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DHONDIWAGH AND HIS ANTI-BRITISH RESISTANCE IN NORTHERN KARNATAKA - A STUDY

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Abstract

Dhondiwagh, a staunch contender of British, organized a revolt against British in South India, from 1799-1800 A.D. and his activities mainly concentrated in Northern parts of Karnataka, because it was very much suitable for Anti British Straggles. Basically, Dhondiwagh was a resident of Channagiri of Bidanore province of the then Shimoga District of princely Mysore State of present Karnataka State. Dhondiwagh was a Maratha by descent and worked under many rulers and ultimately joined military of Hyder Ali of Princely Mysore. Later on misunderstanding arose between Tipu Sultan and Dhondiwagh, as a result Tipu kept him behind the bar. But when Tipu died in the fourth Angli- Mysore War on 4th May 1799, Dhondiwagh, somehow managed to escape from prison and launched Anti British straggle. Under Colonale Dalrymple and Colonel Stevenson the British troops attacked and defeated Dhondiwagh on 17th August 1799. Dhondiwagh hence, moved to the Southern Frontier of Maratha Country where once again he was defeated by a Maratha chief Dhodupanth Gokale on the night of 30th August 1799.

Keywords: Revolts in Karnataka, Dhondia Wagh, Against British in Karnataka.

I. INTRODUCTION

Fighter par excellence, quintessential rebel, daredevil soldier and freebooter who owed his loyalty to nothing and no one except his ownself, Dhondia Wagh, was all these and more rolled into one. He lived in 18th Century and died at the dawn of the 19th in his 60th year on this earth, doing what he loved and did the best till the last; fighting. And with his last fight, he carved a niche for himself in India's colonial history, by giving the British a run for their money.

Born a commoner in a Maratha family of Channagiri in the erstwhile Kingdom of Mysore (present-day State of Karnataka), young Dhondia, enlisted as a trooper in the army of Hyder Ali, the de facto ruler of Mysore, whose ding-dong battles with the English East India Company (EIC) kept Southern India on the boil during the latter half of 18th Century. A soldier by instinct, he soon rose to become a Shiledar, cavalry commander.

During the Third Mysore War, which broke out in 1790 after Hyder Ali's death during the previous decade, Dhondia deserted the army, now under Tipu Sultan, the son and successor of Hyder. He took several soldiers and a sizeable loot with him, and found a safe haven with the Maratha revenue collector of Lakshmeshwara. Once the war ended in 1792, he proclaimed himself the ruler of the areas on the Maratha-Mysore border. With the soldiery he had at his disposal he went on to levy taxes in areas around Dharwad and plunder villages. Establishing his authority over Savanur early the following year, he began raiding territories ceded to the Marathas by Mysore as per the treaty that ended the war.

Karnataka was not a single entity in the 19th century. It was divided among British presidencies under British direct rule and the Mysore Kingdom under the indirect rule of the British. Hyderabad Karnataka area was under the control of Nizam of Hyderabad. Nationalism started in the areas which were under the direct rule of the British namely Bombay Karnataka area and Madras Karnataka area.

Where as in Mysore Kingdom and Hyderabad Karnataka area Nationalism started later. After the full-fledged war efforts by Hyder and Tipu, a number of armed revolts were organized elsewhere in the parts of Karnataka, as in India. The first of them was from Bidnur, under the leadership of Dhondija Waugh in 1800. The next in the series were the revolt of Shivalingaiah Deshmukh in Bidar in 1821, Sindagi in 1824, the queen Channamma of Kittur in 1824, Rayanna of Sangoli in 1836, Badami in 1841, Keladi in 1830-31, Coorg in 1834, Bedas of Halagali, Venkatappa Nayak of Surpur, Babasaheb Bhaskar Rao of Naragund and Bhima Rao of Mundargi in 1857. These native disgruntled elements to stem the tide of the British were stray and isolated and hence they were suppressed with in no time. They failed to produce lasting impact on the minds of the people.

