

REVOLT OF 1857
– EVALUATING THE SIKH ASSISTANCE TO BRITISH &
THEIR PARTICIPATION IN THE MUTINY –

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BACKGROUND

In 1957 the Government of India decided to commemorate the Centenary (1857-1957) of the ‘Revolt of 1857’. A committee by the name of Indian Freedom Struggle Centenary (1857-1957) Souvenir Committee based at New Delhi was formed. During the seminar, the general consensus was that “Indian struggle for freedom (1857) failed as the Sikhs had betrayed and sided with the British”. The Secretary to the Committee, in his letter dated 13th June 1957, asked eminent Sikh historian Dr Ganda Singh to rebut the charge, if possible. Accordingly, Ganda Singh wrote number of articles in “The Tribune” newspaper during the months of August & September 1957.¹ However, even after the lapse of 64 years, the same allegations are being repeated every year.

SIKH POPULATION IN 1857

Dr Ganda Singh states that the Sikhs constituted about 1% of population of united (or pre-partitioned) India. The rest of 99% could have arisen and negated the effect of 1%. In Punjab, the Sikhs were not more than 10% during this period.² Did the rest 99% namely the Hindus and the Muslims rise to the rebellion? If not, why? How many Indian people or the states had joined the mutiny? Let us examine these questions

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WHO DID NOT JOIN THE REBELLION?

Two eminent historians and their works published in 1957 are being used here in this discussion. Ramesh Chandra Majumdar (RCM) wrote *The Sepoy Mutiny & Revolt of 1857*. Majumdar is regarded more of a 'right-wing' historian. While he is particularly liked by the 'Nationalists', Surendra Nath Sen's book *Eighteen Fifty-Seven* was commissioned by the then Government of India and it could be considered as 'Left-wing Marxist' historian's work. Both of them were great historians and for the purpose of this discussion, their contrasting background and philosophy will give readers a balanced picture about this event. Both works have used a lot of contemporary and original sources. Let's examine what these esteemed historians have to say about the role of other states in the 1857 revolt?

Rajasthan: Majumdar states "The people remained quiet and the Rajput chiefs particularly the Raja of Jodhpur helped the British. The only exception was Thakur Kusal Singh, the chief of Ahua who had some specific grievances against the British"³

Bengal: Majumdar writes "Bengal was practically unaffected by the Mutiny with the exception of two sporadic outbursts at Dacca & Chittagong" (both are now in Bangladesh).⁴

Bombay Presidency: The present states of Gujarat, Maharashtra & Sindh (now in Pakistan) were part of it. Majumdar notes "In general the Bombay army remained loyal but there were some sepoys who shared the feeling of their comrades in Northern India. Attempts at mutiny failed at Ahmadabad and Hyderabad in Sindh, and though a mutiny broke out in Karachi, it was easily put down"⁵

South India: Sen writes "The Presidency of Madras remained unaffected all through, though some slight signs of restlessness were perceived in the army. The educated community unreservedly ranged itself on the side of law and order and condemned the rising in unambiguous terms".⁶

Maratha ruler Scindia of Gwalior, Holkar of Indore and Gaikwad of Baroda actively helped British even though Nana Sahib, adopted son of Peshwa Balaji Baji Rao II had plunged into the rebellion. Ranbir

Singh Dogra, ruler of Jammu & Kashmir also assisted British in subduing the revolt.

JC Marshman in *History of India* published in 1867 strongly advocated continuing the princely states of India based on their help in suppressing the revolt. "But so exemplary was their loyalty to the British Government in the days of its extremity, that the advocates of native dynasties (Scindia, Holkar, Gaekwad, Nizam etc) have adduced it as one of the strongest arguments for maintaining them."⁷

WHY DID THE SIKHS NOT JOIN?

Dr Ganda Singh has rightly stated that Sikhs were neither approached nor consulted to join the revolt. The rebel sepoys had declared Bahadur Shah Zafar, scion of Mughal family who lived on British pension and whose influence did not extend beyond Red Fort. This was not acceptable to the Sikhs as Mughals had a history of persecuting the Sikhs. The list is rather long.

