AN ANALYSIS OF INTELLIGENCE DURING REVOLT OF 1857 AND POST REVOLT MODIFICATIONS IN THE INTELLIGENCE

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Abstract:

The revolt of 1857 took place during the governorship of lord canning mainly in the northern and eastern India. The revolt started as a sepoys mutiny and worked as a catalyst for the evolution and development of information/intelligence system by British in India. The intelligence gathering methods before the revolt was only meant to understand the local population and to learn the language and other customs of India by the Britishers and the main source of their information were the newspapers etc. However, both traditional and modern networks of information were enlisted by the rebels during the revolt of 1857 for their gains against the British. With the outbreak of the revolt, the Britishers felt their weakness in the area of intelligence, as they were not aware of any discontent in the sepoy ranks among the army and were ignorant about the conspiracies hatched among different classes of the people especially sepoys.

During the revolt, while introspect the problems and weaknesses of british during the fall of important places like Delhi, Awadh etc, they tried to establish new channels of information and at the same time blocking different channels of information to the rebels, which later gave rise to the institutionalization of intelligence in british India and emergence of Anti seditious acts in the legal framework.

Key words: Sepoy, Dak, Intelligence, Rebels

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Introduction:

The onset of the Rebellion of 1857 as an acute failure in intelligence gathering and analysis of the dissentions among different classes including sepoys. Sir John Kaye, a historian to the Company, remarked how rapidly, in a manner the rebels and the Indian population disseminated information about British weakness and disasters, in his History of the Sepoy War. Bentinck and Thomason's statistical movement had told the British almost nothing about Indian sentiments, politics and beliefs. During 1860's, British officers begun to notice signs of disaffection among the sepoys of east India company. But they generally failed to realize the full significance of the unrest. The unrest can be attributed to many issues related to the Indian customs and the interference of British in the local customs like Sati etc and the introduction of new Enfield rifles. In Feb, 1857, the 19th infantry at Behrampur refused to accept the newly introduced cartridges because of the rumor that these cartridges are greased either with Pig or Cow fat. During this time, passing on of Chapattis from one village to another by the Indians as a wake up call for the revolt, but poorly introspected by the British. The story that the revolt was announced to headmen of villages by the passing of chapatis in a kind of chain letter had gained enormous currency. Thereafter, wandering holy-men giving out benedictions were observed at every major point of tension from 1858 until the end of British rule. Other isolated incidents like in 34th Bengal regiment (Mangal Pandey) and in Meerut, 03rd Native Cavalry revolted and declared their fight against the foreign rule and advanced towards Delhi. British official in Delhi had received no advance warning. At 8 AM on May, 10th, 1857, Signals officer in Meerut was barely able to send off the message that except that, the 03rd cavalry was punished before the link ceased to function. Later, Delhi was able to send the signal of other mutinies to the surrounding areas, before the siege of Delhi by the sepoys.

There were twelve simultaneous mutinies among the Indian soldiers garrisoning the recently conquered Punjab. The sepoys' plan seems to have been to join with the troops at the large military station of Firozpur. This would have put at their disposal 7,000 barrels of gunpowder and vast stores of weapons. 'Had the disarming not been effected when it was, while the electric telegraph had given British monopoly of intelligence, it is quite impossible to say what might have happened within 36 hours. The telegraph had only been opened on 1 February 1855, and in the early days of the revolt electric communications to the west were often sporadic. Nevertheless, information on the Delhi outbreak was passed through from Ambala to Ludhiana,

