

Nizam, his Subjects and Soldiers during the 1857 Revolt

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Abstract: This article brings forth the British Nizam relations, the decisive attitude of Nizam and the role played by his Diwan Salar Jung during the Great Revolt of 1857. Northern and Central Indian territories played the theatres of war while Southern India remained aloof during the period of war. The role played by the Hyderabad state undoubtedly kept South India away from the embers of war. This article speaks of the efforts made by the commoners, soldiers and troops to fight against the British and the fusion between the people and power. It is interesting to note that the people along with the Maulanas, Rohillas, Arabs and Bedars threatened the throne for not fighting against the British. Though there were some sporadic raisings in the state, they were all put down by the British with some effort. The people and the soldiers involved in the revolt were either killed or imprisoned and the zamindars or the leaders who conspired against the British lost their wealth by confiscation. The article further discusses the role played by a few unsung warriors such as Turrabaz Khan, Alla – ud – din, Raja Venkatappa Naik etc and their contribution in shaping the early independence struggle in South India. Though the attack on the Residency building was the only major incident in Hyderabad Nizam's dominion; its impact incited and inspired many other tributaries in and around South India and paved the way for a strong and dire urge for freedom.

Keywords: British Nizam relations, Hyderabad and 1857 revolt, suppression of Rohillas, Jamadar Cheeda Khan, Raja Venkatappa Naik, Shorapore rebellion

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Hyderabad during the 1857 Revolt

“If the Nizam goes all goes”- one can understand the importance of Hyderabad and the friendship of Nizam with the British in the words of the Bombay Governor writing to the Governor-General. Southern India remained more or less aloof while Northern and Central India played the main theatres of war during 1857. The part played by Hyderabad during the Great War was responsible for keeping

the South away from the residue of war. People all over the state were greatly flustered with the events in North India. They anticipated that their leader also should fight against the British in this national struggle. The Wahabi conspiracy also points out the real feelings of the people in the Nizam state. But their aspirations for emancipating the British control could not be realised due to the following reasons;

- Nawab Nasir – Ud – Doula, during his long tenure might have realised the futility of resisting the British. So, he advised Nawab Afzal–Ud–Doula to adhere to the alliance with the British prior to his death.
- At the same time people failed to get the right leadership from the feudal nobles that surrounded the Nizam court.
- Though there were few sporadic risings in the state, they were put down with some difficulty by the British.

Nawab Afzal–Ud–Doula had his own grievances with the British over the influence exercised by the Resident in the state affairs and over the question of Berar but had decided to remain firm in his alliance with the British. His decision to stay firm during this momentous period in Indian history failed to satisfy his subjects who expected a contrary behaviour from their ruler. All in all, the decision of Nizam, the loyalty of the feudals and the efforts of Salar Jung prevented a violent and serious outburst in the Nizam State.

Nizam vs. his Subjects

A close history of Hyderabad during 1857 would convince the reader that the people were waiting for a leader to guide them and lead them against the British. They waited for a man on whom they have their implicit trust, for whom they could satisfy their kith and kin and for a man who could still the enthusiasm of the people. “ If at all they had to rebel against the British, they had to rebel in the name of the far-off Nana Saheb in the Maratha region, whom they had never seen, and about whom they had vague knowledge based only on rumours, while their natural leader, the Nizam for whom they were prepared to rise, lay inert.”¹ The decisive attitude adopted by the Nizam during 1857 not only prevented the embers of war in the South but also responsible for maintaining general equanimity in the South. It also made South India secure for the British. The reconstituted Hyderabad contingent played a decisive role in the battlefields of Malwa and Central India and brought a speedy conclusion in the First War of Independence.

The anti–British struggle in Hyderabad could be seen as;- a rebellion in the capital, rebellion in the contingent forces at Aurangabad and rebellion and conspiracies in various zamindaries. The news of the Delhi war created excitement among the Hyderabadis. As a result, placards appeared on the walls of the masjids and a few public places exhorting the Nizam to raise the standards of revolt². Moulavi Ibrahim, who played a prominent role in inciting the people to rebel and planned to rise in revolt on 10th June was called by the Nizam for his audience and personally warned him not to indulge in such seditious activities. In another incident that took place on 12th June, a fakir in the Bowenpally Municipality was apprehended for addressing the local people to revolt in association with the contingent forces. This fakir was further sent to the Residency for interrogation³.