- a) Martyrdom of fifth Guru, Guru Arjan Dev by Emperor Jahangir in 1605.
- b) Martyrdom of ninth Guru, Guru Tegh Bahadur by Emperor Aurangzeb in 1675.
- c) Execution of younger sons of Guru Gobind Singh by Mughal governor of Sirhind in 1705.
- d) Royal edict to kill Sikhs on sight by Emperor Bahadur Shah in 1710.
- e) Royal edict to kill Sikhs on sight by Emperor Farrukh Siyar and execution of Banda Bahadur & more than 700 Sikhs in Delhi in 1716.
- f) Killing of Sikhs & putting a price on the head of a Sikhs and persecution under Mughal Governors of Punjab namely Zakriya Khan, Yahya Khan till Mir Mannu's death in 1752.

Mir Mannu later became Governor of Lahore under Ahmed Shah Abdali who was himself involved in destroying Harmandar Sahib, Amritsar twice and killing more than 20,000 Sikhs in a single day. Abdali was not a Mughal but an Afghan ruler who invaded north India no less than 8 times.⁸ The British conveniently reminded the Sikhs of the martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur, when rebel sepoys declared

Bahadur Shah Zafar, descendant of Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb as the ruler of India. Across Punjab, posters were pasted reminding Sikhs of the Mughal atrocities.

REBEL BENGAL ARMY

There was no love lost between Punjabis (particularly Sikhs) and soldiers of British East India Company who had fought two Anglo Sikh wars in 1845/46 and 1848/49. These soldiers were known as Purbeas (Easterners) or Hindustani. They were mostly Muslims, Brahmins & upper caste Hindus from Uttar Pradesh & neighbouring regions. The Sikhs and Punjabis had sent feelers to these soldiers' during two Anglo-Sikh wars asking them to join them and oust the British from the country but to no avail. Consequently, the Punjabis blamed them for their defeat. The attitude of Hindustani soldiers and treatment towards Punjabis and Sikhs was very hostile during this interim period of 1849-57. As these soldiers had rebelled, it evoked little sympathy from the Punjabis. The British were able to exploit this distrust.⁹

ABSENCE OF SIKH LEADER

Duleep Singh, the son of Maharaja Ranjit Singh had been taken to England by the East India Company. His mother Maharani Jind Kaur was living in exile in Nepal. Chattar Singh and his son Sher Singh Attariwala who had led the second Anglo Sikh war in 1848-49 were exiled in Banaras. The former had already died. Sher Singh had died in 1858. Other prominent leaders of the second Anglo-Sikh war were either dead or forced to live an isolated life. Bhai Maharaj Singh who was exiled to Singapore had died in 1856. Baba Bikram Singh (Bedi) of Una another leader was forced to leave Una and spend rest of his life in Amritsar. All these leaders and those who were expected to cause trouble were under strict surveillance by the British throughout the revolt.

EXTENTION OF THE REVOLT

The Sepoys of Bengal army had revolted at number of places but in most places the people and the local rulers kept aloof. Majumdar writes that the extent of the revolt where people also participated was

limited to Uttar Pradesh, Delhi (& neighbouring areas) and a few parts of Central India. The revolt took a national character in these areas. Hence he writes that he has chosen the title of his book *Sepoy Mutiny and Revolt of 1857*. He has produced letters of Nana Sahib written to British after the revolt (but before he joined) promising loyalty and redressal of their personal grievances. Nana was an adopted son of Peshwa and wanted recognition and pension for his father. They were not unjust demands and Lord Dalhousie's much maligned policy of 'Doctrine of Lapse' where a state would pass on to the British if they did not have a natural heir, was responsible for forcing him, Jhansi and Awadh (in Uttar Pradesh, which was annexed on superficial grounds) to join the revolt.