as was the first news of the serious revolt in Jalander, whose officials had omitted to warn other stations. These critical telegraph messages were supported by more conventional forms of surveillance. Informers working through the Lahore police brought news that the sepoys were organising for mutiny, but wished to see what happened in Delhi before moving. The Firozpur authorities received news of the fall of Delhi to the Meerut mutineers by the tried old system of harkaras. Letters sent through the post by Indian merchants of Delhi to their correspondents in the Punjab were also scrutinised. This barely adequate intelligence allowed the British to contain the mutinies at most military stations and also to move quickly enough to avert the possibility of civilian uprisings amongst the Province's Hindu and Muslim populations. The Sikhs, recently conquered and resentful of the part played by Indian sepoys in their loss of independence, generally remained sullenly inactive throughout the war. But elsewhere the rebels had large pockets of sympathisers. Robert Montgomery, the Chief Commissioner, was aware that this was a war over Indian 'opinion'. One of the first things he did after the disarming of the troops was to occupy all ferries and passages of rivers. Appreciating the importance of the old pathfinder communities, his lieutenants tried to deprive Gujars of the inflatable skins which they used to cross the rivers. Altogether, the complex river system of the Punjab made it easier to control than the broad, uninterrupted plains of India. An embargo was placed on all 'suspicious travelers who could not give a proper account of themselves and especially upon wandering sadhus and other mendicants of a quasi-religious character'. Thousands of Indian light carriages, which used hourly to run the thirty-five miles between Lahore and Amritsar in the days before the railway, were seized by the British authorities.

Methodology:

Documents and other secret correspondence employed during the revolt of 1857 are destroyed, but many important documents are preserved in Indian House, London and archives of the Home Department. Other contemporary works also contain important details about the revolt. However, details about the british informers and other spy networks has been destroyed by british or taken to Britain at the time of Indian independence. With an intention to establish the authenticities and creditability of the document the method of corroborative evidences has been followed wherever necessary. While utilising the diaries and memories personal prejudices and biases have been eliminated to the extent possible. Simply narration of facts and historical method of exposition has been followed in the development of the present article.

Objective:

1. To identify the failures in intelligence gathering, which led to the revolt of 1857
2. To analyse the intelligence during the revolt of 1857 and its weakness.
3. Trace the contribution of British intelligence officers in suppressing the revolt of 1857
4. To identify different channels of information used by British and to counter the same used by the mutineers.

Role of Communications network/Intelligence

Both traditional and modern networks of information were enlisted by the rebels during the revolt of 1857. It is certainly the case that religious teachers were active in spreading the rebel cause and Muslim religious fighters poured into Delhi from all parts of north and central India, spreading their message in villages along the way. The newly restored Emperor of India rapidly sent out messengers to the neighboring territories in order to try to reclaim an authority which had lapsed in 1803. Shortly after the fall of Delhi to the Meerut sepoys, the zamindar of Rewari cut the postal communications along the Grand Trunk Road at much the same point where earlier Jat rebels had cut the communications of the Great Mughal. There ensued a struggle along the length of Trunk Road to keep the dak running. General Neill, commander of the expeditionary force advancing on Kanpur, employed terror tactics with some success. He summarily hanged the headman of a village near a staging-post where dak horses had been killed and punished attacks on the post elsewhere by burning villages. But insurgents continued to attack the telegraphs. On the other side of Delhi, the Punjab officials coerced the rulers of small states such as Jhind and Nabha and others into protecting the British lines of communication. The Indian rebels had many other informal agencies of communication to fall back on. Nearly half the public officers in the Punjab were Indian and they tried to maintain a regular communication with their families in the rebel-held territories. Other residents of India working in the Punjab fell under suspicion. These included domestic servants or labourers on the Bari Doab Canal and, in addition, Native Indian horse-keepers at Ferozepore, Indian servants at Murree, Indian native doctors at Murree and Amritsar. Once the British had lost control, the dense patterns of social communication which criss-crossed the Indian plains could rapidly be turned against them by the sepoys.

Battle over information was also visible in other parts of India. Banaras, like other places also saw a rapid reassertion of British control. Secure in their links down-river to Calcutta by steamboat, post and telegraph, the authorities were able to act quickly when news of the Meerut mutinies came in. Here the Bhumihar Brahmin royal family, supported for two generations by British power, used its agents to inform the authorities on the course of rural rebellion among its rivals, the declining Rajput clans of the hinterland. The descendants of that most typical of all 'native informants', Maulvi Abdul Kadir Khan, kept a close eye on dissidence among the Muslim weavers and workers of the town. Spies were set on members of the exiled Delhi royal family in Banaras: these far flung branches had long acted as a network of supporters and agents for the Delhi court. But the British also benefited from residual tensions between Hindus and Muslims in the city. Close controls were put on the press and Post Office. When, in September 1857, two Banaras merchants set up an unofficial dak between Lucknow and Banaras, it was revealed to the British by an Indian police officer. The network was broken up and the two merchants were later prosecuted for sedition.