“The oath of the Almighty is on him who does not read this paper”

The aid of the Almighty and his prophet is present with Afzul-Ood-Doula Bahadur who should not fear or be apprehensive. If fearful he should wear bangles and sit at home”.

“If Afzul-Ood-Doula does not act on this paper another Soobah will be ready from Delhi”.

This proclamation (*Izaharanamah*) is written for the faith and Islam of Mahomad Mustapah Sullulallo Allah Wo Salum for the stability of the Reign in the Deccan and war (Jehad) against the infidels.

One of the Placards during the Great War

Reading of the Qutba at Mecca Masjid was prevented by Salar Jung when an attempt was made to proclaim *jehad*. He made the officials remove the placards pasted on the walls of the mosques and sent the people involved in this to the Residency for the perusal. While some of the placards addressed the Muslims in the above style, others were written appealing the common subjects of the state; Hindus and Muslims to rise against the alien Christian forces⁴. Moulavi Akbar, another significant personality had impelled the people who gathered at the Mecca Masjid to offer prayers to rebel. As a result, people made an attempt to raise the standard of the revolt by hoisting a flag in the mosque. However, they were put to flight by the Arab guards posted by Salar Jung. These incidents in the Nizam dominions greatly disturbed the subsidiary troops and it is believed that they vented their feelings with the local people.

British vs the Subsidiary Troops

Col. Davidson, in one of his letters to the Indian Government, writes; “... I sincerely trust that after the present crisis has passed over the British Government will not forget what it has **owed to his Highness the Nizam and his most able Minister**”⁵ addressing about this incident. In this letter, he further states that the cavalry and infantry sepoy from the Hyderabad subsidiary find this as a suitable time to revolt against all Europeans. This disaffection towards the English was not only rampant among the Secunderabad subsidiary but also among various troops in other contingents. This resentment against the British caused a stir among the 1st cavalry of the Hyderabad contingent at Aurangabad. The signs of disaffection had soon appeared in the infantry lines also. Every day there were rumours of the intended massacre of European officials and their families. On receiving information about an attack in the cantonment, one of the European commandants of the 3rd cavalry had ***put his wife, children and some other ladies in a bullock cart, tying purdah, on the either side to be mistaken for a muslim family and sent them to Ahmednagar.***⁶ On the whole, the number of Nizam soldiers arrested and disarmed during the incidents at Secunderabad, Aurangabad, Ahmednagar etc. by the Britishers consisted of 1 Risaldar, 3 Jamadars, 9 Duffadars, 76 troopers, and 4 Trumpeters. Out of these, 21 were shot dead and 3 were blown away with guns.

Writing about this trial, Capt. Abbot States; ***“we have yet plenty of this work before us. Of the prisoners taken in this affair, two were blown from guns; seven shot by the dragoons; four cut in the charge; several hung; between thirty and forty transported; one hundred disbanded and some fifty or sixty others flogged or punished otherwise.”***⁷ While these incidents were taking place in the

other troops at Aurangabad and Berar, such events also moved fast in Hyderabad, and they resulted in planning an attack on the Residency building- the citadel of the British power on 17th July 1857. At the same time, some thirteen sepoys deserted from Buldhana contingent had arrived at Hyderabad under the leadership of Jamadar Cheeda Khan anticipating protection from the Nizam court.⁸ Expecting provocative congregations from Cheeda Khan, and his associates, Salar Jung arrested Cheeda Khan and sent him to the Residency for trial on his arrival. This created great turmoil among the people and soldiers in the city and a large crowd gathered at the Mecca Masjid on 17th July 1857. People and the soldiers pleaded with the Nizam by sending four Moulavies so that Cheeda Khan and his twelve associates might be freed and if the Nizam refused to accede to their request, they would attack the Residency.