ATTITUDE OF THE GENERAL PUBLIC

Maulana Azad a proponent of Hindu-Muslim unity but a scholar captures the attitude of general public in the lengthy foreword to the book written by Sen. He writes, "They were very often mere spectators of the struggle and lent their support to whichever side was more powerful at the moment. An idea of their attitude may be gained from the fate which overtook Tatyá Tope. When he was finally defeated, he resolved to struggle back across the Narmada into Madhya Pradesh. He was convinced that once he reached the Maratha region, the people would offer him support. With almost superhuman courage and tenacity, he eluded his pursuers and did cross the Narmada. When he reached the other bank, he could not find one village which would give him shelter. Everybody turned against him so that he had to fly again and resort to the forests. It was a professed friend who finally betrayed him while he was asleep."¹⁰

Another close confidante of Nana Sahib was Rao Saheb. Sen writes that "Rao Saheb was betrayed, not by a Rajput, but by a man from Maharashtra.

NATIONAL WAR OR FIRST WAR FOR INDEPENDENCE

In early part of 20th century, a number of Indians wrote about revolt of 1857 as 'first war for independence' and glorified the Indian rulers who fought in the revolt as 'freedom fighters'. It was perhaps the need of the hour to instil a nationalist sentiment among the people

of the country. But this is not true. Even in Central India, where the revolt had popular following, there were number of instances where Hindus and Muslims had major disputes and skirmishes. Hence Majumdar has stated **“To regard the outbreak of 1857 as either national in character or a war for independence of India betrays a lack of true knowledge of the history of Indian people in nineteenth century.”**¹¹

Sen is slightly more sympathetic than Majumdar “Outside Oudh and Shahabad there is no evidence of that general sympathy which would invest the Mutiny with the dignity of a national war. At the same time it would be wrong to dismiss it as a mere military rising. The Mutiny became a revolt and assumed a political character when the mutineers of Meerut placed themselves under the King of Delhi and a section of the landed aristocracy and civil population declared in his favour. What began as a fight for religion ended as a war of independence for there is not the slightest doubt that the rebels wanted to get rid of the alien government and restore the old order of which the King of Delhi was the rightful representative.”¹²

BENGAL ARMY’S ROLE IN DESTROYING INDIAN STATES

Majumdar has rightly pointed out that the Bengal Army (consisting of Muslims & upper caste Hindus) was responsible for defeating the Gorkhas, the Marathas and the Sikhs. After helping and assisting the British to win whole of India (there were 7 Indians to 1 British soldier in Bengal Army), the Bengal sepoys mutinied for religious reasons. He writes that Anglo-Sikh war was the most opportune time to revolt against the British, but Bengal soldiers helped British to defeat Sikhs and Indian leaders who revolted in 1857 were still friends with British at this stage. He further writes:

“In this connection a very important fact is often forgotten by those who claim the outbreak of 1857 as a national war of independence, for which patriotic sepoys shed their blood, and political leaders had been preparing grounds for a long time. The Panjab was conquered by the British with the help of the sepoys less than ten years before the outbreak of Mutiny. The battle of Chillianwala which proved the valour and heroism of the Sikhs, and their ability, under

more favourable circumstances, to defeat the English, was fought in 1849, only eight years before the Mutiny. If there were really a movement for freeing India from the British yoke, obviously this was the most suitable opportunity. But we have not the least evidence to show that the Indian leaders like Nana Sahib and others mentioned above raised their little finger to help the cause of the Sikhs. The sepoys themselves, who are supposed to have sacrificed their all for the sake of their country in 1857, had not the least scruple to fight the Sikhs who were the last defenders of liberty in India. There are even allegations that the Sikhs entreated the sepoys to refuse help to the British, but in vain.