The rapid disarming of the Bengal Army sepoys in Lahore within twenty-four hours of the outbreak of the Mutiny in the Meerut Cantonment was a momentous strategic success for the British. Here speedy and accurate intelligence was their salvation. It may be, of course, that the rebellion was doomed from the beginning. An officer less army of peasant soldiers was set against the forces of the world's greatest contemporary military and technological power. No foreign army was in a position to intervene on the rebels' side, and at the critical moment potential enemies of the British in Persia and Afghanistan were paralysed by internal conflict. If the Punjab had been lost, however, the British would have been unable to move their forces against Delhi, the seat of rebellion, as they did within six weeks of the outbreak. This was a knight's pawn move against the enemy king and it threw the whole revolt off balance thereafter. Without this success the cost to the British government in men and material of suppressing the Rebellion would have been infinitely greater.

To counter the british designs in information collection rebels also took to many measures. At Kanpur Nana Sahib executed spies, merchants and Bengalis who had communicated with the British and ordered scrutiny of the people who can speak English. For British, the most dangerous network of sedition was that maintained by Muslims of the purist Tareek – e - Muhammadia ('Wahhabi') tendency. Many officials came to believe that the whole Muslim

community was implicated in Rebellion, fuelling the suspicion which culminated in the Patna conspiracy cases a decade later, when Muslims in the capital of Bihar were arraigned for sedition. Herbert Edwardes, the evangelical Christian officer, serving in the western Punjab, denounced the 'rancorous and seditious letters' sent by 'Mohammedan in Patna and Thanesar, near Deoband, to soldiers and civilians serving on the new North-West Frontier. The evidence suggests that some connections within the 'Wahhabi' movement along with some older Sufi networks were used by rebels to try to coordinate different sectors of the resistance, but the official response was out of all proportion to the threat.

During pre revolt era British authorities thought that relatively few letters were actually treasonable. But the technique adopted by the Indians to wrap up political information in everyday phrases became common during censorship. For example, the British read sinister meanings into phrases such as white wheat has become very scarce and country produce very abundant or hats were hardly to be seen and white turbans plentiful. According to the authorities, the tone of the letters and of wider public opinion in the Punjab actually deteriorated over the summer, and only with the fall of Delhi to the expeditionary forces on 16 November 1857 was 'disaffection nipped in the bud'. It could be that the British were sometimes reading their own fears into this correspondence, but postal surveillance still produced 'many important and interesting documents' which served to indicate clearly the tendency of native opinion.

Intelligence/Information as a tool to control Mutiny at Agra

Agra, by contrast, was held against the surrounding rebels, as the weakest link in the embattled chain of British redoubts. Here the fear of seditious communication among Muslims became particularly feverish during the summer of 1857. Here, too, the British were put at a severe disadvantage by their own media. News of the Meerut revolt was published in the British and Indian newspapers the day after it occurred.48 It quickly reached troops in the vicinity of Agra who began to mutiny as soon as the fall of Delhi became general knowledge. The 'baser classes' were soon running riot on the outskirts of the city, though the British were able to maintain a semblance of control through the efforts of 'men of property', notably Tori Mull the military contractor for the Sikh wars. It becomes clear that in the first two months of the Rebellion the British in Agra were totally starved of information. What E.A. Reade called 'mussulmanophobia' swept the station; it was reportedly cultivated by Eurasian clerks who had been prosecuted for