Turrabaz Khan's inspiring Statement and Alla – Ud – Din's Arrest

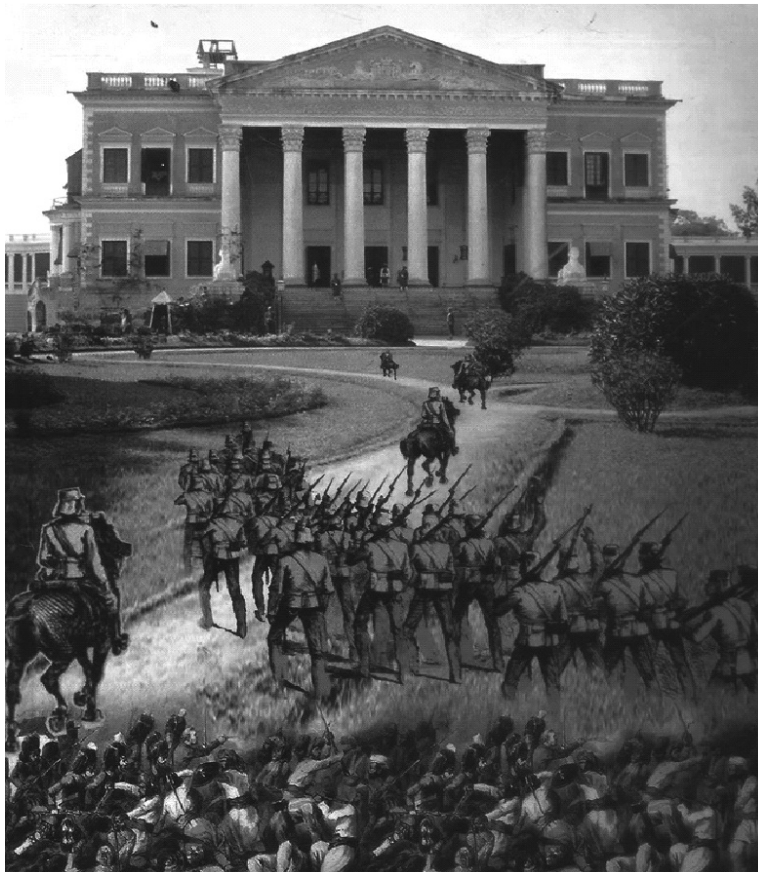
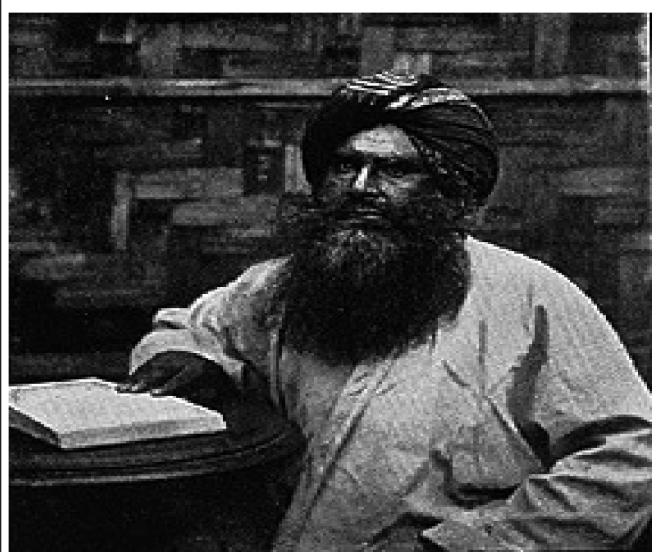


Image depicting attack on the Residency building

https://www.telugubooks.in/cdn/shop/products/1857_Hyderabad_Thirugubaatu_Gathalu000_1024x1024.jpg?v=1512127162

Salar Jung on being informed about the Mecca Masjid congregation sent Arab soldiers to discard the crowd and clued up the same to the Resident. By evening, 300 Rohillas under the leadership of Moulvi Alla – ud- Din and Turrabaz Khan headed towards the Residency. On estimating the severity of the situation, Salar Jung alerted the Resident to defend himself till he assembles Nizam's troops. There in, the Resident posted strong guards at every gate. The Rohillas marched from Sultan bazar area towards the Residency building and occupied the upper storeys of the Abban Sahib and Jaigopal Das; two *soucars*' houses.

