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# **Revolt of 1857 in India: A Geographical Perspective**

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# Abstract

The Revolt of 1857 is an event in Indian history which is not only important for the Historians but also for the scholars and experts of other social science studies. For a Geographer, it is pertinent to know about the areas where the effects of the uprising spread. The common knowledge is that the Revolt spread only in the Northern Region of the country however; studies and archival documents confirm that the fire of the uprising was spreading wild like a forest fire in all directions of the country. The South of India as presumed by some scholars was greatly unaffected but, the reality was that there were spurts of the uprising in the nooks and corners of the Southern country as well. This paper tries to clear the notion that the Revolt/Uprising of 1857 was only confined to the North of the country. It was an event which covered the entire coordinates of the country.

**Keywords-** Revolt, Awadh, Archives, Conspiracies, Involvement, Gwalior, East Bengal, Central India, Nasik, Malabar Coast.

# Introduction

The Revolt spread to various parts of the country there are several incidents which have been documented to prove this hypothesis. The hypothesis that the Revolt was restricted to only Awadh, Delhi and parts of Central India has several contradictions. There are

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many such major or stray incidences recorded in History to prove the Geographical Location of the events or incidences which took place across the lengths and breadths of the country. There were incidences of oppositions which range from a regular revolt or disturbances or just the brewing up of discontent and disapproval of a foreign rule and atrocities being committed on the Indians in whichever part of the country. It would be hence be interesting as a study to look at the significant and insignificant incidents that revealed the presence of the fact that the Revolt was not confined mainly to Northern India.

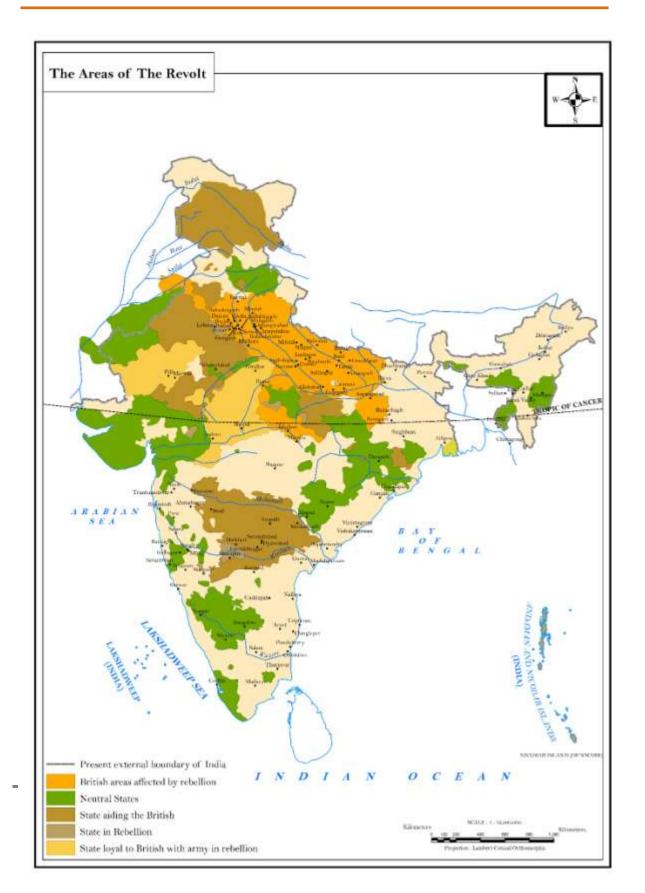
Conspiracies were, being, hatched in every part of the country against the *foreign rule*. The common populace was as enthusiastically involved as were the upper class and the royalty. The whole country became one and there were secret meetings being held in very mysterious mannerisms which used indications, which the British did not understand, like, the waterman *bhishti* refused to give water to the *sahib*; or the *ayah* at the sahib's house left without informing. There were whispers and rumours in the bazaar. Intellectual women, magicians and female astrologers volunteered to initiate and motivate women. Female gypsies and others presented before the female populace a picture of the demonical government, a rogue 'ghost' that had shackled the country, and had to be, burnt. <sup>1</sup>

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# The Revolt spreads across the entire Geography of the Country

# Awadh

One of the major events that triggered off the Uprising was the annexation of Awadh in 1856, when Nawab Wajid Ali Shah was, exiled to Calcutta. Awadh was the main centre of the Revolt and was, spearheaded by Begum Hazrat Mahal, the wife of the erstwhile Nawab. Besides Lucknow, Barabanki, Unnao, Sultanpur, Allahabad, Kanpur, Varanasi, Sultanpur, Jahangirabad, Mitauli (Kheri), Sitapur, Gonda and **Mathura** were the affected areas. There was an uprising in Banaras and the Sikh army also joined in.<sup>2</sup> South of Bari Pargana, District Sultanpur, was Mahmudabad. The greater part of the pargana was held by Bais, of whom the chief proprietors were Bei Singh of Kanhmau and Jawahir Singh of Basahidih, both taluqdars.<sup>3</sup> Some of the parganas mentioned in Ain-i-Akbari with their respective owners were, Daryabad-Chauhans and Raikwars; Bhitauli-Rajputs and Jats; Rudauli-Bais and Chauhans; Fatehpur–Shekhzadas and Rajputs, etc. The Chauhans formed a portion of the great colony, which occupies the west of Fyzabad, Pachhimrath, and Mangalsi, extending to Rudauli and Daryabad in this district. Principal Chiefs of Bara Banki were Taluqa of Ramnagar, Hardha, Surajpur, Jahangirabad, Barai, Rudauli. All these taluqas were on the side of the rebels during the Uprising and they joined forces to fight against the British.