Although this cannot be definitely proved, it should have occurred to every sepoy, who had real love for his country, that by defeating the Sikhs he would only forge the last link in the chain by which India was being fettered by the British. It is difficult to resist the conclusion that the attitude and activities of the sepoys in 1849 certainly did not correspond to the patriotic fervour with which they are supposed to be endowed in 1857. Unless, therefore, we suppose that this sentiment was suddenly developed during the short interval of eight years, we can hardly regard the sepoys, who rebelled in 1857, as being inspired by the idea of liberty and freedom. Incidentally, the Sikh War also proves the absence, in 1849, of any serious conspiracy or organisation against the British, although, according to Sitaram Bawa, such conspiracy against the British was going on for many years in almost every native court. Surely the Sikh War would have been the most suitable opportunity, if ever there were any, which the conspirators should have taken “advantage of for organising a war of independence against the British.”¹³

THE SIKHS WHO JOINED THE REBELLION

The general Indian masses are taught that the Sikhs sided with the British East India Company during the revolt of 1857. The Sikh princely states of Patiala and others in Cis Sutlej area supported the British during the Sepoy Mutiny but so did the Maratha states (Scindia, Gaekwad & Holkar) and Rajput states (Jaipur, Jodhpur and Hill Rajputs including Jammu). They all had a subsidiary alliance with the British.

According to Majumdar & Sen, the revolt of 1857 became a popular movement only in Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, Jhansi and some surrounding areas. In rest of the country it was a Sepoy Mutiny.

The Sikhs from Maharaja Ranjit Singh's territory (known as Majha Sikhs) were not recruited for they were considered unreliable by the British as they had fought the British twice in a span of 3 years (1845/46 & 1848/49). However, the Sikhs from Cis Sutlej region were recruited to form Regiment of Ludhiana and Regiment of Ferozepur in 1846. Shamsul Islam did a yeoman service in 2007 by writing *Rebel Sikhs in 1857* where using contemporary Indian and British sources he gave instances where Sikhs joined the uprising of 1857. He notes an entry by British spy Gauri Shankar dated 23rd August 1857 that approximately 1500 Sikhs soldiers of the rebel army had been posed to guard the gates of the city (Delhi).¹⁴

Among the academic circles it is known for a long time that Sikhs were both among the 'rebels' and the forces besieging Delhi during May-September 1857, but this is practically unknown among Indian population. Let us now point out to the Sikh participation among 'rebels' at various places.

DELHI - MUNSHI JEEWAN LAL'S DIARY

Munshi Jeewan Lal was the head clerk attached to the British Governor General's agent at Delhi when 'rebel' sepoys at Delhi declared independence on 11th May 1857. Jeewan Lal was instructed to stay back in Delhi and provide information to British, basically work as a spy. Jeewan Lal maintained a diary which was translated and published by Charles Theophilus Metcalfe, a senior British official and a benefactor of Jeewan Lal in 1885. The diary contained material and information to be passed on to the British who had besieged the city. The following entries in the book *Two Narratives of the Mutiny in Delhi* about the participation of Sikhs in the rebellion and defence of Delhi will be an eye-opener for many.¹⁵

28th May 1857 - "About 200 men arrived from Lahore and Ferozepur to join the mutineers."¹⁶

1st June 1857 - "News came from Patiala that the two native regiments sent to assist the English had joined the mutineers, and,

had had a fight with the English. It was reported that the whole of the Patiala force was hostile to the English. The soldiers openly remonstrated with the Maharajah for sympathizing with the English, when the natives were fighting in defence of their religion. They reminded him that he had gained nothing by his behaviour during the Punjab war...”¹⁷

27th July 1857 - “Today two Sikhs came on behalf of the chiefs of Lahore to say that 200,000 cartridges had been safely delivered to the troops in the Nimuch camp. Orders were issued that these were not to be wasted, as the supply in the Magazine was running short.”¹⁸

29th July 1857 - “Several Sikhs, retainers of the Rajah Narunder Sing (Narinder Singh of Patiala), deserted from the English camp and appeared at the Durbar, and they reported that the English were’ badly off for artillery horses, but had plenty of guns.”¹⁹

5th August 1857 - “Certain Sikhs presented a petition to the king (Bahadur Shah) complaining that they were in the habit of attacking the English entrenchments, but had to return, as the Purbeahs would give them no assistance and would not co-operate; they prayed to the King to form a regiment of Sikhs from amongst the regiments of Delhi, and to entrust them with two field guns, that they might attack the English with some chance of success. They were encouraged and told not to despair of victory.”²⁰