debt by the Muslim judge (Principal Sadar Amin) of the city. The Magistrate, R. Drummond, had relied on 'respectable Mahometans for information and advice' and employed them 'almost exclusively' in the police and civil offices. These and popular Muslim resistance. When a few gentry members and numerous ordinary policemen joined the Rebellion, Drummond joined his hate-crazed compatriots and dismissed those few Muslims who had not already absconded, thus destroying his whole information system. Colvin, the Lieutenant-Governor, added to the chaos by replacing Muslims with Hindus in what remained of the provincial administration. The rebels, advancing from the south, would certainly have taken the Agra fort had they not run out of powder. The Europeans and Eurasians cowered inside its walls, loosing off volleys at shadowy enemies, and were not even aware of the rebels' withdrawal. One of the few positive measures taken at this time was the removal by Reade of the government printing presses from the orphanage at Secundara and his rescue of the 'record of rights', the painfully acquired register of properties which a generation of officials had been assembling. In most stations the mutineers destroyed printing presses along with office records, which they regarded as vital tools of British oppression.

During August 1857, the Agra authorities began to get the situation under control. A small Intelligence Department was formed under William Muir. This employed a 'large body of well paid and confidential agents' who scouted enemy lines and maintained the links between the forces advancing on Kanpur and the British force besieging Delhi. The first harkara message from Havelock in Kanpur was received on 17 July. But for months the only regular postal correspondence between Britain and Agra was through Rajasthan and Bombay. Muir's job was to prepare daily diaries of intelligence for Colvin and, after Colvin's death, for E.A. Reade who became Acting Lieutenant- Governor. He also prepared daily bulletins of mutiny events which were printed and posted round the station to counter the spate of rumors initiated by rebel sympathisers. In addition to spy reports, Muir read the 'Lucknow Urdu paper'. This may have been the magic a lithographed newspaper connected with the famous Muslim seminary at Firangi Mahal which continued to publish in the interests of the insurgents during the revolt. His most important source, however, was more traditional. This was the Gwalior news writer in Delhi whose newsletters were passed on to Agra by the British Resident in Gwalior. Muir recorded that these reports gradually became more truthful. As the Delhi siege proceeded, the newspapers began to report the British capture of major strong points, even though it gloried in the casualties

inflicted on the besieging troops. From time to time the British even fed information into the newsletters themselves in an attempt to undermine rebel morale. Muir typified the overlap between political surveillance and orientalism.

Muir's closest informant during the revolt was Chaube Ghyanshyam Das, brother of Raja Jai Kishan Das who was later awarded a British honor. He belong to a landlord family of eastern India which had served the government as officials for two generations. They were notably pious Hindus and it is possible that their conspicuous loyalty during 1857 was a consequence of the view, shared by the British that the leaders of the Rebellion aimed to restore Muslim power. Muir's work highlights the strongly ideological, even irrational, aspects of information collection which the British so often represented as scientific. At the height of the revolt, and at the very time when the sepoys were advancing on Agra, the government tied up much manpower by instituting a detailed investigation into whether European women had been raped before being murdered by the rebels. In 1857, rape was a highly sensitive issue both in India and in Britain, and it bore directly on the honor of the imperial rulers. The report concluded that there was no evidence of rape. By the late summer of 1857 intelligence in the Agra sector was also being coordinated by Lieutenant Herbert Bruce, a veteran of the force which had pacified Sindh, and who became Inspector of Police in the NWP in May 1857. Bruce's task was to rebuild communications outward from the capital. He was particularly charged with keeping track of General Havelock's small force pressing to relieve the embattled Lucknow Residency, which had rapidly lost touch with its base. Bruce received crucial help from Manraj, a clerk in the nearby Etawah District Office who sent his own agents to spy on the rebel armies and kept notes on the plunder of villages by insurgents. Manraj was protected by Abbas Ali, sub divisional officer in the District, who intercepted Nana's letters to local landowners and helped to keep the British lines of communications free. From late August 1857, Bruce went on the offensive as the death-struggle around Delhi began. In consultation with Havelock, he drew up a petition which sought to convince the Lucknow rebels not to massacre the inhabitants of the Residency, should it fall. They were offered the choice between 'conciliation' or a 'war of extermination'. An agent, Khageswara, was sent to Lucknow to post up the notice on the walls of certain houses. 'The people could not guess from where the papers issued. Here the British were seeking to turn the indigenous practice of placarding against their enemies. Meanwhile, Bruce was in touch with another sympathiser, Mirza Abbas Beg, who sent information on the position of rebel gun

emplacements, and was the first to relay news of the death in the Lucknow Residency of Sir Henry Lawrence to the outside world.