The conflagration in Awadh has been, referred to in relation with the various facets of the Uprising in the entire monograph and supports the assumption of Awadh being the epicentre of the event. The fall of Lucknow, the siege of the Residency, the capture of power at Kanpur, etc., were events that gave the Uprising a national flavour. They definitely contributed to the holistic representation of the Revolt as a widespread movement, a precursor to the National Movement.<sup>4</sup>

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# Western UP

The Uprising was triggered off by the Indian Sepoys at Meerut on May 10, 1857. By the end of May 1857 the 'mutiny' had totally spread. Bulandshahar, Malagarh, and Anupshahar were in the throes of the Revolt, with the Rani of Anupshahar playing a valiant role there.<sup>5</sup> On May 31, 1857, the British were present at the church in Shahjahanpur (near GF College) when early in the morning 20-22 revolutionaries entered the church with swords and sticks in their hands. The English women and children were on the run, and though the Raja of Puwayya was a loyalist, he was a coward and did not give them shelter, but eventually they escaped to Aurangabad.<sup>6</sup>

# Delhi

The sepoys reached Delhi after the outbreak at Meerut. Bahadur Shah, the Mughal Emperor, referred to by some as the King of Delhi, assumed the leadership. His condition was pitiable, the treasury was empty, he was in bad health, old and powerless. The colonial masters had completely overpowered him and he was just a titular ruler, albeit still considered as the leader who had credibility to head a unified opposition.7 After the battle of Badli Ki Serai, on October 7, 1857, Delhi was, released from rebel control. The effectiveness of the Revolt was heavily, dented and with the relief of Awadh by Colin Campbell, the death knell of the Revolt in Northern India sounded. However, the rumblings remained, "Even now vast number of rebels in Bareilly, Farrukhabad and Lucknow are determined to fight in organized groups and to dispute (the possession of) every acre of the soil (literally 'from Parsang to Parsang') .... (In the neighbourhood of Delhi) the Meos of Sohna and Nuh (Gurgaon District) have created uproar in such fashion that you would imagine lunatics had broken loose from their chains. Tula Ram...Is still at large in Rewari and has now joined his forces with those of Devi, the Meo, and operates under him. This group, in those hilly and forest regions, has its independent plan of fighting the (British) rulers. In a word you might almost say that the very elements in India are in ferment."8

## Bihar

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Bihar too was not, unaffected by the Revolt. There were disturbances in Hazaribagh, Darbhanga, Purnia, Singbhum, Gopiganj, Patna and Jagdishpur. An example of outstanding valour displayed by women during the Revolt of 1857 can be found in Jagdishpur (Bihar). Kunwar Singh, belonging to the royal family of Jagdishpur, actively participated in the Revolt. Despite his demise on April 14, 1858 the hopes of independence were kept alive by his brother Amar Singh who successfully organized the rebellion in Bihar from April to October 1858.9 Unfortunately, in Darbhanga the spread of the Revolt was curbed because of the support of the Raja, Raghunandan Singh, and the socalled respectable citizens of the town to the authorities. Similarly, in Singbhum, Hazaribagh and Patna, despite the active participation of the people, the Revolt did not grow on account of the loyalty of the regional rulers towards the British. To name a few, Raja Bhoop Singh of Patna aided the government; as did the Raja of Serakhillah and the Thakur of Khersherwah who offered their services and assistance as well as 700 to 800 retainers to help the British at Singbhum.<sup>10</sup> However, the spread of the Revolt in Bihar could not be denied. At Pali there were reports of the murder of some British officials that necessitated the despatch of the 47<sup>th</sup> NI from Mirzapur to Pali to curb the rebels there.<sup>11</sup>

# East Uttar Pradesh

East UP felt the impact of the Uprising and was especially noticed on account of the escape of the main leaders, like Begum Hazrat Mahal and others, to Nepal via Gorakhpur and other places. **Gorakhpur, Bansi, Basti, Khalilabad, Azamgarh, Bahraich, Tanda and Sutassee**—all were affected. Rebels attempted to operate from the forests but were chased and in attempting to cross the Rapti many perished, but some led by Mahomed Hussun did manage to cross the Ghagra and reach Tanda. <sup>12</sup> Gorakhpur was occupied by the rebels but was re-occupied by the British through military operations.<sup>13</sup> Basti and Bansi were typical examples of areas of active rebellion where the disturbances were rendered ineffective by the loyal Indian rulers! Raja of Bansi and the Rani of Basti evinced their loyalty to the government during the present

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disturbances, and while the former defeated the rebel detachment there, the latter fell upon the rebel army in its flight and captured one of its guns.<sup>14</sup> The *tehsil* at Khalilabad, which they had turned into a strongly entrenched post and where they kept a large magazine of powder, was blown up by the rebels in their retreat.<sup>15</sup> Many taluqdars and large landholders declared war against the British after the Annexation of Oudh in 1856 as many lost their lands due several reasons, i.e., non-payment of revenue, not having land rights on the villages occupied by them, some being ousted and their opponents being considered the rightful rulers. However, many benefited, so the British were taken aback that so many landowners rebelled against them, consequently leading to reoccupation by the British of their territories and their confiscation (1858 villages). The Bahraich region was particularly affected, where the landowners took an active and hostile stance against the British. 'The chief delinquents among them were the Rajas of Chahalari and Dhaurahra, the Bhitauli Raja, and the Raja of Baundi.'<sup>16</sup> Raja of Baundi was the head of the Raikwar clan and guided the others, as he was devoted to the cause as Begum Hazrat Mahal had gone to his fort after the capture of Awadh.