But however, the anti-British spirit cherished by the people of Karnataka did not go in vain. The sacrifice of the heroes in these armed revolts did contribute to the growth of nationalism, which was rising slowly and gradually, was emerging as a force in the form



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of an accumulative effect. The spirit of patriotism which was conspicuous by its absence during the 1857 uprisings, suddenly far faced after 1885 and during the last decade of the 19th century and in the early years of the first decade of 20th century. It was undoubtedly the outcome of the cumulative forces and factors, both positive and negative. The present article is therefore, devoted to examine and analyses the positive and the negative

II. FIGHT AGAINST BRITISH

Dhodiawagh, a staunch contender of British, organized a revolt against British in South India, from 1799-1800 A.D. and his activities mainly concentrated in Northern parts of Karnataka, because it was very much suitable for Anti British Straggles. Basically, Dhondiawagh was a resident of Channagiri of Bidanore province of the then Shimoga District of princely Mysore State of present Karnataka¹ State. Dhondiawagh was a Maratha by descent and worked under many rulers and ultimately joined military of Hyider Ali of Princely Mysore.

Later on misunderstanding arose between Tipu Sultan and Dhondiawagh, as a result Tipu kept him behind the bar.² But when Tipu died in the fourth Angli- Mysore War on 4th May 1799, Dhondiawagh, somehow managed to escape from prison and launched Anti British straggle³. Under Colonale Dalrymple and Colonel Stevenson the British troops attacked and defeated Dhodiawagh

on 17th August 1799.⁴ Dhodiawagh hence, moved to the Southern Frontier of Maratha Country where once again he was defeated by a Maratha chief Dhodupanth Gokale on the night of 30th August 1799⁵.

British domination: The British merely glorified the teachings and principles like liberty, equality, fraternity, social justices etc. They did not care to implement them in their administration. The British controlled all newspapers including dailies, weeklies etc. They had full control over newspapers in Indian languages under strict censor. Thus, there was no press liberty and other democratic rights. All most all top posts were monopolized by British officers.

For example, Governor, Governor General, Divisional and Deputy Commissioners, District police superindents, District Judges, Military Officers were all British. Lower posts with lower salary were given to the Indians. Indians had to be content with such low posts. Even in democratic institutions Indians were left out. Opinions of Indians were not taken in matters of administration. Real power was enjoyed by British and nominal power were given to the Indian members and officers. Thus, there were ‘black pages’ in the history of British administration. The British showed revengeful attitude against the leaders of Indian Revolt of 1857 as well as the common people. In 1919 hundreds of people were put to death by military operation and thousands of people thrown in to prison. Many Indians suffered lathi charges, jack-boots and tortures in the Cellular jails in the Andaman.

But Dhondiawagh was able to collect frustrated rayats, frustrated rayats, majority of the Tipu’s cavalry chiefly Muslims from Aurangabad Hyederabad, Kadapa and obtained possession of several places in the southern Maratha Country⁶. In the early 1800, Dhondiawagh assumed the title “The king of the two worlds” and occupied the territories near Kitttur and savanur country on 1st may 1800 he seized Dombal⁷. The occupation of savnur by insurgents was important from the point of strategic position on the Mysore frontier and the rebels made it their stornng hold for their expedition towards Mysore in support⁸. Then Dhondiawagh advanced to Havanur, commanded by his nephew, joined the rebels at Kholhapur who became formidable against the company and captured Harapanahalli area⁹.

By the 18th of june 1800, except Havanur on the left bank of river Thungabadra about 16miles north of Ranibenur, there was fort of anyconsequence which had not fallen into Dhondiawagh’s hand. The inhabitants of the Peshwa, Nijam, Mysore and company swelled the rebel ranks¹⁰. Dhondiawagh’s advance continued unchallenged who captured Ranibenur, Hanagal, Manowly, Bannu, Chinnoor. It showsthat Dhondiawagh had strengthened and he was supported by all types of people especially rayats¹¹.

As provinces invaded and occupied, the British were scared of Dhondiawagh. In this regard on 11th may 1800 Governor General of India Morning Ton directed Governor Edward Clive to take¹². Moreover, the most dangerous thing to Wellesley was Dhondiawagh’s practical strategy against company that is what S.B. Ehacidhury very Impressively describes “Intead of bandit chief”, now Dhodiawagh considerably elevated his position amongst like-minded anti-British people of entire south India in synchronizing attack over Mysore and who become the head of practical confederacy, hence, colonial Wellesley himself entered the Arena¹³.