British Intelligence experts evolved during revolt of 1857

Major W.S.R. Hodson also emerged as an intelligence expert during the rebellion. He was appointed Assistant Quartermaster General in charge of the Intelligence Department and helped coordinate the effort against the rebel army in Delhi during the summer of 1857. Hodson also worked with the Agra authorities to keep the dak running between the Punjab and the east. As late as August 1857, it was still being interrupted, its runners being murdered on the road by rebels and reconnaissance patrols. Yet the first intelligence out of Delhi itself came as early as 2 June, even before the siege had begun. As in the case of Muir's intelligence, the source was newspapers from the news writer of Jhind Raj, a Sikh state located about one hundred miles from the capital. These were then copied to the British by G. Barnes, Commissioner of the Cis- Satlaj states. This source continued to be used almost until the fall of Delhi. What is significant about it is that much of the information was apparently collected in the open court of the Emperor. The rebel commanders evidently knew the identity of the Jhind Raja's news writer and presumably they must have assumed that he would send on secret information, and that this would have a good chance of reaching the British enemy. People suspected as 'news-mongers' were taken and beaten nearly to death by sepoys; fifty Bengalis were said to have been incarcerated for having communicated with the British. But the royal court did not take action against privileged news writers, even in the death-throes of the Indian polity. The information about rebel positions which flowed out of Delhi gave the British a huge advantage, though the city would certainly have eventually fallen even without these failures of intelligence.

Hodson and Montgomery had both set up more direct spy networks by mid-August in Delhi. Hodson was aided by Maulvi Rajab Ali. This man was Henry Lawrence's confidential munshi throughout the early administration of the Punjab. Hostility to the Sikhs appears to have motivated his early connection with the British. The information which came to Rajab Ali and Montgomery, direct from the city and via Jhind, was written in Urdu on small pieces of Indian paper which could be folded up and hidden in a stick or in cloth. Becoming more detailed by the week, they give a dramatic picture of the gradual eclipse of rebel hopes, though it must be said that the writers were aware of what their masters wanted to hear: 'the citizens pray anxiously for

the return of British power' was a constant refrain. Divisions within the rebel ranks were detailed alongside attempts to raise morale. The Emperor was said to be using the time-honored method of speaking to his people by proclamation and corresponded with his erstwhile liegemen in Lucknow.

Post revolt Changes in Intelligence:

The Rebellion was catalyst to many changes which decisively reshaped the information order of colonial north India in the later nineteenth century. It brought about a rapid expansion of the railway network and telegraphic communications. There was a sharp increase in numbers of European military and non-official personnel. Post-Mutiny panics notwithstanding, the British moved slowly to try to establish a better-informed system of rural police. In the 1860s and 1870s attempts were made to professionalise the police, to unify it as an agency separate from the local Indian officials and to bring town and village watchmen establishments under their control. Numbers of rural police rose slowly throughout the latter part of the century, but many features of the old system remained. The 1860 'Report on Village Police in India' noted that the NWP police were largely ignorant of what was happening in the countryside. They 'know nothing unless they have some tolerably reliable agency in the village'. By comparison, the village watchmen (chaukidars, goraits, etc.) had 'a sort of knowledge and a sort of influence which no police agent could possess'. For the foreseeable future, the government's criminal and political information systems in the countryside would continue to depend on an uneasy cooperation between the thinly-stretched constabulary and village officers who were under the influence of the landowners. The whole system collapsed, for example, when the watchmen staged a strike over pay or police intrusion and threw in their lot with local criminal gangs. Very little information came into the diaries of the village police stations, especially in years like 1862, when bad seasons put great economic pressures on the watch-and-ward agencies, and gang robbery revived. Informed opinion continued to assert that the bulk of minor crimes were compounded locally.