# Punjab

Punjab witnessed a mixed reaction but the discontent was brewing and sparks did fly in several areas like **Gurgaon, Karnal, Jhajjar, Nuh, Sohna, Bahadurgarh, Ballabhgarh, Loharu, Pataudi, Farrukhnagar, Dujana and Rewari.**<sup>17</sup> There was no dearth of loyalists that quelled the Revolt in Punjab and neighbouring areas. The Raja of Jaipur assisted the government on the application of the Political Agent, Capt. W.F. Edens, in quelling the disturbed district of Gurgaon. His troops also escorted number of English officers, women and children from Nasirabad to Agra. An officer from Karnal wrote about the providential escape he had from Delhi when the 'mutiny' was at its height there. He travelled on foot without clothes and shelter. He was helped by the *zamindar*, his friend, and the family given shelter by Rani Mungha Dabee.<sup>18</sup> "The army mutinied at Sialkot but Tilak Pandey, the *Subadar*, refused to join the mutiny and guarded the magazine with his life."<sup>19</sup>

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# The North-East

Assam: Historical reviews of the North East highlighted that there was brewing discontent in the region, which culminated in the region's participation in the Uprising of 1857. Guwahati, Jorhat, Dibrugarh, Garo Khasi Jaintia Hills, Manipur, Golaghat, Barak Valley, Sylhet, Cachar, Sadiya, Lushai hills and Latu were all affected by the Revolt. In Assam, Maniram Dewan impressed upon the hapless prince to lift the standard of the Revolt by inciting the sepoys at Jorhat, Guwahati, Dibrugarh and Golaghat. Taken aback by the spread of the upheaval to Assam, tea planters exited their estates and sought shelter in Guwahati. American Baptist missionaries at Guwahati were anxious about their security. The Assam (Tea) Company's Assamese workers got work that supported the rebels. "Had an outbreak occurred, there can be no doubt that they would have sided with the rebels," the Company reported in March 1858. Madhuram Koch, the labour contractor, was sentenced to seven years imprisonment in January 1858.<sup>20</sup> The diary of a British soldier, George Carter, stationed at Dibrugarh with the Assam Light Infantry (ALI) had details of, and the duration of, the military disturbances in Upper Assam. Carter mentioned the state of the military establishments, which panicked since Hindustanis exclusively made up the artillery. By the middle of August 1857, Lt. Colonel Simon Hannay, Commanding Officer of the ALI, contemplated 'open precautionary measures' and there was panic all around. Meanwhile, at Jorhat, there were apprehensions that some incriminating documents linked Kandarpeswar Singha to a planned uprising in Assam. Arrests then followed in the battalion. Carter mentioned the names of Jamedar Noor Mahammed, 'native' doctor, Hadaiat Ali and sepoy Shaikh Muhammad. The arrival of the Gurkha troops augmented the ANI and plans for defence of Dibrugarh were finalized.

**East Bengal and Barak Valley and Khasi-Jaintia Hills** were impacted by the Revolt. In November 1857, when they learnt about the Uprising at Meerut, 300 sepoys of the 34th Native Infantry, stationed in the port town of Chittagong, mutinied. They

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looted the Collector's office, released prisoners and took off towards Sylhet through Tripura with Rs. 27, 8267 and three elephants. They entered Cachar and were able to muster support from several Manipuri princes, among whom mention was made of Norindrojeet Sing, who planned to enter Manipur through the mutineers and expropriate the government of the State. They were pursued by the Sylet Light Infantry and by February 1858, around 185 of the rebel soldiers were killed, women and children imprisoned and the rest dispersed.<sup>21</sup> News about the turmoil in the Brahmaputra and Barak valleys had also reached the Khasi-Jaintia hills. Khasi chiefs were excited at the news of the fall of the British power. One of them was the former Jaintia Raja, Rajendra Singh, who professed loyalty to the British, but the British authorities were suspicious that he may use the troubled 1857 scenario to regain Jaintia. He was commanded to stay in Sylhet under the vigil of the authorities.

Several pockets in India drew patriotic inspiration from the events that took place in 1857.For instance, in Manipur, Thangal General (of a Thangal Naga tribe of Manipur) joined the movement as he was struck by the patriotic fervour in India at that time. He was one of the 34th Native Infantry mutineers who mutinied at **Chittagong** on November 18, 1857. These mutineers, "after burning their lines, breaking open the jail and releasing the prisoners, and plundering the treasury, marched through the jungles of Hill-Tipperah and reached Sylhet and Cachar, where three Manipuri princes were arrested for entertaining hostile design towards the British and sent to Alipur Jail."<sup>22</sup> The movement's impact was felt at Manipur, towards which some Manipuri princes headed. Most of them, barring three or four, died or were captured during the repeated attacks by regular troops. Among those who escaped was Thangal General, who thereafter chose to serve in the Royal Court of Manipur.<sup>23</sup>

# **Central India**

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**Malwa, Neemuch to Sagar, Gwalior to Mhow, Bhopal, Indore, Dhgaon, Sipoli, Ramgarh, Ahiri, Ramgarh, Jabalpur, Bastar, Nagpur, Mandla, Arapalli and Mollampalli** were rife with the spirit of the Revolt.<sup>24</sup> The heroism of the Rani of Ramgarh disturbed the Commissioner of Jabalpur, who allowed her to rule till such time as the British had regained control over the lost territories in the north, as was evident in their declared policy of 'discretion was the better part of valour'. They had difficulty in curbing her in military encounters with her in April 1858 and could never capture her, as she preferred death to dishonour, and ultimately committed suicide.<sup>25</sup>

The Revolt of the **Gond** tribe, living in the hilly terrains of Vindhya and Satpura region in Madhya Pradesh, occurred when Bapurao, the *zamindar* of Mollampalli, and Venkatrao, the *zamindar* of Arapalli, ignited the flame of rebellion in this region. They organised the Gonds, Mariye and Rohillas into an army and captured the adjoining areas. After receiving this news, the British dispatched an army under Captain Shakespeare to deal with this menace. However, after reaching at the spot, the British army realized that it was difficult to suppress the army of Bapurao and Venkatrao. Rani Laxmibai of Ahiri refused to surrender the two leaders. Totally rattled, on April 26, 1858, the Commissioner of Nagpur issued an order stating, "Everyone involved in the armed mutiny should be hanged with immediate effect. Others involved in pending cases should meet the same fate. The harshest possible treatment should be meted out to their leaders." Unfortunately, the two were betrayed by someone in the Rani's court, and Baburao was hanged, while Venkatrao escaped to Bastar to carry on the Revolt there. In 1860, he was caught and awarded life imprisonment.<sup>26</sup>

**Jhansi, Gwalior and Indore:** The spread of the revolutionary spirit to Jhansi and other areas in Bundelkhand was spearheaded by Rani Lakshmi Bai, Tatya Tope and Rao Sahib. The whole country was rife with speculation of the imminent revolt that threatened to take massive proportions in Central India. The refusal of Scindia and Holkar to help the revolutionaries, suppressed the Revolts there. Despite the fact that

