
COMPLICITY OF THE MAHARAJAH HOLKAR WITH THE MUTINEERS

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Oppression of the weavers by the Company's inferior servants took the form of illegal exaction of money from them, and also beating and whipping them for alleged misconduct. Added to that there was the fact that the weavers were not paid adequate prices for their fabrics. British private traders and foreign merchants used to pay good prices to the weavers and were less scrupulous than the English Company about the quality of the fabrics. But the weavers in engagement with the Company were not allowed to work for them before completing their engagements. Besides, the weavers were subjected to penalties in case the quality of their fabrics were not up to the required standard or they were unable to fulfil the contracts in time. Sometimes the weavers felt so disgusted that they left their houses and looms and went into voluntary exile.³⁵

Sometimes the Commercial Residents gave rather too much attention to their private trade, with the result that the Company's business was somewhat neglected. They were no doubt called upon by the Board of Trade to explain their conduct in such cases. Misappropriation of public money on the part of the Residents sometimes occurred. Henry Williams, the Commercial Resident of Kumarkhali, was dismissed on this charge.³⁶

Most of the Company's cloth factories were wound up by 1819-20. Some of the Commercial Residencies were, however, retained for the investment of raw silk. These were finally closed down after 1835; and the office of the Commercial Resident was abolished.

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B. N. LUNIYA

His Highness the Maharaja Tukoji Rao Holkar II was ruling in Indore when on the 1st of July 1857 the Mutiny broke out at Indore, Mhow and later on at Mahidpur, Agar and other places in Central India. At many places the sepoys revolted against their British officers and commanders and succeeded to a great extent in wiping out the traces of British military stations and cantonments. At Indore sepoys and gunners of the three companies of Holkar's army, led by Saadat Khan, an officer in Holkar's cavalry, attacked the Residency at about 8-30 A.M. on the 1st of July 1857. Bans Gopal, the commandant of Holkar's army, also joined Saadat Khan. Thrice pickets at the Residency were formed by Colonel Travers to attack the mutineers. But treason had done its work so effectively that thrice the formation was broken. In spite of the gallant charge by Travers supported by a few loyal sepoys, the British failed to stop the advance of the mutineers on the Residency. Realising the situation desperate Durand, the then A.G.G. at Indore, placing the ladies on gun

35. See my *Economic Transition in the Bengal Presidency*, p. 25.

36. Extract of Commercial Gen. Letter from Court, 11 June, 1823.

wagons, moved out of the Residency with the remaining Europeans and followed the road to Sehore. It was then half past 10 o'clock.

In the morning of the 1st of July the Indore Residency was attacked and in the night of the very date, the regular troops at Mhow, fourteen miles away from Indore, broke out into revolt. They shot dead their Colonel and Adjutant, Platt and Fagan respectively. The cavalry troopers likewise killed their commandant Major Harris. Then the mutineers of Mhow and Indore joined hands. Some days later British cantonments near Indore, Mandleshwar and Bhopawar were also destroyed by the mutineers. Troopers at Mahidpur, an important military station in the Holkar State, also mutinied and so did the troops at Agar and Dhar. Within three months the whole of Central India including the State of Holkar was ablaze with the fire of Mutiny.

The conduct of Holkar at this critical period has raised a controversy. There is a group of scholars who argue that he was disloyal to the British. Durand, the A.G.G. at Indore, suspected in distinct terms the loyalty of Tukoji Rao Holkar. On the other hand, there are those who consider that his loyalty was unimpeachable and that the doubts cast upon that loyalty were insulting to his family and name. And then, there are those who believe still that he was a watcher of the atmosphere and sitting on the fence.

While exploring the Government records rooms of the ex-Holkar State I came across nearly a thousand letters and reports in the Modi script about the Mutiny period (1857-58). They throw a flood of light on the Mutiny within the jurisdiction of H. H. the Maharaja Holkar as well as in other States adjoining the Holkar State. A few of these letters indicate that Tukoji Rao Holkar was not favourably inclined towards the British. He was a pro-mutineer and was in communication with the Peshwa Nana Sahib, Tatyia Tope and others. The following facts will make it clear.