These insurgents then called upon the guards to deliver Cheeda Khan and his associates. Ismail Khan belonging to the Hyderabad contingent went to remonstrate with the patrolling guards but was galloped away with the open fire⁹. Defence of the Residency was assigned to Major S.C. Briggs. Though Major remained calm as it was already dark, the Rohillas broke through the partition wall of a house belonging to Azim Ali Khan¹⁰ which resulted in constant firing till about 4 o'clock in the morning. The Rohillas could not stand the firing of the British and gave their way. The Arab guards, who were installed to prevent the Rohillas' attack, helped them to escape from the houses. Col. Davidson stated this incident in his letter to the Indian Government as, "*The Arabs cannot be relied on and will evidently only be on our side as long as we are successful*".¹¹



Moulavi Alla – Ud – Din from the Andaman Prison. https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/a/a4/Maulvi_Allauddin.jpg/440px-Maulvi_Allauddin.jpg



Turrabaz Khan martyrs memorial in Koti.

<https://pbs.twimg.com/media/FZ2pWTFUIAAqs7y?format=jpg&name=large>

Karamat Ali (the Megistrate of the criminal court), Fazlullah (the Megistrate of the Civil court) and Ghalib Jung were deputed to take Turrabaz Khan's statement. He gave a noble statement during his trial. **He took full responsibility for attacking the Residency to drive away the English from India.** He told the Jury that he joined the rebellion for his religion and denied the fact of having known Moulavi Alla – ud – din and Buddhan Khan - his patron. After the trial, Turrabaz Khan was sentenced to transportation for life. However, he managed to escape and was once again rearrested with the help of an informer Kurban Ali. British soldiers killed Turrabaz Khan in the scuffle, and hung his body by chains in Hyderabad.¹² Allah-ud-Din, who led people to attack the Residency on the evening of 17th July fled to Bangalore after the very incident and was arrested at Mangalapalli village. He was "brought back to Hyderabad, tried and sentenced for transportation for life to the Andaman Islands on 28th June 1859. He died in Andaman Islands in the year 1884".¹³ Alla – Ud – Din, is thus remembered as the first freedom fighter sent to the Andaman Island from the Nizam Dominion.

The Knight of Shorapore – Raja Venkatappa Naik

*"Appa! I would rather die than be sent over the black water, or shut up in a fortress always but I would never be faithless to those who trusted me"*¹⁴ - These were the words of a 24-year-old Raja

Venkatappa Naik during the trial to his guardian Meadows Taylor. Closing of the 17th July episode of Hyderabad did not put an end to the disputes between the people and their potentates. The concrete discontentment of the rebellions against the British can be understood from the agitations from various districts. One of the most significant and memorable rebellions took place in Shorapore under the leadership of Raja Venkatappa Naik. The Shorapore principality in the Gulbarga district was a tributary of the Nizam. The majority of people in this tributary were of the Bedar community. The Raja himself belonged to this community. During his minority, Capt. Meadows Taylor acted as the Raja's political agent and loved him like his own ward. He gave the minor Venkatappa Naik a good training in administration and after investing full governing powers to Raja in 1853, Meadows had left Shorapore for Hyderabad.¹⁵

When the great revolt of 1857 broke out in India, Venkatappa Naik - the young ruler could not resist the lure of independence. At the same time, Nana Saheb and some other Zamindars from the Raichur district tempted him to ascertain freedom from the British taking advantage of the situation in the Nizam state. Raja yielded to his naturally inherited patriotic feelings and the promise made by the Maratthas to make him the ruler of the Southern Maratha region stretching from Shorapore to Rameswaram.¹⁶ Above all he could not resist the pressure from his own people to rebel against the British. In one of his confessions to Meadows Taylor, he stated that ***“my people rebelled against me and called me a coward and a fool because I would not let them go.”***

