



The Revolt Of Dhondiawagh Against British In Karnataka

Dr.SHIVARAJU

Associate Professor
Department of History,
Government First Grade College HEBBUR
Tumkur taluk, Tumkur District
Karnataka.

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

IndexTerms - Revolts in Karnataka,Dhondia wagh,against British in Karnataka.

I. INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

II. FIGHT AGAINST BRITISH:

Dhodiawagh, a staunch contender of British, organized a revolt against British in South India, from 1799-1800 A.D. and his activities mainly concentrated in Northern parts of Karnataka, because it was very much suitable for Anti British Straggles. Basically, Dhondiawagh was a resident of Channagiri of Bidanore province of the then Shimoga District of princely Mysore State of present Karnataka¹ State. Dhondiawagh was a Maratha by descent and worked under many rulers and ultimately joined military of Hyder Ali of Princely Mysore. Later on misunderstanding arose between Tipu Sultan and Dhondiawagh, as a result Tipu kept him behind the bar.² But when Tipu died in the fourth Angli- Mysore War on 4th May 1799, Dhondiawagh, somehow managed to escape from prison and launched Anti British straggle³. Under Colonale Dalrymple and Colonel Stevenson the British troops attacked and defeated Dhodiawagh

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

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

By the 18th of June 1800, except Havanur on the left bank of river Tungabadra about 16 miles north of Ranibenur, there was fort of any consequence which had not fallen into Dhondiwagh's hand. The inhabitants of the Peshwa, Nizam, Mysore and company swelled the rebel ranks¹⁰. Dhondiwagh's advance continued unchallenged who captured Ranibenur, Hanagal, Manowly, Bannu, Chinnoor. It shows that Dhondiwagh had strengthened and he was supported by all types of people especially rayats¹¹.

As provinces invaded and occupied, the British were scared of Dhondiwagh. In this regard on 11th May 1800 Governor General of India Mornington directed Governor Edward Clive to take¹². Moreover, the most dangerous thing to Wellesley was Dhondiwagh's practical strategy against company that is what S.B. Ehadhury very impressively describes "Instead of bandit chief", now Dhondiwagh considerably elevated his position amongst like-minded anti-British people of entire south India in synchronizing attack over Mysore and who become the head of practical confederacy, hence, colonial Wellesley himself entered the Arena¹³.

As a sequel for British it was necessary to obtain the consent of Peshwa to enter the Maratha state, to the north of the river Tungabadra to subjugate Dhondiwagh and Peshwa hesitatingly consented the British to help¹⁴. In addition to this a body of Nizam's troops helped Wellesley¹⁵. As per the directions of the Madras government, Wellesley entered the field¹⁶. Mr. Josiah Webb, the secretary of Madras government, wrote a letter to Wellesley on 24th May 1800 stating that 'you have to pursue Dhondiwagh wherever you may find him, and to hang him on the first tree'¹⁷.

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

In addition to this the pategars of border regions of Andhra Pradesh also co-operated with Dhondiwagh²¹. As Wellesley expressed his fear that even the Nizam's officials and servants too conspire with Dhondiwagh in great numbers against the Company that the servants of Nizam had entered into a treacherous collusion with Dhondiwagh²². But Wellesley found this fact at the end of the Dhondiwagh's death. Moreover Thomas Munro also wrote to Resident Close that 'I have regret that amidst all the difficulties and disappointments which have occurred none of the officers ever once wrote to me... when it is considered in the course of last six weeks, and that the answer to a letter sent from Hallihal by common peon cannot reach that place in less than 22 days'²³.

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

Thus, Wellesley decided to curb Dhondiwagh by hook or crook, who therefore invested the detachment in Malabar, Canara and Mysore²⁶, Troops from Bombay and Goa, military forces from Celon, the twelfth Regiment²⁷ and Twenty fifth Dragoons of Britain, second Battalion of fifth Regiment of native infantry were ordered to reinforce the grand army²⁸ along with Nizam's troops and the Subsidiary forces in Hyderabad²⁹. Therefore, under Lt. Col. Maclean, a detachment of Hyderabad Subsidiary force 2nd Battalion 9th Regiment was sent to assist in the Raichur Doab which reinforced soon afterwards by another detachment from the same force, composed of a Regiment of Cavalry and a Companies of Infantry under Lt. Col. Bowsen who assumed command of the entire forces³⁰. In addition this Marathas also sent their troops under Balakrishna Pundith³¹. Purnaiah, the Dewan of Mysore had placed his troops in the service of the 3 British and supplied provisions to them³².

Even though Dhondiwagh was so powerful than the Company, hence, British took strong steps against Dhondiwagh and chasing Dhondiwagh from Shikaripur, Harihar, Bidanore, Chitradurga, Ranibennur, Haveri, Karajagi, Savanur, Lakshmeshwara, Shirahatti, Dambal, Kittur, Saundatti, Jalhaal and eventually to Konagal till the death of Dhondiwagh in the middle of the September 1800 AD³³.

But Wellesley and his commanders like Stevenson, Montresor, Capper, Munro, Balquiere, Dovaton, Prter, Paterson and others, the troops of Marathas Mysore and Nizam failed to defeat Dhondiwagh in direct wars and by using traits they finished Dhondiwagh³⁴.

III. CONCLUSION:

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

The blood-stained moustache of Dhondia Wagh is believed to have been carried away by Wellesley back home to England as a trophy. He seemed to have respected Dhondia for the diehard fighter he was, because in a gesture of chivalry, he offered protection to his four-year old son and paid for his maintenance before he left India. The boy, Salabat Khan, would eventually join the service of the King of Mysore and die of cholera in 1822.

Arthur Wellesley would go on to fight many more battles in India – Ahmednagar, Assaye, Arghum and Gwalighur among others – earning his formidable reputation as a field commander and later, as the Duke of Wellington, find his coveted place in history as the famous victor of Waterloo against Napoleon Bonaparte, the greatest general world had ever known. The duke, till his last days, always maintained that everything he learned about warfare he did in the battlefields of India. The Battle of Conaghalli, wherein he came face to face with a fierce fighter like Dhondia Wagh was his first major field encounter, though it remains a footnote in the Indian and British chronicles of the times.

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