving the Sikhs a choice, whether to bring back the Moghals, under whom the Sikhs had suffered immensely, or to continue under the powerful British. Bahadur Shah, himself was drawing a pension of one lakh rupees from the British, since 1803. And in the words of Maulana Abdul Kalam Azad, he was “a mere puppet, who had neither the army, nor the treasure, nor influence.” Support of such a ‘leader’ was sure to lead the followers to destruction and annihilation.

The Sikhs were aware that during the two Anglo-Sikh Wars, the ‘Emperor’ of Delhi and one of his leading chiefs, the Nawab of Jhajjar, had given assistance to the British.

The same Nawab was Bahadur Shah's main supporter in the struggle then.

### THE POORBIA FACTOR

During the Anglo-Sikh wars, Lal Singh and Tej Singh Prime Minister and Commander-in-Chief of the Sikhs, both Poorbias had treacherously helped the enemy — the British.

During the battle of Mudki, the ten Native Infantry Regiments of the enemy, the 2nd, 16th, 24th, 26th, 41st, 42nd, 45th, 47th, 48th, and 73rd that fought against the Sikhs were all composed of Poorbias.

The British exploited this Poorbia factor fully, as far as motivating the Sikhs to join them was concerned, although the sympathies of the Sikh Rajahs also, were on the same side as those of the Poorbias, during the Anglo-Sikh War.

One of the outstanding Sikh heroes of the Second Anglo-Sikh War was Jawahir Singh Nalwa, son of Sardar Hari Singh Nalwa, who fighting along with Sher Singh Attariwalla, in the battle of Chillianwalla, on January 13, 1849 'pursued Pope's cavalry brigade with great élan, cutting down many British Horse artillerymen including Major Christie, one of the battery commanders, destroying six guns and carrying four guns intact apart from two ammunition wagons and fifty three horses as war trophies.'

With turn of the wheel, same hero of the Second Anglo-Sikh War, joined the British 1st Sikh Cavalry in 1857, to fight against his other enemies — the Poorbias and Muslim sepoys who had fought against him in Chillianwala and Gujarat.\*

[Pakistan Defence Journal, July 2,000: Major (Retd.) Agha Humayun Amin, in Chillianwala, the forgotten British reverse in India, citing Fortesque," A History of the British Army, xii, p. 456.]

Based on a fake book Sau-Sakhi (100 Stories) many ignorant Sikhs believed in several prophecies – some of them initiated by the British to serve their own purpose. One of them was falsely attributed to Guru Tegh Bahadur, who is said to have foretold the arrival of the British to punish the Mughals.

In 1675 a prophecy was ripe among the followers of Guru Tegh Bahadur that they would attack Delhi with the help of the white man and completely avenge the old insult. The British who seem to have initiated the prophecy were of course, most willing to gratify their new allies. In order to please the Sikhs, Capt. Hodson's Horse "deliberately shot" and killed two[three] Mughal princes [two sons and one grandson of Bahadur Shah] after having promised them

safe conduct. Thereafter, he ordered their bodies to be taken into Delhi and put on public display at the same place where the head of Teg Bahadur was supposed to have been exposed over a century and a half before. After three days Hodson ordered the corpses to be removed for sanitary reasons" (Salahuddin Malik, The Panjab and the Indian Mutiny, Punjab Past and Present, VIII, i-ii; Major W.S.R. Hodson, Twelve Years of a Soldier's Life in India, p. 302.)

"Twenty-one princes of the royal family were hanged shortly afterwards." (Gardner. The East India Company, p. 178.)

[Hodson's real reason was that, "On the very spot four months earlier, English women and children had suffered every form of indignity and death." and "To the Sikhs, who crowded round", the place was, where Guru Tegh Bahadur had been beheaded in 1675. (Cave-Browne, p. 154.)]

[These princes, shot dead without trial, were the same about whom Mr. Greathed had written a month earlier, on 19th August, "I am beginning to get letters from the princes; they declare they have been all along fondly attached to us, and that they only want to know what they can do for us. " (Cave-Browne, p, 140 citing Greathed Letters, p. 205.)]