26th August 1857 - “Ghosh Mahommed, the General commanding the Nimuch force...asked for reinforcements. One regiment of Sikhs and four of cavalry were placed under his command.”²¹

DELHI - MAHMOOD FAROOQUI’S BOOK

In 2010, Mahmood Farooqui wrote an excellent book on the revolt of 1857 in Delhi titled *Besieged Voices from Delhi 1857* translating contemporary Persian and Urdu sources. The book makes a lot of reference to Sikhs soldiers among the ‘rebels’. The author has provided a dateline and particularly interesting are the entries relating to 21st August and 22nd August 1857 which are as follows

21st August 1857 - “Commander in Chief (Mirza Mughal)

forwards Sikhs petition complaining discrimination (from Bengal regiment soldiers) and asking to be formed into a separate regiment.”

22nd August 1857 - “Bahadur Shah Zafar tries to conciliate Sikhs in the Bareilly regiment.”²²

Here in 1857 these ‘rebel’ Sikhs were from Cis-Sutlej territories where rulers were pro-British since 1809 but it seems that the Bengal soldiers could not make the distinction between Trans-Sutlej Sikhs who mistrusted them and Cis-Sutlej who has no history of discontent with them.

DELHI - ABDUL LATIF’S DIARY

Abdul Latif, an elite resident of Delhi wrote a diary in Persian during the siege of the Delhi by the British. The Urdu translation is titled *Tareekhi Roznamcha*. His diary is very good source of information. The important entries related to Sikhs are as follows:

17th August 1857 - “200 Sikhs sepoy belonging to the army of Jammu Raja came to join the rebel forces.”

The Raja of Jammu, Ranbir Singh Dogra sent his army to assist British during the siege of Delhi. Out of this army, 200 Sikhs mutinied and joined the ‘rebel’ forces. Sikhs and Dogras usually paint a rather bleak picture of their relations post 1846 when Raja Gulab Singh Dogra refused to fight first Anglo-Sikh war and gave military intelligence to British officer Col. Wheeler at Ludhiana.²³ Despite all this it did not stop some Sikhs from serving under the ‘Jammu Fox’ and his successor.

REBELLION IN CIS- SUTLEJ PUNJAB

The Sikhs had reasons not to join the rebellion. The Mughals had a history of persecuting Sikhs and as explained earlier there was no love lost between Sikhs and Porbeah soldiers. The British exploited this distrust to their advantage. But in Cis-Sutlej Punjab there were rebellions which were crushed. Sardar Mohur Singh was sentenced to death for his role in rebellion in Ropar.

Reverend J. Cave-Brown, a Christian clergyman accompanied the British forces which moved from Peshawar to Delhi. In his memoirs,

The Punjab & Delhi in 1857 he mentions that the mutinous troops at Ropar had Sikhs. He writes “five men concerned in the riot at Roopar (Ropar) were identified, and tried by a civil commission, and, with the Sirdar Mohur Singh, were sentenced to death.”²⁴

At Ludhiana, a Sikh made an attempt to the life of British officer. The Ludhiana District Gazetteer states “Of the two men of the regiment (of native British troops at Ludhiana) who met their death, one was a Jhelum Mussulman, caught as a spy; another who attempted on Lieutenant Yorke’s life, and was shot by him was a young Majha Sikh.”²⁵

SIKH REBELLION IN AWADH (CENTRAL UTTAR PRADESH)

Martin Richard Gubbins was the Revenue Commissioner and a member of the British Commission which governed Awadh after its annexation for fourteen months just before the revolt of 1857. After the revolt, he became one of the chief advisors of Sir Henry Lawrence (Commissioner of Awadh), managed the Intelligence Department and stayed with the British forces till they were forced to vacate Lucknow in November 1857. His memoirs were published in 1858 in London under the title *An Account of the Mutinies in Oudh* has following details about the Sikh ‘rebels’ in Awadh.