As a sequel for British it was necessary to obtain the consent of Peshwa to enter the Maratha state, to the north of the river Tungabadrato subjugate Dhondiawagh and Peshwa hesitatingly consented the British to help¹⁴. In addition to this a body of Nizam’s



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troops helped Wellesley¹⁵. As per the directions of the Madras government, Wellesley entered the field¹⁶. Mr. Josiah Webb, the secretary of Madras government, wrote a letter to Wellesley on 24th May 1800 stating that 'you have to pursue Dhondiaiwagh wherever you may find him, and to hang him on the first tree'¹⁷.

The company spies reported about the camp of Dhondiaiwagh on 27th June 1800 that all chieftains gave the greatest attention to Dhondiaiwagh. Akbar Khan, Ghoopurat and Venkata Rao were among his prominent comrades¹⁸. Dhondiaiwagh received considerable support from Daulath Rao Scindhia and Rani of Kholhapur. Scindhia presented state palanquin to Dhondiaiwagh in recognition of his ability in organizing threats to the company¹⁹. Moreover, the raja of Sholapur sent one thousand horses, 1000 infantry, two elephants and two guns on an emergency basis and subsequently 400 horses, 400 foot soldiers as reserve in support of the rebel effort. These rebels Sholapur struggled on behalf of Dhondiaiwagh until his death²⁰.

In addition to this the parganas of border regions of Andhra Pradesh also co-operated with Dhondiaiwagh²¹. As Wellesley expressed his fear that even the Nizam's officials and servants too conspire with Dhondiaiwagh in great numbers against the Company that the servants of Nizam had entered into a treacherous collusion with Dhondiaiwagh²². But Wellesley found this fact at the end of the Dhondiaiwagh's death. Moreover Thomas Munro also wrote to Resident Close that 'I have regret that amidst all the difficulties and disappointments which have occurred none of the officers ever once wrote to me... when it is considered in the course of last six weeks, and that the answer to a letter sent from Hallihal by common peon cannot reach that place in less than 22 days'²³.

Wellesley, therefore, expressed his view that "If we take the country ourselves, I do not expect much tranquility"²⁴. And also who wrote to Fort Saint George on 11th August 1800 that "the disaffection against the English was so wide spread that even if we suppressed the Dhondiaiwagh, some other leaders equally strong would emerge and continue the struggle"²⁵.

There were many leading daily papers like Mysore Star, Deshabhimana, Mysore Standard, Mangalore Patrike, Dhanurdhari Veerakesari, Karma Veera and other papers which exposed the British atrocities. Economic exploitation, religious discrimination aroused nationalism among the people of Karnataka. The emergence of modern press, both English and Vernacular, was another offshoot of British rule in India. Newspapers like, the Indian Mirror, the Bengali, the Amrita Bazaar Patrika, Bombay Chronicle, The Hindu Patriot, the Mahratta, Kesari, Andhra Prakashika, The Hindu, Indhu Prakash, Kohinor etc., in English and different Indian languages exposed the message of nationalism to every nook and corner of the country.

The newspapers like Kesari and Marathi were very popular in western India, especially in the parts of Bombay province and north Karnataka. "Kesari occupied a pioneering place and wide spread scope in whole Karnataka. Marathi was learned with the intention to read and understand the paper, Kesari". They carried the news of national happenings like the formation of the Indian National Congress, its annual sessions, its resolutions, presidential addresses and British reactions apart from popularizing them among the people, the ideas of representative government, liberty, democratic institutions, home rule and independence.

The newspapers published in Karnataka exerted a profound impact on the minds of readers. Karnataka Vaibhav, Chandrika, Jnanaprakash, Induprakash, Karnataka Patra, Dhanurdhari, Aryadharmojeevini, Udaya Chandra, Okkaliga Patrika, Ananda Chandrika, Kannada Kesari, Kannada Samachar, Karnataka Vritta, Chandrodaya, Deshabhimani, Dharwad Vritta, Belagavi Samachar, Mangalore Samachar, Mysore Gazette, Rajahansa, Lokamitra, Vrittanta Chintamani, Vagbhushana and some other daily, weekly, fortnightly, monthly, bi-monthly, quarterly, half-yearly and yearly newspapers, magazines and periodicals were published from various cities and towns of Karnataka in several languages viz., Kannada, English, Marathi, Sanskrit and so on by the eminent patriotic, enthusiastic, courageous and committed writers, publishers, columnists and editors, time to time in frequently. The list of papers, which were published in Karnataka, was innumerable. It may not be exaggeration to state that the 'press became the mirror of Indian nationalism.