### ECONOMIC FACTOR: THE "MAZHBI" SIKHS

A large number of "Mazhbi" Sikhs were employed in public works, "more especially on the different canals in the course of formation in the Doaba...When the mutiny broke out, and all put out of all such works" they were thrown out of jobs. "When the call was made upon them, they eagerly seized the opportunity...and were drafted off in huge numbers to Delhi. ..." A large number of them were, after the mutiny, formed into "Pioneer Corps," later called the "24th Punjabees", a corps which has attracted so much attention from the many converts to Christianity (Cave Browne, pp. 207-08.). [Also see: The Fourth Punjab Administration Report (1956-58).]

The Sikh soldiers (who had participated on the side of the British, in their struggle for survival) were conscious of their decisive contribution, and it was natural for them to be upbeat.

Frederick Engels warning the British that the Sikhs might attempt restoration of their lost empire, wrote in 1858:

"The Sikhs are beginning to talk in a way, which bodes no good to the English. They feel that without their assistance, the British would scarcely have been able to hold India, and that, had they joined the insurrection Hindustan would certainly have been lost to England, at

least for a time. They say this loudly and exaggerate it to their Eastern way. To them the English no longer appear as that superior race which beat them at Mudki, Ferozeshah and Aliwal. From such a conviction to open hostility there is but a step with Eastern nations, a spark may kindle a blaze. “

In the minds of the Sikh soldiers, the British were, perhaps, never superior, as they were aware that the British won the war against them due to treachery of the Sikh Commander-in-Chief and his deputy, not through their fighting skill.

While commenting on a conspiracy among Sikh regiments at Dera Ismael Khan, Engles wrote:

“There are now nearly 100,000 Sikhs in the British service and we have heard how saucy they are, they fight, they say, today for the British, but may fight tomorrow against them, as it may please God. Brave, passionate, fickle, they are ever more subject to sudden and unexpected impulses than other Orientals. If mutiny should break in earnest among them, the British indeed have hard work to keep their own.

“The Sikhs are always the most formidable opponents of the British among the nations of India; they have formed a comparatively powerful empire; they are of a peculiar sect of Brahminism, and hate both Hindus and Musalmans.

“They have seen the British ‘Raj’ in utmost peril; they have contributed a great deal to restore it, and they are even more convinced that their own share of the work was a decisive one. What is more natural than that they should harbour the idea that the time has come when the British Raj shall be replaced by a Sikh Raj, that a Sikh Emperor is to rule India from Delhi or Calcutta? (Marx and Engles, First Indian War of Independence, Moscow, 1960.) Sikh “Niggers”?

Even though Sikh soldiers, mostly provided by the cis-Sutlej Sikh Rajas, helped the British in suppressing the sepoy mutiny, a good number of English people did not trust or respect them. In their opinion they were still ‘niggers’.

“The Sikhs don’t love us one bit, but hate sepoys (Poorbias) like poison.... Moreover, they are the lastly conquered of the Indian races and have not forgotten what British Pluck can do. They like the cause now, for the sepoys have mutilated and tortured their men.... And their blood is up on our side at present – but, this business over, they may play us the same trick as the sepoy ruffians any day. There is no sympathy between us – we despise the niggers, they hate us”. (James Lawrence, Raj: The Making and Unmaking of British India, p. 267.)

From the above evidence it is clear that the British were helped by cis-Sutlej Sikh Rajas, out of treaty obligations, with full realization that taking the side of Mughal Emperor, for whom the Sikhs had no love, only hatred, would have meant political suicide for them, and they would lose their states, just as Ranjit Singh’s empire had been swallowed. Sikh soldiers saw on the opposite side Poorbias, that had become victorious not because they were better soldiers, but because their treacherous Sikh Commander-in-Chief was in league with the enemy –the British. Therefore, they fought against the Poorbias with a vengeance.