On 31st May 1857, Gubbins led British sepoys were able to capture a group of rebel sepoys in a village outside Lucknow. It was found by Gubbins that “three of the men belonged to the 48th Native Infantry and three to the 13th Native Infantry, and one man was a Seikh (Sikh).”²⁶

GUBBINS ALSO NOTES

“Many of these men (Sikhs) deserted us during the siege; and the rest were, during the whole time, a constant source of alarm and anxiety. They were in constant correspondence with the enemy, through their deserters, who used to come up under the walls of the squares and converse with their brethren inside...The object of these visits of the Siekh (Sikh) deserters was...to induce their brethren to desert also.”²⁷

Gubbins’ narration of Awadh rebellion mentioned the fact that

by the end of July 1857 there prevailed 'great despondency' among the British troops as every day native and Sikh soldiers joined the ranks of the rebels."We daily lost men, sometimes six or seven in a day; and they had begun to think that relief was impossible. Many desertions had taken place, and several of the Seikhs (Sikhs), including sixteen men of the 13th Native Infantry had been of the number."

Gubbins while describing the events of the month of August (1857) wrote that Sikh troops continued giving "much anxiety. Many of them had deserted; and we were not sure that the rest who were known to maintain clandestine communication with the enemy, might not any time follow the example of their brethren."²⁸

SIKH PLOT TO KILL SENIOR BRITISH OFFICER

Gubbins writes the details of an abortive plot which allegedly was hatched by the Sikh soldiers against Gubbins himself. As a precaution he banned entry of Sikh soldiers into his enclosure (tent)."Their plan was stated to be the following: the Seikhs (Sikhs) were to enter my enclosure by twos and threes, on pretence of speaking to me about obtaining an issue of pay. My native artillerymen were then, at a given signal, to turn the guns of my post on the European, when a rising of the native was to take place everywhere, while an attack from the outside was to be made by the enemy."²⁹

BENARAS - LARGE SCALE KILLING OF 'REBEL' SIKH SOLDIERS

The book *Chiefs and Families of Note in Punjab* (Volume I) written by Sir Lepen Griffins contains details of large-scale rebellion of Ludhiana Sikh troops of the British army stationed at Benares (Varanasi) and their massacre by the British. "On the 4th June 1857 the 37th Native Infantry was disbanded at Benares, and some suspicious movement being observed in a corps of Ludhiana Sikhs present on the ground, the guns, which were being served against the 37th, were turned against the Sikhs. The whole affair seems to have been a miserable mistake; and there is no reason to believe that the corps was anything but loyal. But it was not prepared for so severe a test of its loyalty, and accordingly charged the guns; but was repulsed with great loss and driven from the field."

Lepen notes the role played by Sardar Surat Singh, a veteran of 2nd Anglo Sikh war who was exiled in Benaras by the British. Lepen writes, “When the Sikh guard hears of the fate of their comrades, their agitation and rage was extreme, and they would certainly have mutinied, seized the treasure, and attacked the Europeans, had not Sardar Surat Singh one in among them and, by his personal influence and expostulations, kept them to a sense of their duty. Through that long June night, the Sardar, ably seconded by Pandit Gokal Chand, argued and entreated till, towards morning, the little party were escorted to the mint by a European force.”³⁰

JAUNPUR - REBELLION OF SIKH SOLDIERS

The city of Jaunpur which is less than 40 miles from Benaras (Varanasi) has had a contingent of Sikhs soldiers from Ludhiana regiment and they revolted after hearing the massacre of their regiment in Benaras. They killed their commanding officer and marched to Lucknow, the capital of Awadh which was still under the ‘rebels’. Lepen writes

“At Jaunpur another detachment of the Ludhiana (Sikh) Regiment was stationed. When these men heard of the destruction of their regiment, they rose in fury, shot their Commanding Officer murdered the Joint Magistrate, and marched to Lucknow with the treasure.”³¹

