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## Dual Diplomacy of Nepal in the Indian National Movement of 1857

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### Abstract

*This study examines Nepal's nuanced role during the 1857 Indian Rebellion, highlighting the strategic and cultural complexities faced by Prime Minister Janga Bahadur Rana. Aligning with the British to preserve Nepal's sovereignty, Janga Bahadur simultaneously offered refuge to Indian rebels like Begum Hazrat Mahal and Nana Saheb, showcasing Nepal's intricate position. The research utilizes historical records and contemporary accounts to reveal how Nepal provided essential military support to the British while covertly aiding the rebels. British concerns about Nepal's dual role led to increased military surveillance at the border. Janga Bahadur's diplomatic efforts to mediate between the British and rebels, coupled with his later arrests and conflicts, further illustrate the challenges of balancing sovereignty and regional alliances. This study offers insights into the interplay of cultural solidarity and geopolitical strategy in colonial contexts, shedding light on the role of smaller states in imperial conflicts.*

### Keywords

Sepoy mutiny, Nepal-India relation, Begum Hazrat Mahal, Janga Bahadur.

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## **Dual Diplomacy of Nepal in the Indian National Movement of 1857**

### **1. Introduction**

On August 24, 1608, the British first arrived in Surat, India, to do business. The British East India Company, founded in 1600, played a pivotal role in establishing British dominance in the region. Under the leadership of Robert Clive, the company achieved a significant victory in the Battle of Plassey in 1757, allowing them to trade without paying taxes in Bengal. Following this, the company secured further victories in the Buxar War (1764), the Anglo-Mysore Wars (1766-1799), and the Anglo-Maratha Wars (1772-1818). These triumphs enabled the company to control most of the land in India.

At its peak, the British East India Company ruled much of Southeast Asia and parts of Hong Kong, with an impressive force of 270,000 troops. By the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, the company effectively governed all of India. However, discontent with British rule culminated in a significant revolt in 1857-58, known by various names: the Sepoy Mutiny, the Indian Mutiny, the Great Mutiny, the Mutiny of 1857, and the First War of Independence. This uprising began on May 10, 1857, when soldiers in Meerut, 64 km east of Delhi, initiated a rebellion. The soldiers' rebellion gradually expanded to include non-military citizens in the northern Ganges plains and central India, spreading to the north and east. With assistance from the Nepal government, the British East India Company suppressed the rebellion on June 20, 1857. Despite being seen as a British ally, Nepal cleverly adopted a dual diplomatic policy during this period.

The War of Independence in 1857, led by local Rajas, the people, and Indian soldiers against the British, holds significant importance not only in Indian history but also in the history of Nepal. While most historians have noted that Nepal did not assist the Indian freedom fighters, secret documents from that era reveal a more nuanced stance. These documents show that Nepal adopted a dual policy, both supporting and not supporting each side as needed to affirm and protect its independence and sovereignty. This strategic

approach highlights Nepal's careful diplomatic maneuvering during the conflict.

The Indian sepoy mutiny in 1857 had both positive and negative effects in Nepal. Many local Indian kings sought refuge in Nepal during this time. This study aims to explore the role Nepal played during the mutiny, focusing on how the Nepalese government and people interacted with both the British and the Indian freedom fighters. Previous studies often stated that Nepal only supported the British government. However, this study tries to reveal that Nepal also secretly supported the Indian people. Previous studies have largely overlooked Nepal's dual approach, where the country secretly supported Indian rebels while publicly aligning with the British.

The rationale behind this research lies in understanding the complex relationship between Nepal and India during British rule. Despite the tension, the Nepalese people supported Indian citizens, and the cultural ties between the two nations remained strong. The objective of this study is to uncover the nuanced role Nepal played during the 1857 revolt, highlighting its dual diplomatic strategy. The implications of this research are significant as they provide a deeper understanding of the historical and cultural connections between Nepal and India, which have existed for centuries and continue to influence the relationship between the two countries today.

## **2. Materials and Methodology**

This study employs a qualitative research design to explore the dual role played by Nepal during the Indian Rebellion against the British East India Company, a century after the British Empire was established in India. The Indian Rebellion of 1857 was a pivotal event that not only laid the groundwork for India's eventual independence but also led to significant casualties and a wave of refugees seeking asylum in Nepal.

To investigate Nepal's nuanced involvement, a comprehensive approach was taken. Historical documents from the Ministry of Archaeology and related departments in both India and Nepal were examined. These documents provided critical insights into the interactions between Nepal and the Indian rebels, as well as the British government.