Raja with the ambition of ruling the South raised mercenary forces consisting six hundred Arabs and Rohillas secretly. He sent agents to Bombay and Belgaum also, to raise men for his armies. Col. Davidson, finding Raja's activities implacable issued a proclamation through the Nizam Government that ***“if any person happened to take service with the Raja of Shorapore, he would run the risk of being severely punished and his property confiscated”***¹⁷ He also sent Capt. Campbell to influence Venkatappa Naik to stop his anti-British activities in 1858. He further ordered forces from Madras and Bombay and located them at a point of equi distance between Shorapore and the Maratha territory. Adding to this an army of 400 soldiers from Hyderabad was also sent to Shorapore to paralyse Raja's strength¹⁸.

Amidst all these advancements, on 7th February, 1858 the Bedars, Rohillas and Arabs in the Raja's army attacked Capt. Wyndham's troop; the Hyderabad army. The battle in Shorapore took lives and injured several Englishmen such as Capt. Newway and R.C. Stewart. Enraged with this, Capt. Wyndham trapped and drove the Raja's troops to the middle of the town. Following this event, Venkatappa Naik fled to Hyderabad with only two of his followers as the others dispersed with the fear of defeat. Unfortunately, while wandering in the bazaar to meet his former guardian Meadows Taylor, Raja was apprehended and handed over to Major Davidson. The English forces occupied Shorapore and Col. Campbell became the new administrator of Shorapore. Venkatappa Naik was kept as a prisoner at Secunderabad and tried by the Military commission. His former guardian Meadows Taylor was deputed to trial the Raja and record his confessions about the people involved in the conspiracy. Like Turrabaz Khan, Venkatappa Naik also took the entire responsibility on himself for the attack instead of revealing the names of his supporters. In his confession he questions Meadows Taylor that ***“what if I tell the names of my supporters? Government is powerful enough to crush them if they rise. But what they can do? Am I not the strongest among them? And yet where am I now?”***¹⁹ Originally sentenced to death, Raja Venkatappa Naik was imprisoned for four years in the fortress of Chengalpat (Madras) with the intercession of the Resident. Raja took his own life with a loaded revolver to avoid the humiliation of being a prisoner to the British Power.

After the death of Raja Venkatappa Naik, his followers dispersed in different directions. Tasaduq Khan, one of his followers was taken to Shorapore, tried and hanged in the marketplace as a warning to the rising rebellions. The Shorapore tributary was passed to the British during the rebellion and later restored to the Nizam on 4th March 1861. Apart from the Shorapore rebellion, Bhimrao's rebellion from Mundargi in the Dharwad region, Kenchangouda's rebellion from Hummigi and the rebellion of Srinivas Venkatadri from Dumbal were suppressed by the British.

Conclusion

The First war of Independence broke out in India in 1857 and plunged into a great upheaval. During this period, the people of Hyderabad also tried to oppose the English rule in spite of absolutely no encouragement from their ruler and their Diwan. As discussed under several headings in this research endeavour, people's curiosity of fighting against the British conflicted with Nizam's decisive attitude. Though the role played by the Nawab Afzal-Ud-Doula and his Diwan Salar Jung prevented the embers of war in the Nizam's dominions, it created chaos and disturbance in the subsidiary troops stationed at Hyderabad, Secunderabad, Aurangabad, etc. Thus, the Nawab faced disassociation from his own people and soldiers. The Arabs who were employed to guard the rebellions joined hands with the Rohillas and freed them. The protests in Nizam's Hyderabad and the memorable attack on the Residency building caused rebellions in many other districts and contingents such as Auranagabad, Ahmedabad, Shorapore, Buldhana, etc. The only major incident took place during this period in Hyderabad was the attack on the Residency building but it created disputes between the people and their rulers. This uneasy situation prevailed continued up to 1860 and the people involved in these incidents were either killed or transported for life. Commenting about the unity displayed by the Hindus and the Muslims during this period, the Englishman wrote, "... *the Hindus will begin to hate us, they will begin to love the Musalmans.*"

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