



CHALLENGE & PUNISHMENT: A STUDY OF TRIAL OF RAJA NAHAR SINGH

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Abstract

The main objective of this research paper is to assess the Trial proceedings of Raja Nahar Singh who challenged the British Authority. The Uprising of 1857 is a historic landmark in the history of India. Raja Nahar Singh of Ballabgarh had taken a leading part in the rebellion. The trial of Nahar Singh was started in Delhi on Saturday 19th of December 1857, by order of Major General C.B. Penny following instructions from Sir John Lawrence, Chief Commissioner of Punjab. The Commission consisted of the following members- President-Brigadier General Chamberlain, Members Lieutenant Colonel Dawes - Horse Artillery, Major Palmer- 60th Rifles, Major Redmond-61st Foot, Major Sawyer-6th Carbineers, Interpreter Lieutenant Waterfield, 23rd N.I., Prosecution for Government-Major F J Harriott- Deputy Judge Advocate General. Charges leveled against Nahar Singh, 'For that he being a subject of the British government in India, did at Ballabgarh between the 10th of May 1857 and the 1st of December of the same year, held treasonable correspondence with those who were in open rebellion and hostility against the said government and did moreover and abet the said rebels in levying and waging war against the said British government, by supplying them with troops both cavalry and infantry, and also money, provisions and arms and further by sending troops to Palwal, for the purpose of usurping it from the possession of the British government in India, did thereby throw off his allegiance, and openly levy and wage war against the said British government, the whole or any part of such conduct being a heinous offence under the provision of Act No. XVI of 1857 of the legislative council in India'. R.M. Courtney, counsel, attorney for Nahar Singh and hotel proprietor of Meerut pleaded the case. 15 persons were called into the court as witness. Finally, the Court reassembled 12 O' clock on 2nd January 1858 & the court gave the decision that, '...Nahar Singh, Raja of Ballabgarh, to be hanged by the neck until he be dead, and further to forfeit all his property and effects of every description'. After the trial by the European Military Commission Raja Nahar Singh was declared a rebel and hanged till death on 9th January 1858 in *Chandni Chowk*, Delhi. Here it is noticeable that the proceedings of the trial began on 19th December 1857 & decision came on 2nd January 1858. Total of 8 days were taken for the proceedings. In this limited period of proceedings how could justice have been given? During the trial proceedings it seems that the British Government tried to prove Nahar Singh guilty for helping the Army, Rebels and the Emperor. After minute study of the available trial proceedings & available historical sources regarding Raja Nahar Singh, it can be concluded that Nahar Singh, Raja of Ballabgarh challenged the British Authority, helped the Rebels during the traumatic months of Uprising of 1857. As a result, British punished the Raja Nahar Singh.

Key-Words: Uprising, *sepoys*, heinous offence, treasonable correspondence, Carbineers, *Chandni Chowk*, *dargah*, *jagirdars*, confectioner.

The Uprising of 1857 is a historic landmark in the history of India. On the evening of Sunday, 10th May 1857, Uprising occurred at Meerut.ⁱ On 11th May 1857, rebel *sepoys* occupied Delhi and proclaimed Bahadur Shah II as Emperor.ⁱⁱ Very soon the news spread all over. By the end of May 1857, all Haryana was practically engulfed in the Uprising. Raja Nahar Singh of Ballabgarh had taken a leading part in the rebellion & in the list of 406 rebels, figured at serial 176.ⁱⁱⁱ The Nawabs of Jhajjar, Dadri, Farrukhnagar and Raja Nahar Singh were put to trial for their role in the rebellion.^{iv}

The trial of Nahar Singh was started in Delhi on Saturday 19th of December 1857, by order of Major General C.B. Penny following instructions from Sir John Lawrence, Chief Commissioner of Punjab. The Commission consisted of the following members:

President : Brigadier General Chamberlain.

Members

- 1) Lieutenant Colonel Dawes : Horse Artillery
- 2) Major Palmer : 60th Rifles
- 3) Major Redmond : 61st Foot
- 4) Major Sawyer : 6th Carbineers

Interpreter

- 5) Lieutenant Waterfield : 23rd N.I.

Prosecution for Government

- 6) Major F J Harriott : Deputy Judge Advocate General

Nahar Singh, was brought into the court before Brigadier General Chamberlain President, European Military Commission. The proceedings started by:

Question : Prisoner, do you object to being tried by the President, or by any other officers appointed to sit on this military commission?

Answer : No.

The President, Members, Interpreter and Deputy Advocate General were duly sworn. All witnesses were directed to withdraw. The charges were read and entered as follows:

"For that he being a subject of the British government in India, did at Ballabgarh between the 10th of May 1857 and the 1st of December of the same year, held treasonable correspondence with those who were in open rebellion

and hostility against the said government and did moreover and abet the said rebels in levying and waging war against the said British government, by supplying them with troops both cavalry and infantry, and also money, provisions and arms and further by sending troops to Palwal, for the purpose of usurping it from the possession of the British government in India, did thereby throw off his allegiance, and openly levy and wage war against the said British government, the whole or any part of such conduct being a heinous offence under the provision of Act No. XVI of 1857 of the legislative council in India".

Question : Nahar Singh, Raja of Ballabgarh, are you guilty or not guilty, of the charge preferred against you?

Answer : Not guilty.