In addition to primary sources, the study relied on secondary materials gathered from various libraries, archaeology departments,

private collections, journals, and online databases. These sources were meticulously organized to ensure a thorough understanding of the historical context. The data collection process involved:

1. **Document Review** : Historical records and documents from governmental archives in India and Nepal were scrutinized to trace Nepal's diplomatic stance and actions during the rebellion.
2. **Secondary Source Analysis** : Various secondary sources, including books, articles, and online databases, were reviewed to supplement and contextualize the primary data. This ensured a well-rounded perspective on the events.
3. **Data Processing** : Information was systematically organized to identify relevant themes and patterns. Irrelevant or redundant information was filtered out to focus on the most pertinent details.
4. **Qualitative Analysis** : The analysis employed both descriptive and analytical methods. The descriptive analysis narrated events and behaviors related to Nepal's role, while the analytical approach interpreted the implications of these actions on Nepal-India relations.

### **3. Result and Discussion**

The Indian freedom struggle of 1857, according to British historians, is often described as a brief uprising that lasted only a few months. From May 10 to September 16, 1857, the independent Indian government, known as Azad Hindustan, established its rule in Delhi. However, this period of autonomy was short-lived. After the capture of Emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar, the British reasserted their control over Delhi and achieved significant victories in Jhansi, Farrukhabad, Bareilly, and Lucknow.

Despite these setbacks, the freedom fighters demonstrated remarkable resilience and refused to accept defeat. To continue their resistance and strategize for a resurgence, many of them crossed into Nepal. The British managed to suppress the rebellion in several areas, yet their dominance remained tenuous in numerous regions. Key centers of resistance during this period included Lucknow, Gorakhpur, Faizabad, Awadh, and Bareilly, extending towards the Bihar region. The determination and strategic retreats of the freedom fighters underscore their enduring commitment to the struggle, even in the face of substantial challenges (Ramakanta, 1877 : 281).

Janga Bahadur Rana, the Prime Minister of Nepal, was prepared to assist the British during the critical period of the 1857 Indian rebellion. However, the majority of his colleagues in Nepal were inclined to support the Indian rebels. This division is exemplified by an incident in 1877 AD when Dhir Shamsher, a prominent Nepali figure, informed a British officer that all the Bharadars (nobles) except Janga Bahadur wanted to aid the rebels and drive out the British, in alignment with their longstanding national sentiments. Janga Bahadur's decision to support the British was a strategic move aimed at preserving Nepal's sovereignty and securing its position. In contrast, his colleagues felt a strong affinity with the Indian rebels due to shared cultural and historical ties.

The support of Janga Bahadur was crucial for the British, as Nepal's assistance played a significant role in helping them regain control in several areas. Meanwhile, the inclination of the other Bharadars to support the rebels underscores the widespread sentiment against British rule in the region. This episode reflects the complex interplay of local and regional politics during the 1857 rebellion and highlights the pivotal role Nepal played in this historical context.

The historical relationship between Nepal and India during this period is significant. Despite the official support for the British, the sympathies of the Nepali people largely lay with the Indian rebels. This dichotomy illustrates the deep cultural and historical connections between Nepal and India, which persisted even under the pressures of colonial rule. Studying this period reveals the multifaceted nature of Nepal's political stance and the enduring bonds between the two nations.

The priest of the palace was a key figure advocating for Nepal's support of the Indian rebels during the 1857 uprising. He argued that if Nepal assisted the rebels, British rule in India would be brought to an end. However, Janga Bahadur held a different perspective. He believed that although British control in India might be temporarily disrupted, the British would likely regain power within six months. Janga Bahadur warned that if Nepal supported the rebels and the British subsequently regained control, Nepal could risk losing its independence within two to three years.

When Janga Bahadur consulted with his advisors and military leaders on whether to support the British or the rebels, Padma Jang

noted that Janga Bahadur was already convinced that supporting the British was the most prudent course of action. He believed that aligning with the British would ensure Nepal's safety and sovereignty in the long run (Rana, 1974 : 189).

Following the fierce revolt against the British in India, there was a disagreement among British officials regarding whether to seek Nepal's assistance. The Governor General of India, Lord Canning, preferred to avoid relying on Nepalese support, believing that it might undermine British authority. Conversely, the British resident in Nepal, Ramsey, supported seeking cooperation from Nepal. Those opposed to enlisting Nepalese help argued that doing so would imply a lack of confidence in British soldiers and officers, potentially revealing the British government's vulnerability to Indian observers. This view was accepted by the majority of British officials, including English officer H. C. Tucker, who expressed his opposition to involving the Gorkhas in a letter dated June 13.

"I am completely against and oppose the entry of Nepali soldiers into our state. If we cannot end this problem without the help of the Gorkhals, then we should think that it is time to leave this place. The presence of Gorkhali soldiers would adversely affect neighboring states." (Ramakanta, 1877 : 228).