### **SIKH RAJAHS WERE AMPLY REWARDED FOR SAVING THE BRITISH EMPIRE PATIALA**

A tract of land out of the confiscated territories of Nawab of Jhajjar, valued at about two lakhs of rupees a-year, was conferred on the Maharaja and his heirs in perpetuity on condition of good behavior and of service, military and political, at any time or quarrel, danger or disturbance.” Also, his family estate of Bhadaur, adjacent to his estate, which had recently been absorbed by the British, was restored to him. “Zeenat Mahal” in (New) Delhi, belonging to Bahadur Shah’s favourite wife was also given to the Maharaja of Patiala. A number of additions were made to his titles – now the Farzand-i-Khas (Special Son).

### **JIND**

Raja Saroop Singh of Jind was given lands confiscated from Dadree, valued at about a lakh of rupees a-year; several villages from pargannah of Thanesar worth 14,500 rupees yearly revenue. His titles were also increased, and now he was Farzand-i-Dilband, or most cherished son.

### **NABHA**

Raja Bharpoor Singh of Nabha was given two districts, worth a lakh of rupees annual revenue, from the confiscated land of Jhajjar. He was also awarded additional titles, and he was now Farzand-i-Arjumand, or Noble son of good faith.

### **FARIDKOT**

“Though no conspicuous services were rendered by the Raja, yet he showed himself loyal and eager in our [British] cause,” and “In acknowledgement of these services, he was delivered from the duty of furnishing his contingent of sowars to the Ferozepore Commissioner, and received an increase of honours and titles.” (Cave-Browne, p. 246)

### **KAPURTHALA**

“In acknowledgement of services of ‘Almost Christian’ Raja of Kapurthala, Randhir Singh Ahluwalia, Government

remitted the entire tribute for the year 1857, and reduced yearly amount in future from yearly 150,000 rupees to a quarter of a lakh." (Cave-Browne, p. 248)

### **SOME SIDE BARS**

After peace was proclaimed by Lord Canning, automatic pardon was announced for all rebels who would surrender before January 1, 1859, unless they had been involved in massacres.

Charles Dickens, furious on learning about announcement of Amnesty, wrote on October 4, 1858:

"I wish I were commander-in-chief in India, I should do my utmost to exterminate the Race upon whom the stain of the late cruelties rested" Nothing less than extermination of the Hindus would have satisfied Dickens, who was disgusted by reports that Canning had offered amnesty to mutineers not directly involved in the killings." (Dickens, C., Letters of Charles Dickens, II, 459, 473. (Oxford, 1995); James, Lawrence, Raj: the Making and Unmaking of British India, p.283)

### **QUEEN VICTORIA IN DEFENCE OF DULEEP SINGH**

Maharaja Duleep Singh was in London. Some Englishmen observed that he had not condemned his countrymen's atrocities, during the mutiny. Lord Clarendon was one of those, who were very vocal against Duleep Singh. Queen Victoria came to his defence and justified his reaction, whatever it was.

"Lord Clarendon wrote he was indignant to learn that the boy MahaRaja Duleep Singh, who was being educated in England, had shown little or no regret for the atrocities which had been committed. The young MahaRaja's father, one of the most harsh and cruel of Indian rulers had been deposed by the British government and his son taken under British protection. The Queen pointed out that in spite of gentleness and amiability the MahaRaja had an Eastern nature, and could hardly be expected as a deposed Eastern sovereign to be very fond of British rule or to like hearing the people of his country called fiends and monsters and that they being brought by hundreds if not thousands to be executed. She advised Lord Clarendon to say nothing on he subject." (Cecil Woodham Smith, Victoria, Dell Publishing Co. p. 496)

### **BRITISH POLICY OF "DIVIDE AND RULE" TO CONTINUE**

Lord Canning wrote in his letter dated October 9, 1857: "The men who fought against us in Delhi were of both creeds; probably in equal numbers. If we destroy or desecrate Mussulman Mosques or Brahmin Temples we

do exactly what is wanting to band the two antagonist races against ourselves ...as we must rule 150 million of people by a handful (more or less small) number of Englishmen, let us do it in the manner best calculated to leave them divided (as in religion and national feeling as they already are) and to inspire them with the greatest possible awe of our power." (Amin, Agha Humayun, Major (Retd.) Pakistan Defence Journal, December 2000.)

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