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the Gwalior army joined the Rani of Jhansi and Tatya Tope's forces, the might of Sir Hugh Rose resulted in a defeat of these forces and the death of the Rani in June 1858.<sup>27</sup> The kind of simmering discontent had all the portents of a much bigger conflagration. An incident revealed the state of things in cantonments. In Mhow, the Native Officer of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Native Infantry refused entry to a *badmash*, who attempted to incite the sepoys, by threatening them that European artillery was ready to fire and would blow them away. It was asserted by *Mofussilite*, that though the person given credit for preempting the Revolt at Mhow was the Commanding Officer of the Artillery, it was actually the fidelity of the Native Officer that did it!<sup>28</sup>

Similarly, Holkar wrote to the British Agent about how a detachment of State troops stationed for protection of the Residency along with British forces, "adopted a course of direct mutiny, and led on by their unfortunate fate... Raised a great disturbance, and having commenced firing guns, killed some innocent beings." The whole Residency was plundered and it necessitated Holkar to ask for help from Mhow. However, the Mhow troops had mutinied, and marched to Indore to join, "the mutinous and disaffected here. It is impossible to describe the excitement, plunder, and bloodshed that continued here for two following days. I had no troops left to think of fighting with the troops of the line from Mhow..." His anguish conveyed the fact that as late as June 1858 Central India was a tinderbox that could easily have been ignited if the Maratha Chiefs had helped. Every hand was now against the English, from Neemuch to Saugor, from Gwalior to Mhow. The force at Durand's disposal was "extremely inadequate to the restoration of order and stay of anarchy. The Gwalior contingent had become our most powerful foe; the Bhopal contingent was in open mutiny and no trust could be put in the Malwa contingent."<sup>29</sup>

All the turbulent Afghans and foreign mercenaries in the surrounding district joined the rebels. Firoz Shah, of the Delhi Royal Family placed himself at the head and raised the Musalman standard. The heavy rains continued and made the black soil impassable.

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Nawab Adil Mohd Khan also joined them. These men gave out that they were going to the Peshwa, which led the British to think that they would go to Kalpi. Great many Moofsids and Thakurs who had plundered the districts lying on the other bank of the Ganga had also joined the rebels.

# Western and Southern India

Since the establishment of British power, regions in Maharashtra, Goa, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Kerala displayed occasional resistance to colonial systems. Local leaders and local people took up local issues. However, since 1854, different areas in South and West India seemed to be looking at a wider landscape and by the time the Uprising of 1857 happened the country south of the Narmada was disturbed. The popular belief that Western and Southern India remained unaffected by the Revolt was probably a creation of the accounts written in and around 1857. These were mostly accounts and writings by the English, and were naturally biased. There were several reasons for resistance in South India. These prevailed much before the actual Revolt of 1857 broke out. In the late 1830s the colonial government decided to reduce the area held by local chieftains, referring to it as 'alienated land', so several such areas lapsed to the British government in the Bombay Presidency and the Madras Presidency. Hence, local rulers, like the Nawab of Carnatic, who lost economic, social and political positions they had held for centuries, did not hesitate to join the discontented anti-British groups. Secondly, there was no particular tradition of loyalty to the British in the Madras army. There were occasions when troops of the 'native' cavalry or infantry regiments revolted against their British officers.<sup>30</sup> Thirdly, there were local chieftains like Rani Chennamma of Kittur in Karnataka who, for various reasons, waged battles against the colonial government (1824). Fourthly, since the 1850s Christian missionaries had been active in Southern India creating a sense of injustice that led to the formation of the Madras Native Association in 1852.

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The government was certainly concerned about the disaffection in South India. The resolution of the Government of Madras in the Judicial Department, dated September 3, 1857 is indicative of this concern. It stated, "Hyderabad is always inflammable and was sure to be deeply excited.... Our Provinces of Kurnool, Cuddapah and Malabar contain a large Muslim population which would participate in these feelings and at Madras itself and the towns of Arcot, Vellore and Trichinopoly animosity was felt in consequence of extinction of the Nawabship of the Carnatic...Prominent notice was drawn to the Native Community by the press...... The policy of annexing Native States on the failure of lineal male heirs may in particular be noticed as having been discussed in very inflammatory language." <sup>31</sup> From the Resolution, it was evident that in 1857 a conspiracy existed across the country, from Belgaum to Mysore, Kurnool and Madras.

GA Ballard, Special Commissioner for North Canara (Karwar) believed that, "the uprisings were due to people's love for freedom and the leadership by the Dasais who were ever against the British rule."32 However, it is a fact that the revolt everywhere was led by the natural leaders of the people, the educated middle class. In South India, many leaders were there in 1857, who had no vested interests and fought 'selflessly' against the British. Some prominent ones were Rango Bapuji in Satara; Sonaji Pandit, Rangarao Pagay and Moulvi Syed Alauddin in Hyderabad; Bhamrao Mundargi and Chotu Singh in Karnataka; and Ghulam Ghaus in Madras. There were others in Chingelpet, Arnagerry, Krishna, Coimbatore, Mulbagal Swamy etc. Besides these, the hill and forest communities like the Bhils, Kolis and Gonds from Maharashtra; Bedars of Karnataka; Koyas and Savaras of Andhra Pradesh, were led by valiant leaders, like Bhīma Naik, Kaji Sing, Ramji Gond, Gudgya, Subba Reddy and others, who rose in uprising. Hindus Muslims, townspeople, tribals, civilians, army men, all fought together. They failed in their task and failed in the end. <sup>33</sup> Unfortunately, the common thread that ran through the disaffected states was that most of the conspiracies failed as the British came to

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know about them and crushed them and most of the time, either deported the rulers—or perpetrators of the crime— or imprisoned them or even put them to death.