Similarly, an English judge from Gorakhpur wrote a letter stating, "the Gorkhals are very dangerous, they give us more trouble than good help" (Ramakanta, 1877 : 228). In a similar vein, Mrs. Canning remarked to Hudson, "You praise these Gurkhas like your husband, but I can assure you that they are looked on here as being little better than the rebels" (Hunter, 1896 : 256). The British East India Company officials were skeptical of Nepalese military aid, viewing Nepalese soldiers as outdated and inexperienced compared to the more modern and practiced Indian rebels.

As a result, when the rebellion began, Jang Bahadur's offer of assistance to the British was initially declined. The British East India Company only acknowledged Nepal's willingness to help with a formal thank-you. However, as the British position in India deteriorated, the situation shifted. By June 1857, more than 50 British individuals persecuted by the rebels were given refuge in Nepal's Terai region, though they were barred from entering Kathmandu or the inner Terai. Jang Bahadur even took the drastic step of executing soldiers who supported anti-British sentiments or advocated for

joining the Indian-led struggle instead of aiding the British. This illustrates the complex and strategic decisions made by Nepal during this tumultuous period (Ramakanta, 1877 : 284).

In a letter to the resident of the Company government in Nepal, Jang Bahadur emphasized his commitment to the British cause by reminding sepoys and Umraos not to assist the rebels and highlighting his respect and honor from the British government for his efforts. He noted that he had worked diligently for the good of the British government and his brothers and soldiers (Nepal, 1984 : 48).

As the British position in India deteriorated daily, they grew increasingly apprehensive about the potential for their Gorkhali troops to side with the Indian rebels. Despite these concerns, Jang Bahadur managed to convince the British to accept Nepal's assistance. Consequently, the British agreed to deploy Nepalese troops to support them. Jang Bahadur sent soldiers to India in stages: 6,000 troops on July 2, 1857; 8,000 troops on November 18, 1857; and 9,000 troops on December 10, 1857. On December 30, 1857, Jang Bahadur's forces launched an attack on Gorakhpur (Rana, 1974 : 200).

With the arrival of the Nepalese troops, the British position began to stabilize, and the rebels' position weakened. The support from the Nepalese army enabled the British to regain control of key locations, including Lucknow, Gorakhpur, Faizabad, Amberpur, and other northern regions (Melleson, 1889 : 226). During this campaign, 70 individuals were killed, including Lieutenant Colonel Madan Man Singh Basnet from Nepal, and many others were injured. Notably, Gambhir Singh Rayamazhi from Devidatta Gana distinguished himself by single-handedly killing seven unarmed rebels and was honored with the title of Bahadur by the Indian government (Rana, 1974 : 199).

Jang Bahadur returned to Nepal on May 4, 1858, traveling through Banaras. Meanwhile, some Indian rebels who had survived the conflict began to cross into Nepal, seeking refuge and planning to continue their resistance against the British. In response, Nepal adopted a policy of supporting these Indian freedom fighters, offering them sanctuary and ensuring that those who sought shelter would not face death.

#### **4. Nepal's Policy on Supporting Indian Rebel Soldiers**

Nepal provided refuge and support to Indian soldiers who had rebelled against British rule. After the British emerged victorious,

Jang Bahadur returned to Nepal, while the surviving rebels sought safety within Nepal's borders. Nepal adopted a policy of protecting these rebels by sheltering them and ensuring their safety. Following the Sepoy Rebellion, Indian soldiers who fled the conflict were granted asylum in Nepal. However, British forces could not openly enter the Terai region due to the risk of encountering rebel resistance. Additionally, the treaty between Nepal and the British government included provisions preventing British soldiers from entering Nepalese territory (Naraharinath, 1965 : 131-133).

In this context, Nepal's policy of monitoring British activities and protecting Indian rebels led to some British soldiers monitoring Nepalese government camps along the Gandaki River. These British soldiers, acting as spies, relayed information to the Governor General stationed in Fort William, Calcutta. Consequently, the Governor General sent letters to the Nepalese government urging them to expel the Indian rebels from the Terai region. Despite these requests, Nepal largely disregarded them, allowing the Indian freedom fighters to operate in the Terai unhindered.

Contemporary secret and military documents reveal that, although the British were gradually regaining control over the rebellion in India, they struggled with the situation in Oudh and Ruhelkhand, where Farrukhabad became a stronghold for the freedom fighters. Despite numerous challenges, the rebels remained hopeful. Whenever British troops surrounded them, they would retreat through difficult routes into Nepal. When opportunities arose, they would rejoin the conflict or participate in marches. The British, hoping that the malaria-infested Terai would naturally diminish the rebel numbers, chose not to exert significant pressure on Nepal. They also hoped to persuade the Nepalese government to return the remaining rebels. However, the Nepalese government ignored these requests, allowing the rebels to continue their activities in the Terai. This stance is confirmed by the following two documents:

a) The then British Resident in Nepal made the following allegations in a secret letter written to his superior in India on 25 January 1858:

“Due to the lack of clear orders from the King of Nepal, Nepalese soldiers have not arrested the Indian rebels who have entered Nepal. I requested Lieutenants Bhagat Singh and Haridas of the



Nepalese forces stationed at the Jaleshwar base to keep a strict watch on the activities of the Hindustani soldiers. If they do not want to arrest the Hindustani soldiers, at least they should keep a strict watch on their activities and inform us immediately of any developments” (Ramsey, 1858).

b) Similarly, in a letter written to his superiors in May 1858, the Commissioner of Patna made the following allegations:

On May 22, 1858, the Magistrate of Tirhut observed a platoon of Hindustani rebels within the borders of Nepal. When he requested immediate action from the Nepali military officers stationed at Janakpur, they responded that they would not take any action until they received orders from their government, nor would the British (Letter from officer to Superior, 1858: 240). This incident was not isolated. Earlier, in January, numerous Hindustani soldiers had similarly crossed into Nepal, bringing cannons and elephants without impediment. Despite these activities, no Nepali officials intervened to stop the rebels or return them.

The Nepali government took deliberate steps to prevent British soldiers and spies from infiltrating its borders or acquiring sensitive information. The Nepalese showed clear sympathy for the Indian rebels, and as a result, the Nepalese government only provided the British with information that would not significantly damage their relationship or substantially harm the Indian rebels. This was evident from a letter dated March 6, 1859, from Commander Kelly of the British Field Force to his officers. In the letter, Commander Kelly noted, “The Government of Nepal has not sent me any confidential information to date. The information I receive comes solely from their intelligence sources” (Kelly, 1859).

Similarly, G. Ramsey, a British resident in Nepal, detailed the nature of Nepalese support for the Indian rebels in a letter dated March 8, 1859. Ramsey’s correspondence outlined the assistance provided by the Nepalese to the rebels who had taken refuge in the Terai region of Nepal:

“I believe that the Nepalese authorities possess more knowledge about the plans of the Hindustani rebels than they are disclosing. I have received clandestine reports indicating that the Nepalese government is secretly supplying stolen food items to the rebels

while purchasing these items at the stated price. Additionally, the rebels have recently provided the Nepali soldiers with 5,000 guns, spears, shields, and swords. Information from the Border Magistrates and the Government of Nepal suggests that 5,000 weapons and ammunition are being supplied to the rebel forces. While I remain skeptical about these claims, it is possible that the Nepalese administration has distributed food items to border villages to safeguard them from potential looting. A few days ago, an English officer visited Kathmandu and observed some well-bred Anta Arabian horses grazing in the mountains along the route. Upon inquiring with locals, he learned that these horses were purchased from a small village permanently settled in the Terai forest. It is possible that Hindustani rebel soldiers sold these horses to obtain food” (Ramsey, 1859).

Based on the information provided, it is evident that both Nepali and Indian soldiers were aware of the establishment of a base for Indian insurgents in the Terai region of Nepal. British representatives frequently reported that these rebel soldiers found refuge in the Terai. During this time, soldiers stationed near the Terai border did not impede the entry of refugees into Nepal. Instead, they meticulously gathered information about these refugees, including details about their numbers and backgrounds.

On February 2, 1859, Nidhi Pudasaini, a Subedar in the Nepalese Army, sent a letter to Prime Minister Jang Bahadur detailing the arrival of these refugees. In his correspondence, Pudasaini described his efforts in facilitating the movement of cavalry soldiers from notable figures such as Raja Devi Bakhsa Singh of Gonda, Raja Jwala Singh of Churda, Bala Rao, and Begum Hazrat Mahal of Lucknow across the river into Nepal. His men compiled a comprehensive inventory of the refugees and their equipment. The list included 1,160 individuals, 223 guns, 21 spears, and 6 mechlaks (a type of firearm). Additionally, it detailed 228 horses, 16 cannons, and 497 swords, as well as 1 bowman, 7 elephants, and 6 camels. Pudasaini assured the Prime Minister that he would continue to closely monitor and record all future arrivals across the river (Pudasaini, 1859).

## **5. Espionage at the Nepal-India Border**

In response to the information suggesting that Nepal was actively supporting the rebels, the British decided to station additional troops at the Nepal-India border. They deployed British soldiers and even a

platoon specifically to monitor Nepali activities and maintain strict surveillance along the river ghats. This increased military presence is documented in a letter from British Colonel Kelly, stationed at Velwabazar camp, dated March 6, 1859.

Colonel Kelly reported that on March 3rd and 4th, Indian rebels had crossed the river and entered Nepal, advancing towards Butwal. There were concerns that the rebels might soon launch an attack on Gorakhpur district. In response to this threat, Colonel Kelly ordered a portion of his troops to establish a defensive position at Badhwaghat. He planned to move the remaining soldiers to Satti Budhwaghat to either cross the river or remain there as needed. Additionally, he instructed that pressure be applied to the Government of Nepal to destroy all boats at Sikraulaghat to prevent any further crossings by the remaining rebel soldiers (Kelly, 1859a).