Arya Samaja branches were started by Sathyanada and others at Hospete, Bangalore, Mysore etc., These branches also inspired the youth to take part in freedom movement. Tilak started the paper Kesari in Marathi in 1881. It played a predominant role in mass awakening in Maharashtra and in the Bombay – Karnataka province. Pune became the seething cauldron of political activities and center of higher education.

The forefront leaders of Karnataka like, Gangadhar Rao Deshpande, Kauljagi Srinivasrao, Jayarao Deshpande, Alur Venkatrao and others came to Pune for their higher education, where they came in contact with Shivaji club, Aikyavardhini Sabha and other organizations with the result in 1897 at Badami, in Bijapur district, they celebrated Shivaji festival, was very splendid in manner. The



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Bombay state political conference (Mumbai Pranteeya Rajakeeya Sammelana) was conferred year by year in various places of Maharashtra. Some of its conferences were held in Belgaum, Dharwad and in other cities of Bombay-Karnataka. It developed the neo-nationalist feeling of Tilak on the minds of leaders of Karnataka. Similarly, the Vyayamasalas were started in many places with the intention to furnish the healthy and muscle powered youths in the nation building activities. These Vyayamasalas became the centres of politico-cultural activities, some of these having a good collection of books in its own vachanalayas. Youths of these Salas celebrated the festivals of Sri Ganesh, Shivaji Maharaj, Jayanthis and Punyatithis of national leaders, Nadahabba, Mahanavami, Holi, Deepawali, Urs of Muslim peers with great sense of pride towards the feelings of nationalism

Thus, Wellesley decided to curb Dhondiwagh by hook or crook, who therefore invested the detachment in Malabar, Canara and Mysore²⁶, Troops from Bombay and Goa, military forces from Celon, the twelfth Regiment²⁷ and Twenty fifth Dragoons of Britain, second Battalion of fifth Regiment of native infantry were ordered to reinforce the grand army²⁸ and along with Nizam's troops and the Subsidiary forces in Hyderabad²⁹.

Therefore, under Lt. Col. Maclean, a detachment of Hyderabad Subsidiary force'2nd Battalion 9th Regiment was sent to assist in the Raichur Doab which reinforced soon afterwards by another detachment from the same force, composed of a Regiment of Cavalry and a Companies of Infantry under Lt. Col. Bowsen who assumed command of the entire forces³⁰. In addition, this Marathas also sent their troops under Balakrishna Pundith³¹. Purnaiah, the Dewan of Mysore had placed his troops in the service if the 3 British and supplied provisions to them³².

Even though Dhondiwagh was so powerful than the Company, hence, British took Srong steps against Dhondiwagh and chasing Dhondiwagh from Shikaripur, Harihar, Bidanore, Chitradurga, Ranibennur, Haveri, Karajagi, Savanur, Lakshmeshwara, Shirahatti, Dambal, Kittur, Saundatti, Jalhaal and eventually to Konagal till the death of Dhondiwagh in the middle of the September 1800 AD³³. But Wellesley and his commanders like Stevenson, Montresor, Capper, Munro, Balquirere, Dovaton, Prter, Patarson and others, the troops of Marathas Mysore and Nizam failed to defeat Dhondiwagh in direct wars and by using traits they finished Dhondiwagh³⁴.

SOCIO ECONOMIC CONDITION

Socio-Economic conditions in Kittur taluka around 1793 which had 285 villages comprising of 91 "inams" and 194 "Khalsa" villages mentioned that the taluka had a total income of Rs. 4,10,786 in 1793. The taluka had fertile lands watered by rains or rivers. The famine in August 1787 in the area due to failure of rains caused the price rise and jowar became very dear and was sold at 8-9 seers per rupee. The poor were starved to death.

Kittur was also connected with important towns and cities. The amount of Rs. 6,618 collected with imports and exports indicates the increased traffic in goods. The fact that in Kittur, taxes were to be paid twice showed that it was a viable unit economically.

Karnataka has been a land of freedom fighters from the earliest times. When the British power slowly spread over the whole of India in the last part of the 18th Century, the people of this area could not tolerate this alien rule. So they decided to wage a revolt. Thus the revolution started and we call it "Armed Insurrection". Venkatappa Naik of Surpur, Bheema Rao of Mundargi, Baba saheb of Nargund, Rani Channamma of Kittur, Rani Channamma of Keladi were a few notable brave men and women who struggled throughout against the British for the freedom of the country.