**Bombay** was suspected as a centre that harboured supporters among Indian leaders of high standing in the city including, Jagannath Shankarshet (1804-1865). He was the driving force behind the establishment of the Bombay Association in 1852 and was its first President. The Association was set up to be able to send petitions to the government with regard to prevalent problems or issues. He was a *shetia*, a rich person of the mercantile class. The Bombay Association suffered a setback because Bhauji Lad and he were, suspected of being involved in the Revolt though no conclusive evidence was, found against them<sup>34</sup>. Jagannath Shankarsheth, himself, narrowly escaped being arrested on charges of high treason, after a secret inquiry by Charles Forjett, Deputy Commissioner of Police, as ordered by the Governor of Bombay.<sup>35</sup> A reign of terror was, unleashed by the Bombay government and anyone suspected of being connected in any way with the Revolt was arrested and punished in some way or the other. One of the punishments was being publicly hanged or blown from cannon. In September1857, Forjett erected gallows near the Bombay Police Commissioner's office. The 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> N.I. regiments were present in Bombay and some of the sepoys in these were a part of the conspiracy of revolt. Ganga Prasad was one such person in whose home the secret meetings were held.36

**Ratnagiri** was disturbed, as was evident from a letter from the Commissioner of Police to the Judicial Secretary to the Government, Bombay, June 13, 1857, which said, "It is not expedient that the detachment of the line stationed there should be either removed or reduced in number."<sup>37</sup> Similarly, at **Satara**, the British authorities conveyed to Hugh Rose that, "it would be impolitic at present to remove the military guard from Satara jail."<sup>38</sup> Satara was a victim of the Doctrine of Lapse and headed by the Agent of the ruler, Rangoji Bapuji. Grand Jacob observed, "Rango Bapuji took advantage of the Satara

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situation, and in conjunction with Nana Saheb (Peshwa), became a leading spirit in 1857-58."39

**Kolhapur** was a great Maratha State, its heritage going back to Shivaji. Itwas subjugated by the British by a treaty of October 1, 1812. The 27<sup>th</sup> N.I. Regiment of the British army was quartered at Kolhapur. The sepoys had contacts and links with revolutionaries in other parts of the country. Reports were that Baiza Bai Shinde of Gwalior would visit Kolhapur to mobilize the forces there. The Revolt of the army was raised on July 31, 1857 under the leadership of Ramji Shirsat and about 200 sepoys, primarily the Pardesis and Marathas in the Regiment.

The Revolt started with an attack on the Regiment treasury and on the quarters of the European officers, the stable being the next target. The rebels then marched to Ratnagiri where a detachment of the 27<sup>th</sup> N.I., about 250 strong, was stationed. Chima Saheb, the younger brother of the ruler of Kolhapur headed this joint Revolt of the army and the townspeople. They took possession of the palace and gates of the fort. Col. Le Grand Jacob was appointed by the Bombay government as the Special Commissioner with the commands of the troops in Kolhapur and Savantwadi. Le Grand reported that the ferment of the 'mutiny' had been brewing, and almost all native officers were involved. He said that regular emissaries from Satara, Gwalior etc. were coming to Chima Saheb, one of the emissaries, being from Nana Sahib, having visited southern centres, including However, the Revolt was suppressed by the British as on August 18, 1857, Mysore.40 the 27<sup>th</sup> N.I. at Kolhapur was disarmed at a public parade, as was the detachment of the 27th N.I. at Ratnagiri. Court Martial was conducted in courts formed at several stations under the recently passed Act 14 of 1857. The rebels were convicted and some sentenced to death, eight were blown away from the guns. Jacob reported that, "All met death with fortitude, refusing to purchase life by betraying their common secret."<sup>41</sup> In May 1858, the British government struck the 27th N.I. Regiment off its army List, and thus came to an end the chapter in the 1857 Revolt in South India.42

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After the failure of the army revolt some elements started gathering again under the leadership of Chima Saheb. Taibai, the erstwhile dowager queen of Kolhapur, played an important role in insitigating the 2<sup>nd</sup> uprising at Kolhapur. Jacob, the Special Commissioner in Kolhapur, wrote, "There is throughout the country a general feeling of dislike to English rule and that any great reverse would bring this into active operation."<sup>43</sup> The outbreak at Kolhapur happened on December 6, 1857 when the rebels took the city by storm by placing a gun at the gates and threatening to blow it up. The Raja surrendered without a fight, but the British forces reached there and fighting ensued. However, the next day the British forces broke all resistance and the revolt was put down. Chima Saheb left Kolhapur hurriedly and was later deported to Sind in May, 1858, where, he died at Karachi on May 15, 1869. Chima Saheb's wife, Sakwarbai, appealed to Jacob to allow her to go with her husband but her request was turned down, thus resulting in her suicide on April 2, 1858. Chima Saheb also lost all claims to the throne of Kolhapur.

**Bhil Rising in Khandesh**: The Kolis and the Bhils were the two communities residing in south Nasik and North Ahmednagar areas. They were staunch supporters of the Peshwas and fought continuously against the British since 1820. During 1857, Nasik was the scene of considerable anti-British activities. The Bhils of south Nasik and north Ahmednagar were 7000 strong. They were a section of the warlike and backward community of Central India, scattered mostly in the Western Ghats, with their main stronghold in Khandesh. They had a history of armed resistance against the British in the first half of the nineteenth century. The Bhil leaders were very active during 1857 and proclaimed that they were acting under authority of the Mughal Emperor at Delhi. They raised the standard of revolt against the British authority at Khandesh. British officers have given accounts of the 'determined resistance' that the Bhils had offered.<sup>44</sup> In the Battle of Amba Pani on April 11, 1857 alone, more than 460 women and children were taken prisoners. Thus, it is evident that the entire Bhil population of the hills took

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up arms against the British.<sup>45</sup> The repercussions of the Bhil Revolt were felt in southern Ahmednagar, Nashik district, and a few parts of Hyderabad State where similar revolts occurred.

**Penth in Nasik** had a large population of Kolis, who on December 6, 1857 attacked Harshul and destroyed all the Mamlatdar office records. Along with Bhil leaders, they besieged the government office. Raja Bhagwantrao of Penth had been corresponding with Nana Sahib and along with his Dewan, planned the risings in Penth. He, along with his compatriots, was arrested and hanged in public in January 1858.<sup>46</sup> His property was attached and the revenue of Penth henceforth was to be collected in the name of the British.