## **6. Brave Begum of Lucknow**

Another letter details that soldiers loyal to Begum Hazrat Mahal of Lucknow had crossed the Gandak River into Nepal. During the Indian rebellion, not only soldiers but also numerous Indian civilians fought against the British. Following their defeat, these rebels fled to seek refuge within Nepal's borders. At that time, Nepal had a tradition of allowing sadhus (holy men) to enter and leave freely, a practice that extended to all people seeking sanctuary. On May 10, 1859, a British spy reported that rebels had entered Nepal and had been observed by spies. In response, the British swiftly ordered their troops to take action. However, due to Nepal's position as a foreign territory, their army was unable to cross the border. The British then requested the assistance of the Nepali security forces to apprehend the rebels. Unfortunately, the local Nepali authorities did not cooperate and actively prevented the arrests. As a result, the rebels were able to evade capture and continued to stay within Nepal, where they found safety.

After being engaged in continuous conflict for two years starting in 1857, the Indian commanders believed that their situation might improve if they could find refuge in Nepal. By 1859, 60 commanders who had fought in the war had crossed into Nepal and set up camps in various locations. British spies frequently reported on these movements. This information is corroborated by a letter dated April 14, 1859, from Colonel Kelly, who was stationed near the Nepal-India border. In the letter, he wrote that:

“Yesterday, my intelligence captured a Hindustani soldier and brought him before me. This soldier had served in the army of Begum Hazrat Mahal and Khan Bahadur Khan, the Nawab of Bareilly and the then Commander-in-Chief of the Hindustani Army, until the evening of April 7, 1859. At that time, the Begum, her son Shahzada Virjis Qadr, and Nana Saheb Peshwa were in the fort of Nuwakot, located beyond Butwal. They were protected by around 200 bodyguards stationed in the fort, while the rest of their soldiers camped in the dense forests of Butwal. Bala Rao, with his 2,000 soldiers, had established a strong position near Ratanpur, directly opposite our front. It is also reported that the king of Gonda, Devi Vakhsh, was setting up his camp with a large force a short distance west of Dukharari, near Tulsipur” (Kelly, 1859b).

Following two engagements with our troops on March 25 and 28, the rebels’ morale has declined, and many are abandoning the city. Despite Bala Rao’s efforts to bolster his troops with daily rations of half a seer of rice per person, the rebels are unlikely to surrender unless they are driven to starvation. All rebel soldiers have been informed that they will receive pardons if they surrender, but it appears that very few will agree to do so unless their situation becomes dire.

Currently, there are no remaining rebel forces on the east side of Butwal. Brigadier Rowcroft has informed us that there is a significant possibility of a rebel platoon advancing towards our front. In response to this potential threat, I have dispatched four platoons, equipped with cavalry and artillery, under the command of the Lieutenant Colonel of His Majesty’s Thirteenth Infantry to Bansi. This move is intended to prepare for any possible rebel advances and ensure the security of our position. (Kelly, 1859). When Colonel Kelly wrote the letter to his superiors, Khan Bahadur Khan of India and his minister Shobharam were in Nepal. The Hindustani army was suffering from malaria, and many of these patriotic Hindustani heroes succumbed to Terai fever. The extent of the casualties remains unrecorded. This situation was mentioned in contemporary British newspapers, *The Bengal Halakhwar* and the *India Gazette* as follows:

Bala Rao, the brother of Nana Saheb (Peshwa), Talukdar Hardatta Singh of Bhauni near Bahraich, and the Nawab of

Najibabad died on July 19, 1859, in the forest near Butwal within the Nepal border due to extreme heat. Almost all the rebel soldiers were suffering from Terai malaria. Nana Saheb, who was very sick himself, said that he would either give up his life there or die fighting on the battlefield. The Begum (Hazrat Mahal) has held out bravely so far. If she manages to move to Pargana or Tirhut, she might cause more trouble, which seems to be her plan (The Bengal Halknabar and India Gazette of July 1858, 1858).