Later nineteenth century was becoming a kind of police state. Certainly, numbers of police were going up. It would be wrong, however, to assume that the police became markedly more efficient. Successes were scored against major dacoit gangs and 'criminal tribes' were surrounded with rules and regulations, but much of the countryside remained out of the ken of officialdom.

Where the authorities did gain a greater purchase on rural society it was less because of more effective government policy than because Indian society itself was slowly becoming more complex, literate and self-aware. Ultimately, it was social change which was to make the British more knowledgeable about their Indian Empire, but also more vulnerable to its internal lines of communication. The postal system evidently did improve at the sub-district level: 'a daily post now reaches every thana [village police post]' and 'it is wonderful how correspondence has increased under the new system'. But he conceded that beyond the thana there was 'great delay and uncertainty', despite hopes for a bi-weekly post to every village.

Other institutionalised changes were also observed during post mutiny era and new institution especially for intelligence gathering was created. For Example, A small cell for a "Special Branch" was established in 1887, as by that time the Thuggee and Dacoity department had more or less ceased to exist. In 1904, on Frazer Commission's recommendations, a Central Criminal Intelligence Department, under an IG was created, in line with the provincial CID to collect, collate and communicate information, under condition of frank and cordial cooperation, between the Centre and the provinces, without taking away the responsibilities of the local Government.

The 'Native Press was put under strict censorship'. The authorities imprisoned the editor of the Moortizaee of Peshawar for treason and 'the native paper at Mooltan was likewise suppressed'. The editor of the Chesma-i-Faiz of Sialkot was ordered to remove his press to Lahore where it was kept under strict surveillance. These newspapers had all earned a reputation for veiled criticism of the government before the outbreak of the revolt, but officials justified the harsh treatment of the press on the grounds that the editors of three of the five Punjab Indian newspapers were 'Indian'. British occupation of the Punjab had seen a rapid growth in the numbers of small lithographic presses, which had been strictly controlled by the Sikh rulers. The British were now reaping the consequences of the information revolution which they had put in train. To a much greater extent than any earlier Anglo-Indian encounter, this was a modern war of propaganda. In form the Rebellion may have seemed like a scattered patchwork of risings, but broader currents of opinion were at work even in areas which did not revolt.

The importance of battle to control the passage of 'sedition' and mould public opinion was demonstrated by new regulations for the control of the Post Office. Since 1836, the government had always controlled the posts closely, suppressing unauthorised 'native daks'. The main reason for this was financial: the need to maximise revenues from postage duty and stamps. Otherwise,

officials had viewed the post, like the press, as benign agencies for spreading useful knowledge. The mood now changed sharply. In each district the magistrate was appointed head postmaster with orders that all Indian letters should be opened and scrutinized. The officials 'suppressed suspicious letters, especially those addressed to sepoys'. The authorities discovered many examples of treasonable messages and were left in no doubt of the widespread popular hostility to their rule.

Conclusion/Findings:

- The main reason behind the revolt of 1857 seems to be the intelligence failure on part of the East India company as compared to the use of old channels of intelligence by the rebels, which gave advantage to the rebels during the first phase of the revolt.
- The success of the British in suppressing the revolt and regaining the political ground in India is attributed to the developing of new channels of intelligence by the British and establishment of effective intelligence network with the employment of Indian spies in gathering of intelligence.
- The intelligence gathering apparatus and the methods of scrutinizing the Indian channels of information by the British gives an upper hand to the foreigners in India in establishing strong empire which lasted till 1947.
- Newspapers and News writers including upper class Hindus played an important role in the development of spy system in Indian, which later gave positive impetus to the evolution of security state in India.
- The experience of the Rebellion burned itself into the mind of Anglo-India and policies were evolved to keep a much closer watch on the movements and political opinions of Indians.

Suggestions:

Wars are not won by the military might alone, but needs an effective intelligence network to execute the plans of the army against the enemy. To establish any political control over a territory, it is important to first establish the intelligence network. Lessons can be learnt from the revolt of 1857 in tackling current problems like Naxalism and Terrorism in India and to ISIS designs in Middle East.

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