In **Pune**, when the Revolt broke out in May 1857, the news of the happenings was reported in Marathi and English newspapers and messages too arrived continuously from the north. The impact was palpable in Pune, for example, prayers were offered at the Jama Masjid in Pune on May 22, 1857, for the success of the uprising at Delhi. 47 At the Poona Native General Library, the centre of intellectual activity, "seditious conversations were openly carried on in favour of the mutineers and against the British." Luminaries like Professors Kero Lakshman Chhhatre, Krishnashastri Chiplunkar, and the editor of the daily, Dnyanaprakash, Krishnaji Trimbak Ranade, were among these. The Commissioner of Police, A. Bettington, observed that the government should decide whether the library should be closed down, as also whether those in government employ-involved in fostering a spirit of 'mistrust and disaffection'-ought to be acted against.<sup>48</sup> The British government, however, refrained from taking any such action. In September 1857, copies of the Peshwa's Proclamation in Marathi were stuck near the college and the library. <sup>49</sup> One of the leading organizers in Pune was, Balwantrao Babaji Bhosale. He wrote a letter secretly to Dadasaheb Bhosale at Kolhapur on March 22, 1858, "Everything here is ready, but there is great need of money......The officers of the Paltans here are on our side. Our friend, Bala Sathe who

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joined Nana Sahib has written to urge readiness and care and promised to send money for our expenses." <sup>50</sup> In 1861, Rao Saheb Peshwa, the nephew of Nana Sahib arrived near Pune but left for Hyderabad to re-assemble forces for a prospective revolt.<sup>51</sup>

Hyderabad State was a major area where several anti-British uprisings were planned. In Aurangabad, on June 12, 1857, the 1st Cavalry of the Hyderabad Contingent openly revolted against the British and refused to proceed to the north to fight the forces of Bahadur Shah. The Artillery and the Infantry stationed at Hyderabad also joined the Revolt, along with troopers of the 9<sup>th</sup> Cavalry and Infantry of the Hyderabad Subsidiary. Very soon the common people in Aurangabad also joined them. On the night of June 13, the Cavalry raised the banner of Revolt, under the leadership of Chhedi Khan, Jamadar of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Troop. The British apprehended most of the rebels, and Chhedi Khan and his followers escaped to Hyderabad, where they were arrested by Salar Jung, the Nizam's minister, and handed over to the British Resident. On July 17, the British Residency at Hyderabad was attacked by 200 Rohillas and the common people under the leadership of Maulvi Alauddin and Turabaz Khan on July 17, 1857. 52 "There were local leaders at different places who organized recruiting of soldiers for the army, collecting of arms and ammunition, sending of emissaries, raising of money, pasting up posters, etc. The local leaders had communication links with leaders at the national level, like Nana Saheb Peshwa and Tatya Tope."53 The British authorities were concerned about these developments as strategically Hyderabad was crucial. "If the Nizam went, the whole Peninsula as far as Cape Comorin would go. Hyderabad was to Southern India what Delhi was to Northern India. All in this quarter look to the Nizam and his capital: and general insurrection here would spread like wildfire throughout the Madras Presidency and to Nagpore."54 Also, The Resident reported that cavalry and infantry sepoys of the Hyderabad Subsidiary Force were moving around without permission. "The opportunity and a leader are all that [are] .....wanting to extend...the Revolt to the Deccan and all Southern India.....how can they be considered good and trustworthy soldiers?" 55

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**Mysore** became a centre of opposition after the defeat of Tipu Sultan in 1799. In 1855, the plan, though unsuccessful, was a serious effort to overthrow British voke.<sup>56</sup> The Commissioner, M Cubbon, admitted that, "the last two years and a half were considered unfavourable for the introduction of new measures amongst a population naturally suspicious and to some extent disposed to identify the progress of English education with the loss of caste."57 During the Revolt, there was sufficient reason to believe that Mysore was disturbed. As mentioned before, Major General Jacob observed that Chimma Sahib of Kolhapur had received among others one emissary from Nana Sahib who had reported that he had secured the cooperation of 40 regiments in the South. Col. Davidson, the British Resident at Hyderabad from 1857, had reported, "Letters of the most treasonable and seditious character were intercepted from Aurangabad, Bhopal, Ahmadabad, Belgaum, Kurnool and Mysore."58It is beyond doubt that a wide network of revolutionaries prevailed, there was voluntary involvement of the masses, and there was a very hostile spirit against the British that was prevalent. The British sought, and obtained, the help of the Maharaja of Mysore in tackling the simmering discontent.<sup>59</sup> Thus the uprisings in Mysore were suppressed by the British with the Maharaja's help but it was not easy as the movement had spread to the masses.

**Coastal Andhra** was affected by the Revolt. Anti-British uprisings occurred at different places in coastal Andhra—from Ganjam in the North to Nellore in the south. Rajas, *zamindars*, Poligars, and hill chieftains of Savaras, Khonds and other forest communities here wielded political and army power, and had traditionally defied the British authority. Radhakrishna Dandasena, the chieftain of Gaiba, rose against the British, but was caught and hanged to death. His relatives and followers were also rounded up and by the beginning of 1858, were sentenced to imprisonment and sent away to different jails. Some were executed.