### **7. Asylum to Wives, Families or Women of Rebel Forces**

The government of Nepal and its military chiefs had sympathy for the Hindustani rebels. This is evident from a report sent by General Badrinarsingh Rana of the Nepalese Army to his superiors on March 24, 1859. At that time, 4,000 British soldiers, equipped with many cannons, suddenly reached Pali Majhpali, Gandak Tari, against the rules. Subsequently, Begum Hazrat Mahal left and reached Butwal. The report states:

“Intelligence reports that Begum’s soldiers were encamped near Sauraha. As soon as she saw the arrival of a large British army, she quickly fled towards Butwal. A large number of women, children, and servants also accompanied her.” No armed men were seen with them. The Begum sent me a letter from the keeper at Butwal’s Palace. In the letter, she expressed her wish to come to the mountain. I responded that I did not have the authority to make such a decision. Despite this, I could not bring myself to force the innocent children and women back down. Therefore, I allowed them to come up to the mountain. My conscience did not permit me to force these sheltered refugees to descend again. I will continue to follow orders as before (Rana, 1859). In this way, it seems that the Indian independence fighters have started requesting asylum from the Nepalese government.

### **8. Petition by the Rebel Regiment of Nasirabad to the Government of Nepal**

A very important Indian Freedom Army that took refuge in Nepal was the Nasirabad Regiment. This regiment had fought alongside the British on several fronts before entering Nepal without success. Exhausted from living in the jungle, suffering from hunger and disease, Haresh Khai and its officers requested the Nepal

government. The request bore the stamp and signature of General Ram Bakhsh of the 9<sup>th</sup> First Battalion, Brigadier Major Mansharam, and Gangasingh Lunt of the 9th Nasirabad Division. The application was sent by the Hindustani soldiers to the Government of Nepal on April 22, 1859, on behalf of all 4,000 soldiers and officers in their cantonment in Nepal. The following was mentioned in the petition:

“We, the entire army, rebelled against the British (Firangis). The reason is that a hundred years ago, these Englishmen came to Hindustan and gradually raised their forces, eventually becoming the masters of all the native states of India. Our forefathers served them, and we did the same. In return, the British government always took care of us and our children. With God’s grace and our help, the British conquered the kingdoms they wanted. Thousands of our Hindustanis died in these wars, yet we never sought any excuse or rebelled. Everyone knows how well we served the British. But in 1857, the British issued an order that new cartridges brought from Britain must be used. These cartridges contained cow and pig fat. Not only that, they also ordered us to eat wheat flour mixed with human bone dust” (India-Nepal Magazine, 1980).

First of all, this work started in the Meerut cantonment. The soldiers, for the sake of their religion and honour, refused to accept the order. To force compliance, the British soldiers stood before us, prepared cannons, and confiscated the weapons of 84 of our soldiers, imprisoning them. Because of this, we and our countrymen stood shoulder to shoulder and fought the British everywhere to defend our religion. We did not fight to gain property or kingdoms, despite British claims to the contrary. The British propagated that we fought for these reasons, deceiving many kings and chiefs who didn’t care about their religion and honour.

These misguided leaders believed the false statements of the British and prepared to fight against us. As a result, we had to continue fighting for the next two years. The kings and chiefs who supported us in this struggle faced significant suffering. We fought continuously for two years to protect our religion and honour because, for both Hindus and Muslims, if their religion is destroyed, they have nothing left in the world. Despite our efforts, we received no help because all the kings and chieftains sided with the British. We fought everywhere for the sake of religion, endured hunger, and

faced countless hardships. Now, we know that no one can protect our religion because the British have won over everyone and are trying to arrest us by paying large sums of money (India-Nepal Magazine, 1980).

## **9. Negative Policies of the Nepalese Government Toward the Rebels**

After returning from assisting the British, the relationship between Janga Bahadur and the British deteriorated for a period. Consequently, despite the need to retract his actions, Janga Bahadur, the Prime Minister of Nepal, issued two orders that created a strained atmosphere between Nepal and the British for some time (Foreign secret consultation of 26th November 1859). Among the main leaders of the rebellion in the Terai of Nepal during this time were Begum Hazrat Mahal, her son Virjis Kadar, Peshwa Nana Saheb and his brother Bala Rao, Devi Waks, Veni Madho, Jwala Prasad, Devi Din of the Nashirwad Brigade, Khan Bahadur Khan of Bareilly, Nizam Muhammad Hussain Raja Diggvijay Singh of Gorakhpur, Maulvi Muhammad Sarfarz Ali Adi was the main one (Russel, 1896: 48). Seeing that these rebels could regain their lost state and position in India if they could obtain the help of the Government of Nepal, Raja Gangadhar Rao and Bala Rao wrote a letter to Janga Bahadur on 22 January 1859 in which they said:

Now we are taking refuge in Nepal. So you can do whatever you want to hold us or keep us free. Now we will give one crore rupees to Nepal and five crore rupees after taking back Lucknow and Gorakhpur. No one can save our religion except you. We are cows, do what you want (Gangadhar and Bala, 1859).

In this situation, Janga Bahadur was unable to take action against the rebels. On one hand, he wanted to support the rebels, while on the other, he faced the challenge of enforcing his orders. He even informed Dr Oldfield that although he had issued orders to eliminate the rebels, he was uncertain whether the troops would follow through with them. (Pravin, 1971 : 29).