There is a letter in the Government records written by the agents of Nana Sahib to the Maharaja Holkar. It is dated 22-10-57. They had been staying in Indore incognito for three months and were transmitting to the Peshwa Sarkar once every day written information about all the happenings in Holkar's State and his capital. They urged Maharaja Tukoji Rao Holkar in this letter that "For the sake of the revered name of Ahilya Bai it would be better if after reducing the Mhow cantonment to ashes, you send your troops (to Peshwa); otherwise the Peshwa will be very angry....."

Before the outbreak of the Mutiny the Maharaja expected some trouble in his army; the presence of the Peshwa Nana Sahib's agents in his own capital for some months probably with his own knowledge is enough to infer that he expected the outbreak of the Mutiny. Being a Maratha Chief he desired to further the cause of the Peshwa secretly and avoid active assistance to the British. On the 15th of May 1857, when Colonel Durand had paid a visit to the Maharaja Holkar at Lal Bag Palace and "applied to the Maharaja for the aid of his troops in the event of a Mutiny breaking

out at Mhow", "promising every assistance" the Maharaja Holkar tried to explain the incapability of his troops by telling Durand that "his men could not cope with the regular troops" of the British Government, and that "he had little ammunition" to spare. Even Malleson in his book "History of Indian Mutiny," Vol. III, accepts this version that Holkar knew already the fomenting of some troubles in his army before the outbreak of the Mutiny and "told Durand that he mistrusted his own troops".

If the Maharaja knew that "the control of his troops was slipping out of his hands" he could have disbanded his sepoy or taken drastic disciplinary measures against the suspected ones to restore confidence. Instead of adopting any such measure he issued orders to enlist a pretty large number of young men for his army, especially Wallayatis and Mewatis, and provide them with adequate arms not only for Indore but for all the districts of his State such as Rampura, Bhanpura, Jirapur, Sunel, Mahidpur, Tarana, Depalpur, Petlawad, Chikhaldia etc. (Vide the Maharaja's Barnishi, inward and outward register, Letters No. 4848 A and 4848 B. dated 5-6-57 Jyestha Suddha 13th Friday, recently discovered in Government records).

To equip some of these new soldiers adequate ammunition was taken out from Hinglajgarh, a very old impregnable and well defended hilly fortress of the Holkar State. In a confidential letter No. 48 dated 2-7-1858 it is clearly stated that "three thousand shells and lead (weighing six maunds and some seers, Rampura Taul) from the fort of Hingalajgarh" were taken out "at the time of the revolt". To conceal this it was given out that "the magazine in the fort was blown up" and the "whole place was levelled to ground". (Vide the letter of Shri Shiv Chand Kothari to Bakshi Kuman Singh discovered in the Holkar's Barnishi of 1858). Later on official orders were issued "to put the gun carriage factory in working order" and Nakhala Singh Golandaz was sent "with the necessary staff to Parda in order to commence the manufacture of shells". Recently a letter has been discovered in which it is stated that in the Ratnagiri district Maharaja Holkar had distributed a sum of Rs. 15000/- for the preparation of an army and ammunition and Lee Warner points out that the Maharaja Tukoji Rao had gone out on a hunting expedition, but in fact to supervise the casting of cannon. All this was without the knowledge of the British Government, as we find no mention of these facts in the British records.

Outwardly, the Maharaja gave out that he was short of arms and ammunition for the protection of the British and consequently on the 5th of June, 1857, he sought the assistance of the British Agent at Indore to write to Lord Elphinstone, the then Governor of Bombay, to provide military supplies for his troops—2000 fusils, 300 pairs of pistols and 4 lakhs of gun caps. The British Agent had then endorsed the Maharaja's request with this remark that, "if these arms can be spared even to half the amount named, a thousand fusils, Holkar would be gratified and I have taken upon myself to order that they receive forty rounds per gun for each battery, the ammunition being drawn from Mhow Magazine".