In the **Vishakhapatnam** area there had been several altercations between the several rajas and *zamindars* and the British, the main antagonist being the Raja of

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Vizianagram, leading ultimately to his defeat and death. Similarly many other chiefs fought losing battles against the British. There were grain riots in July 1857 in Vizianagram and Allipore, Banglaore, etc. This was probably because firstly, the suspension of public works rendered a large number of people unemployed; and secondly, for want of rain and large exportation of grain, food became expensive.<sup>60</sup> It was interesting that in August 1857, Telugu placards against the British government appeared on the walls of Vishakhapatnam which were purportedly messages from the Muslims of the area conveying the orders of the Mughal Emperor, that the British would certainly be quitting the country.<sup>61</sup>

The Christian missionary activity in **Madras** was resented by the Hindus there. It was an important centre for anti-British activities. Besides the Revolt of the 1<sup>st</sup> Hyderabad Cavalry, at Aurangabad in June 1857, men of the 7<sup>th</sup> Madras Cavalry troopers preached uprising against the British. In Madras the state of anti-British feelings in Triplicane, with a predominantly Muslim population connected to the Nawab of Carnatic, necessitated the establishment of military posts in different parts of the city. Madras had links with Belgaum, Kolhapur and other places and these links resulted in spread of revolutionary ideas. The British government of Madras was cautious from the beginning and endeavoured to check revolutionary activities. The fear was that disbanded sepoys of the Bengal army would enter Madras and it was ordered that their movements be watched, as they could enter in the guise of fakirs. <sup>62</sup> Despite this, revolutionaries spread the word of anti-British movements. It was ordered that, "All the convicts from Madras under sentence of Transportation for Mutiny, Treason and Rebellion have been sent to the Andaman Islands". <sup>63</sup>

In **Goa**, the struggle against the Portuguese atrocities got intermingled with the Revolt against the British elsewhere. The Sattari Mahal, which was part of the Sawantwadi State and bordered on North-east of Goa, was in a protracted struggle against Portuguese economic and social suppression and exploitation. Dipuji Rane, their leader,

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started the struggle against the Portuguese rule in 1852. In May 1857, with the commencement of the Uprising in other parts of India, Dipuji's activities increased. In a long letter to the Portuguese government, Dipuji lamented about the sorry state of affairs of the people of Goa and the repression of the Portuguese. <sup>64</sup>

The chief of **Jamkhindi**, Ramchandrao, alias, Appasaheb Patwardhan, organized revolt in different centres in North Karnataka from June 1857. He connected with Nargund, Satara, Kolhapur, Shorapur, Sangli, Miraj, etc. and a worried Political Agent, C.J. Manson, writing from Ramdurg on May 29, 1858, urged Col. Jacob to arrange for the "immediate occupation of Sanglee and Meeraj from Kolapore and Satara."<sup>65</sup> The main supporter in the Raja's effort was Chhotu Singh, the Commandant of the Jamkhindi troops. Appasaheb was finally arrested in March 1858 and deported, but released in January 1859 under the direct order to dismantle entirely all the forts and other strongholds in Jamkhindi. There was some preparation for the Revolt in **Bijapur**. There was gunpowder seized by the British from one Dhongri, purportedly meant for the Raja of Jamkhindi.

There was a long tradition of anti-British feeling in **Belgaum** district ever since Belgaum fort fell in April 1818, and British conquest was complete as far as the south of Krishna River was concerned. The 1<sup>st</sup> Great Revolt that had taken place was at Kittur headed by Rani Chinamma of the ruling Desai family. Hence, there was traditionally an anti-British feeling in Belgaum. "The Revolt in Belgaum was suppressed with a heavy hand resulting into trials of patriots, their executions, and sentences of transportation beyond the sea for life."<sup>66</sup> On June 12, 1858, Babasaheb, the Chief of Nargund, was hanged publically in Belgaum. Letters of Munshi Mahommed Hussain at Belgaum to N.I. Regiments at Kolhapur and Belgaum were intercepted and these showed "how widespread was the organization and how large in number sepoys in south India in every station were ready to join the War of Independence." He was tried by the British Military Court at Belgaum, and blown away from the gun publicly on August 14, 1857.<sup>67</sup>

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**South Andhra Pradesh:** In Cuddapah and Kurnool Rohilla attacks were seen in 1857 as not only carried out with plunder in view but with political motives.<sup>68</sup> Simultaneously, there was a serious attempt to instigate a revolt of the Indian sepoys in the British army regiment at Cuddapah, the 30<sup>th</sup> Madras N.I. Regiment by Sheikh Peer Shahi as there was dissatisfaction at the dilatoriness of the Nizam who was looked up to assume leadership, if success was to be met. He was sentenced to ten years rigorous imprisonment, and as in Nellore, the revolt was aborted.<sup>69</sup>

In **Pondicherry, Cuddalore and Thanjavur**, in coastal Tamil Nadu, there were 'suspicious characters' spreading the word of revolt, but no serious incident was recorded. However, there were some 'Mutiny prisoners' even in 1861. In interior Tamil Nadu, in **North Arcot, Salem** and **Madurai**, some fakirs were apprehended. In **Coimbatore**, at Bhavani, a Sanyasi, Mulbagalu Swamy, who was the Guru of a large number of followers, was suspected of organizing the people against the British in 1857. The government authorities declared that an eye would be kept on him and if any treasonable behaviour was seen, his land would be attached. <sup>70</sup>

There is evidence to show that there were efforts to instigate uprisings in **Kerala** in 1857-58. For example, letters from Malabar, which were intercepted by the British government in August 1857, were addressed to a Subadar of the 10<sup>th</sup> N.I. Regiment at Bombay, and it was this regiment that revolted in August–October, 1857 in Bombay. Sporadic efforts to create uprisings went on till end of 1859. The grain riots at Quilon in 1859 exhibited that any political or economic injustice would be resisted. Though the movement in Kerala was weak, it demonstrated that the fear of British power was diminishing.<sup>71</sup>

**Central Coastal Andhra**: Disbanded soldiers of the Bengal army were going around spreading news about the revolt in the north. A rebellion broke out in the hills north of Yernagudem in **Rajamundry** on September 17, 1857 under the leadership of Karkonda

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Subba Reddy, with the support of rajas and *zamindar*s. It was crushed and leaders were arrested, five of them were taken to different parts of Rajamundry and publicly hanged. The Muslims in **Machilipatnam (Masulipatam)** had close contacts with their compatriots at Hyderabad and disturbances here started almost at the same time as Hyderabad. As the British feared, on November 7, 1857, a body of 400 Rohillas and Telegus attacked Jaggiapeta, a large trading town in the district, on the frontiers of the Nizam's territory, four men on duty at the *Kutchery* were killed, and the government treasury was looted. The culprits were punished and disturbances quelled.