Similarly, on the other hand, killing cows and Brahmins within the borders of Nepal is considered a great sin and a big crime legally. Therefore, he said that the said work cannot be done. Understanding the complex dynamics between the rebels and the British, Janga Bahadur sought to mediate. On February 27, 1859, he sent a letter to

Begum Hazrat Mahal through Captain Niranjan Rayamazhi, advising her to reconcile with the British for her benefit. In response, Nawab Ali Muhammad Khan, also known as Mammu Khan, acting on behalf of Begum Hazrat Mahal, rejected the offer, stating that they did not need Janga Bahadur's assistance. This refusal put Janga Bahadur in a difficult position. Subsequently, he was arrested by the British with Janga Bahadur's assistance, tried, and sentenced to exile in the Andaman Islands (Pravin, 1971 : 29).

At this time, Janga Bahadur changed his approach towards the rebels. He arrested Nawab Khan Bahadur Kha of Ruhelkhand and handed him over to the British. The British executed him by hanging in the main square of Bareilly in March 1860.

The British made several attempts to return Begum Hazrat Mahal and her son Virjis Kadra to their own country, and they also tried through the government of Nepal. However, the Nepalese government did not comply. Many rebel soldiers, exhausted by the situation, discarded their weapons and quietly returned to their homes. The British government took no action against these soldiers. Some soldiers chose to retreat to the jungles of Nepal rather than submit to British control. Eventually, the Nepalese government ordered all of them to move to Chitwan, as noted in a document by Virjis Kadra.

After the order of Janga Bahadur, they sent all their soldiers in different groups towards Body, Chitwan, Butwal and Pallonuwakot. The Nepalese government used to take guns and other weapons from those rebel soldiers and give them rice. Facing this kind of grief, Bala Rao, Nana Saheb and several friends of Begum Hazrat Mahal, Rana Venimadhav, Davir Janga Bahadur, Raja Jograj Singh of Vaiswade, Raja Devi Wakhsha Singh of Gonda, Har Prasad of Khairabad, Thakur Hardatta Singh of Waudi, Bahraich, Nana Saheb's friend Azimulla Khan and Gulaw of Werua. The lions were killed one by one. Because of this, Begum Haresh started eating. The British tried as much as possible to take him and his son back. But he liked the sad freedom of Nepal better than the captivity of the British. In the end, falling in love with her beloved land and her purpose, she decided to seek refuge in Nepal and requested the Nepalese government to grant her refuge.

Before seeking refuge in Nepal, Begum Hazrat Mahal gathered all her diamonds and jewels and sent them as a gift to Janga Bahadur.



She did this to demonstrate her goodwill toward the Nepalese government and Janga Bahadur. Ultimately, filled with despair and without options, she arrived in Kathmandu. Although initially housed in a temporary residence, Janga Bahadur soon built a palace called Barfbagu near his palace to accommodate her. The Begum also restored and improved an existing mosque, turning it into a fort-like structure, and appointed Sarfraz Ali, a scholar from Gorakhpur who had studied in Lucknow and worked as a Ukajiu in Delhi, to oversee the mosque. Sarfraz Ali began offering prayers there but passed away within one to two years. The Government of Nepal allocated a monthly allowance of 500 rupees to cover the expenses of the Begum and her son. After Begum Hazrat Mahal arrived in Nepal, Janga Bahadur wrote a letter to Nana Saheb. The content of Janga Bahadur's letter is not known, but Nana Saheb's response to it included the following details:

We have received your letter. Although we are far away, we have heard much about the fame of Nepal. I have studied the character and history of many past Indian kings and assessed the present rulers. However, your qualities are truly remarkable. There was no hesitation on your part when you went to assist the British, despite their longstanding disdain for your people. Your generosity is boundless. Given such exceptional generosity, would it be unreasonable to hope for your support for the Peshwa as well? Remember that the ancestors of the Peshwas have always been allies to you and your people, and I am a descendant of those Peshwas. If you can find space in your heart for your enemies, surely you can extend that same kindness to your friends.

The Peshwa's signature was affixed to this letter. Additionally, Nana Saheb sent his brother, Shrimant Bala Saheb, to speak with Janga Bahadur personally. Upon receiving the letter, Janga Bahadur dispatched one of his lieutenants, Colonel Balbhadra Singh, to meet and converse with the Indian freedom fighters. During their meeting with Balbhadra Singh, the soldiers expressed the following:

We are fighting to protect the Hindu religion, and Maharaja Janga Bahadur is also a Hindu. Therefore, he should support us. If he aids us or directs his officers to lead us, we can resume our struggle against Calcutta. We are committed to achieving our freedom and following his commands. Any territories we

capture in the war will be placed under the Gorkha government. If direct support is not possible, we request at least to be allowed to seek refuge in his kingdom, where we will remain under his command (Savarkar Vinayak Damodar, 1947 : 518-519).