ROLE REVERSED - SARDAR SURAT SINGH

Most readers would not know that all Sikh chiefs who joined the second Anglo- Sikh war 1848/49 were treated harshly by the British and their jagirs (lands) were confiscated and given nominal pension. The more serious ‘offenders’ were sent to exile outside Punjab. Sardar Surat Singh was one of them. His jagir worth Rs 22,600 was confiscated and he was sent to Benaras in exile on an annual pension of Rs 720 in 1849. He was under constant surveillance by the British. After lapse of 8 years people had switched sides. The Bengal regiment soldiers who fought from British’ side and did not respond to Sikh’s call to join them and ouster the British in 1848/49 were now fighting the British. Surat Singh who had fought the British before, in 1857 used his personal influence (as a Sikh Chief) to stop further desertions to ‘rebels’ who

were soldiers from Bengal regiment that defeated Sikhs, Marathas and Gurkhas. In India it is common to use the terminology of ‘freedom fighter’ and ‘traitor’ and it is fashionable to see the events in black and white. History is more complex and there is lot of ‘grey’ areas.

SANDHANWALIA SARDARS

The Sandhanwalia Sardars who share the ancestral lineage with Maharaja Ranjit Singh fought in revolt of 1857. Damandeep Singh Sandhanwalia, scion of the family and a bright young man informs the author of the article that Sardar Thakur Singh Sandhanwalia was the son-in-law of Raja Nahar Singh, Jat ruler of Bhallabgarh who joined the rebellion with his father-in-law. Following the capture of the Jat ruler (& subsequent execution) Thakur Singh came to Punjab. His role in Singh Sabha movement and trying to restore Maharaja Duleep Singh to the throne of Lahore is well known. Shamsul Islam has quoted letters from the British spies in his book which confirms that the Sandhanwalia Sardars joined the rebellion in 1857.³²

CONCLUSION

Since the Sikh princely state of Patiala and others had actively assisted British by sending their soldiers and numerous Hindu princely states including Dogra, Hill Rajputs, Marathas (states of Sindhia, Holkar & Gaikwad), Rajputana and state of Travancore actively helped the British in suppressing the revolt, **why are Sikhs specifically targeted for betraying the nation? Is it because they are an easy target and do not form a vote-bank outside Punjab? Both the historians Majumdar and Sen have rightly stated that nationalism was still in infancy among Indians and those who fought the British had some personal grievances against them.**

It is very fashionable across the Raavi to paint the revolt as a Muslim struggle to regain the Empire where the Hindus did not assist them. The Nizam of Hyderabad, Nawab of Malerkotla, Karnal, Punjabi Muslims (except Rai Ahmed Khan Kharal) and Pathans, did not join the revolt even when Bahadur Shah Zafar, scion of old Mughals was declared the Emperor of India. These rulers and communities helped British to crush the revolt.

Sikhs are not devoid of patriotism. The Sikh contribution in freedom struggle against British is not taught outside Punjab. Another myth is propounded by many that Sikhs actively helped British by joining their army. By WW2, Sikhs formed about 20% of the forces, the Punjabi Muslims & Pathans formed a third of all forces (33%) and remaining were all Hindus (about 47%). These figures explode this myth.

Vast majority of the Indian native rulers remained loyal with the British and that included rulers from all three religions. In 1861 The British Government in India gave the 'Most Exalted Order of the Star of India' to Indian princely rulers for their loyalty and help in suppressing the revolt. The list contains the 'usual suspects' namely Nizam of Hyderabad, Scindia of Gwalior, Ranbir S Dogra, Holkar of Indore, Gaekwad of Baroda, Nawab of Rampur & Bhopal, ruler of Nepal and Patiala among others.³³

To blame the Sikhs alone for the failure of this revolt and partial mutiny is to miss the wood for the trees as the documentary evidence produced above goes against the false charge of traitorship against the Sikhs. It is time to sift the grain from chaff and set the record straight. The Sikhs have proved more patriotic than their compatriots at every stage of India's history.

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