**Guntur** was simmering as the peasants were incensed with the arbitrary collection of revenue. Sultan Baksh, a member connected with the Royal Family of Bahadur Shah, arrived in **Chinglepet** from Madras. It became a hotbed of secret meetings and conspiracies. On the night of July 27, 1857, 5000 to 6000 men collected, and struck down and disconnected the telegraph posts and wires nearby. The Chinglepet Uprising was suppressed with a heavy hand.<sup>72</sup>

**Halgili** in **Karnataka** had predominantly the Bedars, a martial Community, traditionally hunters, the Chief of Shorpur State being one of them. He, with the Desais and *jagirdars* planned to overthrow the British power there. Halgili refused to disarm in compliance with the Disarming Act of September 11, 1857. On November 27, 1857, he Bijapur Cavalry arrived and a battle ensued, the Halgili leaders were killed and Shorpur did not help. <sup>73</sup>

# Later Risings

As late as 1859, attempts were made to overthrow the British in the Southern regions. The British Resident of Hyderabad, Col. C. Davidson, went to Calcutta to see the British Governor-General, Lord Canning. It was arranged that he would be at the Nizam's Durbar on March 15, 1859, to present a *kharita* to thank the Nizam for his support to

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the British during the revolt. The people were already angry at the unholy alliance between the Nizam and the British. When the Nizam's minister, Salar Jung, and the Resident were walking in the courtyard, they were suddenly attacked by Jahangir Khan, a Rohilkhand Pathan. A scuffle ensued between the guards of the Nizam's minister and Jahangir Khan. In this Jahangir Khan was mortally wounded. He died of his wounds. Plans were underway in **Beed** since the beginning of 1859 to launch uprisings against the British in the name of the Raja of Satara. The Englishman of June 25, 1859 noted, "We shall find the conspirators and rebels so numerous that, of a necessity we shall be obliged to close our eyes to the offence. But......the salutary measure of punishing some men of name and note......will not be wanting." The planners were across professions and groups, there were the Deshmuhs, Deshpandes, Chiefs of Rajputs and Rohillas, the son of a Collector, etc. The plans failed, probably because of the lack of finances. <sup>74</sup>

In **Hyderabad**, in 1862, a valiant and serious effort was made to gather forces once again against the British power. The leader was Rao Saheb Peshwa, nephew of Nana Sahib. After the defeat at Gwalior, he arrived in Hyderabad and stayed in Begum Bazar. Both he and Kishan Rao, a revolutionary, were engaged in enlisting men and collecting money for an uprising. The British were wary and convicted around forty of his men. Rao Saheb and Kishan Rao escaped, and later wandered in the guise of *bairagi* pilgrims in the hills north of Punjab, while his Brahman servant was captured at Narsinghi. He was ultimately apprehended along with his wife at Chenani (Jammu Region) in 1862, and sent to Kanpur, where he was hanged to death on August 1862.<sup>75</sup>

At **Bhalki in Bidar** district, Ram Rao alias Jung Bahadur, nephew of Chhatrapati Shahu of Satara, raised the banner of revolt in 1867. He had been sent by Tatya Tope to the south during 1857, was arrested in 1859 and later released. He collected hundreds of followers to raise the banner against the British and the Nizam. He captured some forts there and everywhere his official papers carried the seal with 'Chhatrapati' inscribed on it. He declared that he was reviving the *gaddi* of the Chhatrapati at Satara. Rama Rao

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and his associates, including Bhim Rao, were arrested around April 1867, trials conducted in the Nizam's Criminal Court, and they were transported for life. Thus, the effort at a rising fizzled out. <sup>76</sup>

## Tatya Tope's Movements: South and Western India

Tatya Tope was in touch with the people and leaders in South India. He had sent his emissaries to the Nizam's territory, urging the people to join against the British. Tatya Tope crossed the Narmada River and marched towards **Khandesh** in the beginning of November, 1858. He entered Khandesh when it was too late and the Bhil rising had ended. On November 23, 1858, he attacked Kargund, a village 30 miles from Sindva. On the following day, his forces looted the British Post Office and destroyed telegraph wires on the Agra road. They then went northwards and reached Chota Udepur, where there was an encounter with the forces of Brig. Parke on December 18, 1858. Tatya's forces were expected to cross the Narmada again and go to the south and enter Khandesh again through Akarni. However, there seems to have been a change of plans and they rapidly moved towards Khandwa. It is a quirk of history that time did not favour Tatya and conditions were not suitable for opening another front in the south. If that had been achieved, history would probably have been different!<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Savarkar, VD: *1857 Ka Swatantrta Yudh*, Bombay, 1957. pp. 44-45, 57, 75, 160,167,190 <sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> Nagar, Amrit Lal: *Ghadar Ke Phool*, Delhi, 1982. pp. 265-66

<sup>4</sup> Shukla, C: *Pratham Swatantrata Sangram Mein Uttar Pradesh Ka Yogdan*, Mathura, 2000. pp. 55-56 <sup>5</sup> Op Cit: Savarkar

<sup>6</sup> Mehrotra, NC & Tandon, M: *Swatantrata Aandolan mein Janpad Shahjahanpur ka Yogdan*, Allahabad, 1995. pp. 40-43

<sup>7</sup> Situation and aftermath in Delhi is described in Part 5, Chapter 8B on Bahadur Shah. Hence, this finds a mention here

<sup>8</sup> Joshi, PC: *Rebellion 1857*, National Book Trust, India. pp. 32-45, 397

<sup>9</sup> Deshpande, Harihar Waman: 1857 Chya Veer Mahila, Amravati, 1959. pp. 89-91

<sup>10</sup> A Hindu: P.P.E.I. Mutiny No.7 and

Bengal Hurkaru, November 27, 1858

<sup>11</sup> Bhargav, ML & Rizvi, SAA: Freedom Struggle in UP, Vol. IV. P. 30

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**Note:** The spellings of places and person used in this chapter are those that appear in the original documents and they were used in a particular context suited to the era of the Revolt.