THE KITTUR PALACE

The entire palace is a masterpiece of planning. The relative positions of the sitting-cumguest rooms, the assembly room, dining hall, store rooms, bath rooms, have all been so well arranged that every part is independently approached without passing through the other parts, every room is provided with two entrances, each leading to a different room, and all these providing examples of meticulous planning. While a detailed description of the palace and its rooms is not necessary, there are, however, a few important features, which deserve to be noticed.

The most impressive interior part of the palace is the assembly hall, which is not too large and which was meant for confidential meetings with sardars and other high officials. The hall is provided with backrests in the adjoining walls. The assembly hall is a very big dining hall meant for occasional dinners arranged in honors of the Royal guests. In the front portion of the palace, to the left side, is a room for a unique purpose. In the middle of the walls of this room is an obliquely fixed iron pipe of about one and half feet in diameter open to the sky and meant for viewing the pole star. In front of the pipe is a platform to sit on. More ingenious than all these is the



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excellent water supply system from one common source to the whole palace.

In the center of the open back verandah, there is water well at the center. Water receiving bowls made of stone and water tankers on the sides and at two corners had also been kept. Adjoining the inside pack wall of the palace, water was poured from the well into these bowls from where it was carried to all the water tanks and to the well behind the kitchen by concealed copper pipes. Stone wash troughs had been provided at the right places in different parts of the dining hall, kitchen and other rooms. Another interesting feature of the palace is the excellent garden provided with cisterns and fountain jets and so on. The bricks used for the floor in the garden are of very high quality and of different shapes and sizes.

The walls, some of which in fact can be seen even today, are only 6 inches thick, but incredibly strong. The whole palace is of ashlars masonry built with hematite quartz, rubble and dressed stone and strong slaked lime mortar. The pillars are also constructed with circular discs, greenish schist stones, placed one on the other, using the same mortar as binding materials. The surface is plastered partly, such as the niches in the walls, the walls of the bathrooms and kitchen. The lower parts of the walls are dressed in rectangular slabs of schist stone.

The windows and niches in the walls are so arranged as to provide light and air to the sidewalls and rooms. The ashlars masonry and arched niches clearly indicate the tradition of the Muslim, Maratha architecture in survival phase of the tradition and Kittur is one of the finest specimens of this type of architecture.

III. CONCLUSION

Dhondia Wagh fought his last battle on the morning of the next day, 10 September 1800. The locale of the battle was a place called Conaghalli in the present-day Raichur District of Karnataka. It was as ferocious an encounter as any as battles go. Wellesley, having at long last found the prospect of nabbing an adversary who had made him look silly, threw caution to wind, and charged at the head of his 19th Light Dragoons in line abreast. Not to be outdone, Dhondia, the master cavalryman he was, rode out with his troopers to meet the charge head on in a deadly clash, wherein no quarters were asked or given. He fell fighting and the Dragoons carried the day³⁵.

Till 1885, the idea of integration had not upon in the minds of Indians. Perhaps it was one of the reasons why they failed in many battles which they fought against the English. Later, the spirit of nationalism manifested itself among doctors, lawyers, journalists and authors. The Indian National Congress Session was held in Bombay and it gave impetus to this concept of nationalism. Its impact was first felt in starts which were directly under British control.

In Mumbai Karnataka and Madras Karnataka, the spirit of nationalism raised its head. Those who propagated it further were Mangalore Narayana Rao, Kolachalam Venkata rao of Bellary, Gangadhara Rao Deshpande of Belgaum, Alur Venkata Rao of Dharwad, Raghavendra Rao and N S Hardikar. They continued their agitation till the independence was achieved. The idea of nationalism spread in HyderabadKarnataka due to the efforts of Balagangadhara Tilak of the Congress. V.D Savarkar of Hindu mahasabha and Keshava Rao of Arya Samaja, Vishwanath Reddy Mudnal and Bhimanna Khandre have added their mite in making the national agitation successful. At this time, among the people of Mysore,

The Mysore Wodeyars had received power to rule from the British. Hence, they were opposed to any agitation against them. The Dewans too had been appointed on the recommendation of the Viceroy. Hence, they too did not like the idea of nationalism. But, the News Papers like Mysore Star, Deshabhimana, Karnataka prakashaka, Mysore Standard severely criticized the British atrocities and the Dewan's anti-people policies. Some of the articles were about the necessity of nationalism.

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