There is no trace anywhere in the records so far discovered how, where and when such vast ammunition was used by Maharaja Holkar. But it is recorded that the day prior to the Mutiny at Indore the Maharaja's troops were provided with the ammunition recently obtained from the British Government and it was given out that they looted the Magazine. The same story was repeated at Mahidpur, an important military station of the British, within the jurisdiction of Maharaja Holkar.

All this enables one to infer that—

1. Maharaja Tukoji Rao Holkar was expecting some military troubles against the British.
2. He had acquired and collected enough arms and ammunition to support materially the anti-British elements.
3. He allowed secretly the use of his arms and ammunition by the mutineers.

When the British had succeeded in suppressing the Mutiny a good deal, it seems that the Maharaja withdrew his indirect support to the anti-British elements and issued confidential orders for the replacement of certain ammunition taken out from Hingalajgarh. Had the Maharaja used this ammunition against the mutineers there was no reason why he should have ordered for its replacement in 1858. If the Maharaja had used all this ammunition for the protection of the British officials and their Government he would have certainly referred to it while claiming territorial rewards for all that he had done for the British during the Mutiny period. Conspicuous absence of such a reference in the whole of the voluminous correspondence of Maharaja Holkar for territorial reward confirms the fact that instead of using this ammunition in the interest of the British Government, it was secretly used against it. It appears that under the pretext of the above-mentioned shortage Maharaja Holkar had equipped himself well for fighting with those means in which the British had distinct advantage over the Native Princes and the so-called mutineers.

Besides this, instead of prohibiting recruitment from the classes of Mewatis and Wallayatis who were then planning the revolt all over India against the British and swelling the ranks of the mutineers, the Maharaja Holkar himself recruited fresh sepoy from these classes and provided them with military equipment.

When the Maharaja's troops actually attacked the Indore Residency, he was within his palace approximately one and a half miles away from the Residency. He neither set out for the Residency to control and withdraw his troops nor opened negotiations with the British Resident and his officials for protection. Within an hour of the outbreak of the Mutiny Saadat Khan, the ringleader of the mutineers and cavalry officer of his army, had ridden into his presence to report that he had attacked the Residency, and wounded and killed Europeans. Instead of arresting and sentencing him to death for his crimes the Maharaja allowed him to go away to his house and boast of his deeds among the members of his family.

Malleson states that the Maharaja remained in his palace in Indore till the 3rd of July, 1857, in constant communication with the mutineers and then visited them at Residency and conversed with Saadat Khan and Bans Gopal—the ring-leaders and commandants of the mutineers—and the Subedar of the 23rd Native Infantry whose hand was red with the blood of his commanding officer.

When the Mutiny had spread all over Central India, Nana Sahib and Tatyá Tope entered the southern Madhya Bharat with a vast force to seek material help from the people and the princes. Though Maharaja Holkar did not offer outwardly any substantial material help to the Peshwa and Tatyá Tope, he maintained close contact with them as is evidenced from the letters of Hari Trimbak, a person in Holkar's confidence. These letters are also discovered in Government records of the Holkar State.

Thus the presence of the agents of the Peshwa in Maharaja Holkar's capital town, their letters to him, Maharaja Holkar's expression of his inability in clear terms to safeguard the British Government and its interest and officials, getting arms and ammunition from the British and allowing the mutineers to carry them away before the outbreak of the Mutiny, fresh recruitment of Wallayatis and Mewatis for his army, secretly providing mutineers with ammunition at other places, his passive attitude at the time of the outbreak of the Mutiny at Indore and Mhow, his release of Saadat Khan, the ring-leader of the mutineers, his contact and conversation with the mutineers and their leaders on the 3rd day of the Mutiny,—all these, when viewed simultaneously, indicate that Maharaja Holkar was not only furthering the cause of the so-called mutineers but definitely strengthening their hands against the British. He was not free from complicity with the mutineers. Malleson also remarks that "his conduct bore a very suspicious appearance." Instead of interfering actively on behalf of the British he was watching the turn of events, encouraging the mutineers, and waiting to throw his lot with the party which would emerge victorious.