Nahar Singh requested that Mr. Courtney from Meerut may be allowed to attend and assist him in court as counsel for the defense.^v

15 persons were called into the court namely William Ford, Captain Hood, Mectcalfe Bart, Mohamad Bux, Hukam Chand, Jiwan Lal, Ahsan Aulla Khan, Ahmed Ali, Lt. Coghill, Harak Chand, Madho Narain, Brig. Showers, Dhanna Singh, C.B. Saunders and Baldev. Edward Burrows, a Pensioner of Government and Instructor of the Raja's band and John Michell were called in the court for defense of the case and duly sworn and examined by Nahar Singh. Nahar Singh was then called on for his defense.^{vi} R.M. Courteny, counsel, attorney for Nahar Singh and hotel proprietor of Meerut pleaded the case.^{vii} He pleaded before the court that:

"After mature deliberation the judgement of the law should be passed on this unfortunate, but in no way to be depressed man, who owing to weakness of mind and character has been to his grief and treacherous evil advisors who when they could not well prevail on him by their counsel used threats menaces to accomplish their desires and thereby have brought ruin."^{viii}

It was defended by saying that the Raja's letters addressed to the Lieutenant Governor and the Governor General Lord Viscount Canning are more than sufficient; in them the prisoner explicitly makes known his intentions.^{ix}

John Michell, Civil Engineer in the Railway was called into court and duly sworn and was first examined by the Prisoner on some knotty points. Finally, the Court reassembled 12 O' clock on 2nd January 1858. The Deputy Judge Advocate General produced his reply which was read and entered as follows: Gentlemen,

“The charge against the Prisoner will perhaps be best considered under the three distinct heads adopted in the defense, viz. the holding treasonable correspondence with those who were in open rebellion against the government of India, the aiding and abetting rebels in levying and waging war against the said government by supplying them with troops both cavalry and Infantry, and also money, provisions, and arms. Third, the circumstance of the prisoner having himself levied war against the state by sending troops to Palwal for the purpose of usurping unlawful authority over it and wresting it from the possession of said British government.”^x

Deputy Judge Advocate General refuted all the petitions raised by Courtney on behalf of the correspondence that took place between Raja Nahar Singh and the Emperor, which has been earlier discussed. Harriott appreciated only the saving of life of Michell and the party.

Then the court gave the following decision:

“The courts on the evidence before them are of opinion that the prisoner Nahar Singh, Raja of Ballabgarh, is guilty of the charge preferred against him, with exception to the word “money” of which the courts do acquit him. The court having found the Prisoner “Guilty” of the charge preferred against him to the extent above specified, do sentence him. Nahar Singh, Raja of Ballabgarh, to be hanged by the neck until he be dead, and further to forfeit all his property and effects of every description.”^{xi}

After the trial by the European Military Commission Raja Nahar Singh was declared a rebel and hanged till death on 9th January 1858 in *Chandni Chowk*, Delhi.^{xii} The bodies of Nawab of Furrukhnagar, Raja Nahar Singh and Nawab of Jhajjar were buried along with those of some of the princes, in the *dargah* of Qazi Baki-Ullah.^{xiii} As Ghalib noted:

“The lives of the jagirdars of Jhajjar, Ballabgarh and Farrukhnagar were ended in such a manner that none could say blood had been spilled.”^{xiv}

Here it is noticeable that the proceedings of the trial began on 19th December 1857. Hearings were held on 21, 22, 23, 28, 29, 30 December 1857 and 2 January 1858. Total of 8 days were taken for the proceedings. 15 persons were called into the court namely William Ford, Captain Hood, Mectcalfe Bart, Mohamad Bux, Hukam Chand, Jiwan Lal, Ahsan Aulla Khan, Ahmed Ali, Lt. Coghill, Harak Chand, Madho Narain, Brig. Showers, Dhanna Singh, C.B. Saunders and Baldev. Mr. Burrow and John Michell were called in the court for defense of the case. On the 8th day (2nd January 1858) the court gave judgment. In this limited period of proceedings how could justice have been given?

From the questions raised by Nahar Singh and the answers that followed, it does appear that Nahar Singh was trying to establish his innocence. From the method of questioning used by the prosecution against Hukam Chand, Jiwan Lal and Ahsan Aulla Khan it is clear that the Government wanted that they would say that the writings of the papers was undertaken by the orders of Nahar Singh so that Nahar Singh may be held responsible for it.

An account statement of Salij confectioner of the account of the Raja of Ballabgarh, dated 8th June 1857 for stores supplied for the army, which arrived from Agra and Delhi, was read out as supporting document to prove Nahar Singh guilty for helping the Army. Account of 3rd October was added only to prove Nahar Singh guilty for helping the Emperor.

Nahar Singh directed Inayat Ali to reach Palwal and present himself before Sirdhani Singh, Sheikh Ghans, Hira Singh and other officers of Nimach army coming from to Delhi and get them ready to encamp at Faridabad. Besides the language used in the charge makes it clear that the British objected to Nahar Singh's correspondence with revolutionaries, in any case Nahar Singh was clearly in contact with rebels.

The trial of Nahar Singh was certainly premeditated, little more than a farce. Unlike the Nawab of Jhajjar, who had come out openly on the side of the rebels, Nahar Singh had maintained a discreet link both sides, something that he continued to insist upon during the proceedings of the trial, and something that stands out quite clearly. Subsequent writings, have added to the whole incident a flavour of great patriotism that may be only partly true. The fact remain whatever his deeds he paid the price of a rebel hero. This is yet another example of how Nahar Singh at heart was opposing the British but somehow failed to come out openly.



After minute study of the available trial proceedings & available historical sources regarding Raja Nahar Singh, it can be concluded that Nahar Singh, Raja of Ballabgarh challenged the British Authority, helped the Rebels during the traumatic months of Uprising of 1857. As a result, British punished the Raja Nahar Singh.

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