The British have extended a significant opportunity for mercy by offering a policy of pardon. Therefore, you should surrender your weapons to the British and seek refuge with them. In response, the Indian leaders provided the following reply:

We have also heard the announcement, but we refuse to repay the blood of our brothers by submitting to them. Maharaja Janga Bahadur is a Hindu, and we do not wish to fight against the Gorkhas. We are prepared to accept his support if offered, without hesitation. However, on June 18, 1863, the Indian English newspaper *Friend of India* reported that Nana Saheb was being hidden by Janga Bahadur himself. This publication led the British government to suspect that Janga Bahadur was sheltering Nana Saheb. The suspicion arose because Nana Saheb had sent a letter to Janga Bahadur, who responded in kind (Times of India, 1978).

Before the British government could formally question Janga Bahadur about these suspicions, Janga Bahadur wrote to Resident Ramsey, addressing various newspaper reports that claimed Nana Saheb was in Nepal or being concealed by the Nepalese government. Janga Bahadur stated that if anyone could prove that Nana Saheb was indeed in Nepal and being hidden by the Nepalese government, a reward of 1 million rupees would be offered. In response, the Indian leaders provided the following reply:

After receiving the letter, Resident Ramsey tried to deceive Janga Bahadur by saying that since there is freedom of speech in India, newspapers are free to write anything they hear or see. After this, there is no mention of what happened to Nana Saheb, and where he went. However, some other British officials suspected that Nana Saheb had died somewhere within the borders of Nepal (Rana, 1863). After some time, in a note written by Mirsubba Rambhakta written in a copy of Chandrashamsher's library, it is mentioned that Unanarao 1 Balarao 1 was handed over to someone in the Jhari of Butwal, so it seems that Nanarao died inside Nepal. In this situation, the news published in the above-mentioned English magazine *Friend of India* on 18 June

1863 and the suspicions made by the high-ranking British officials at that time appear to be true (Dixit, 1978 : 70).

However, an article in the Times of India from July 1978 claimed that Nana Saheb, whose grandson wrote the piece, died at the age of 102 in the Pratapgarh district of India. The article also noted that Nana Saheb had trained in archery. This claim aligns with the possibility that Nana Saheb was in Nepal during Janga Bahadur's time. Janga Bahadur and his brothers did not fully trust the British, which contrasts with the approach of Bir Shamsher and his brothers, who provided substantial support. As a result, the Indian freedom fighters, including Virjis Kadar, gradually returned to India, with Kadar going back to Calcutta. Therefore, the account mentioned in the Times of India appears to be credible (Times of India, 1978).

On September 12, 1950, Shree Laxmanji of Pune, India, wrote a letter to Major General Sharda Shamsher, the then Director of Foreign Affairs of Nepal, through the Indian Embassy in Nepal. In his letter, Srilakshmanji, a member of Baji Rao's clan, requested the return of Baji Rao and his family's properties within the borders of Nepal (Gupta, 1950). Begum Hazrat Mahal passed away in Nepal in April 1879, 19 years after seeking refuge there. Her mortal remains were buried in front of the mosque she had repaired and improved, far from her birthplace (Pravin, 1971 : 29). With her death, a significant chapter in the history of the Indian War of Independence of 1857 ended.

The fate of the Indian rebels who accompanied Begum Hazrat Mahal and sought refuge in various parts of Nepal remains unknown. However, her son, Virjis Qadar, later travelled to Calcutta during the reign of Bir Shamsher and passed away there. His grave still exists in a place called Khizarpur. Thus, Nepal's dual role during this period was notable: while it provided refuge to Indian rebels, Jang Bahadur Rana maintained Nepal's independence by keeping the British government satisfied through military support.

## **10. Conclusion**

The findings reveal that Nepal, under Janga Bahadur's leadership, aligned with the British to preserve its sovereignty while simultaneously offering refuge to Indian rebels such as Begum Hazrat Mahal and Nana Saheb. This dual approach demonstrated Nepal's intricate position, balancing its geopolitical strategy with cultural solidarity.

Historical records and contemporary accounts highlighted Nepal's essential military support to the British and its covert aid to the rebels. This dual role led to increased British military surveillance at the Nepalese border, reflecting British concerns about Nepal's ambivalent stance. Janga Bahadur's diplomatic efforts to mediate between the British and rebels, along with his later arrests and conflicts, further illustrate the challenges of maintaining sovereignty while navigating regional alliances.

The study underscores Nepal's careful diplomatic maneuvering during the conflict, revealing that previous historical accounts may have oversimplified Nepal's role as merely a British ally. Instead, Nepal's strategy involved a delicate balance of support and non-support to affirm its independence and sovereignty.

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