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SEPOY MUTINY AND THE UPRISING OF
1857 IN BUNDELKHAND.

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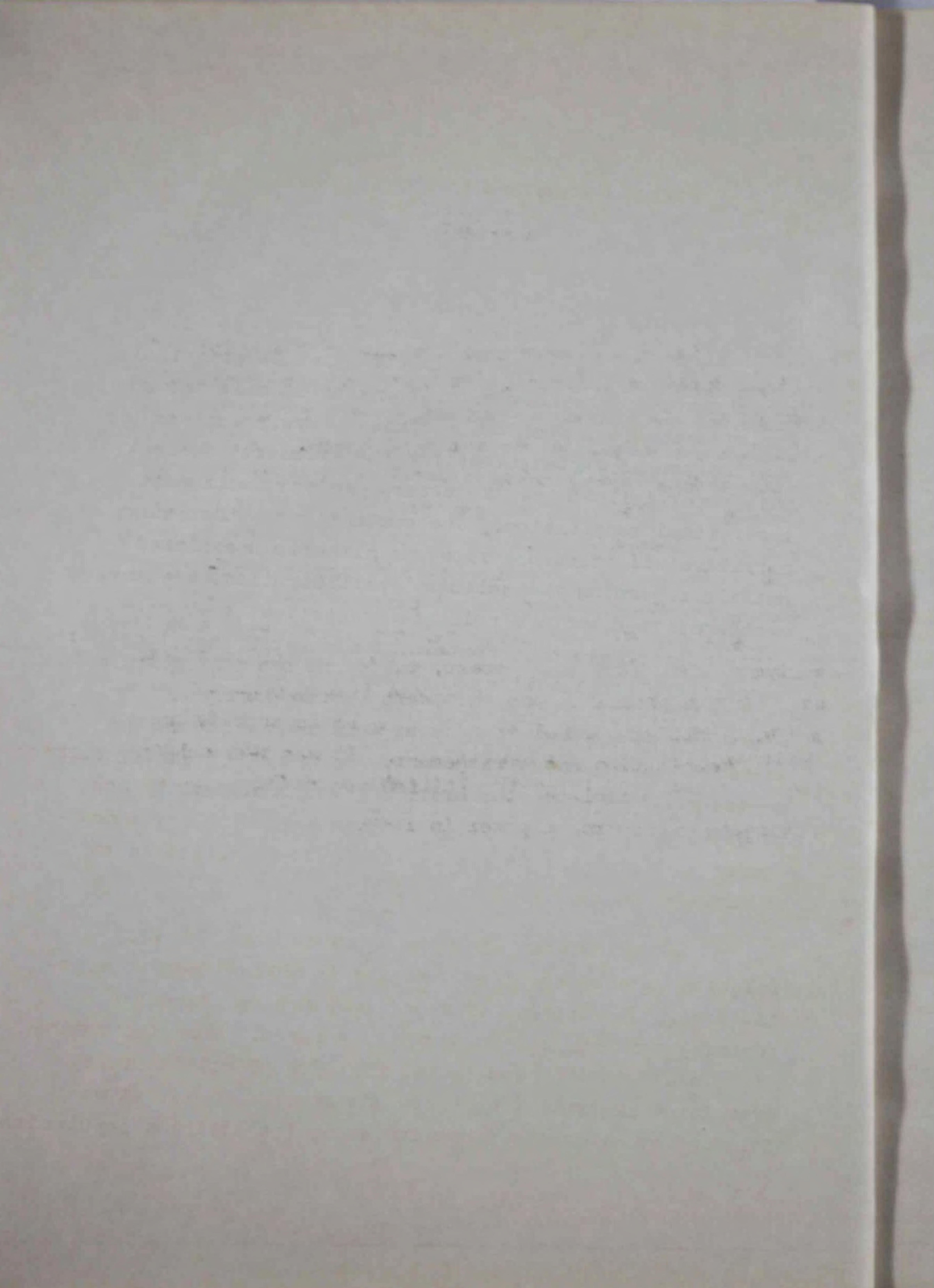


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Abstract

This is a descriptive account of the soldiers' actions during the mutiny. It takes up the principal cantonments in the four major towns of Bundelkhand and explores the course of the mutinies there. Instead of seeking causal explanations for the soldiers' dissent, this paper follows the trajectory of their actions to their final suppression. The contention is that such a narrative will disclose rich and hitherto unexplored details regarding the soldiers' participation, how they were mobilised and the political objectives they were striving for. In this context, the paper brings together some of the proclamations that were issued during the mutiny justifying rebel actions as well as specifying their organisation and arrangement. It was the soldiers, after all, who replaced the British government with an alternate structure of power in 1857.



Sepoy Mutiny and the Uprising of
1857 in Bundelkhand

Tapti Roy

When an army rebels, it marks, in the most immediate and palpable sense, a crisis of the State. If the State claims, in relation to society, a monopoly of legitimate force, then the army is precisely the repository and instrument of that force. A mutinous army, therefore, is a curious anomaly: the instrument of legitimate force itself questions the source of its legitimacy, the very embodiment of order becomes a body of rebellious men.¹

The corporeality of force which an army represents is important. A mutiny does not dissolve a body of soldiers, it turns them as a body from the side of the state to its opposite. A rebel army, in other words, carries on its body the signs of order and legitimacy; only now it has forsaken its old loyalty and is looking for a new source of authority to give it social recognition as an instrument of legitimate force.

A mutiny then produces a moment when the very relation between state and society is thrown open to negotiations. The actions of rebel soldiers can have far reaching consequences in society at large. When the mutiny of soldiers in 1857 led to the collapse of British rule over large regions of northern and central India, it was followed by extensive rebellion among the civilian population.

Historical writings on the mutiny² speculate at length on factors that could explain why the loyalty of the soldiers towards the state was severed in so many regiments, stationed in such widely dispersed cantonments as Dinapur and Meerut. It seems all the more striking because before this event, the loyalty of the Indian sepoy, his 'fidelity to his salt'³ was so widely acclaimed. Contemporary English officials had often remarked on 'the good conduct, firmness and steady attachment of our native troops', on sepoys being 'patient, cheerful and obedient', on them being 'devoted to the services'.⁴ Lord Gough described the Indian army during the Sutlej campaign as "nearly perfect ... There cannot be an army more loyal, better disposed, or more ready to do their duty".⁵

The mutiny of 1857 was a sudden and quite unexpected inversion of that highly applauded collective loyalty. Naturally enough, it cries out for an explanation. There were, of course, earlier instances of soldiers' mutinies in the nineteenth century; these were, in fact, fairly frequent after 1824. They had, however, always remained local affairs confined to one or two contiguous stations. Now, after the conflagration of 1857, English officials in their efforts to seek corrective measures, searched for the sources of widespread disaffection among the soldiers of the Bengal Army. Their findings and explanations have been used later by historians to catalogue a set of factors regarded as the causes of the mutiny.

The soldier had many reasons to complain. His salary which remained unrevised at 7 rupees a month was certainly a paltry sum. The extra field allowance called 'batta' was also in course of time curtailed and prospects of promotion to higher ranks were increasingly restricted. The service was rendered all the more odious when the army was driven to hazardous campaigns in Burma and Afghanistan. The physical discomfort together with the persistent fear of social ostracism at having to cross the Indus or the sea in the east was said to be distressing to the Indian sepoy. William Kaye and following him Amiya Barat dwell at length upon the growing distance between the soldiers and their commanders, caused primarily by the latter's intemperance and disdain towards their Indian subordinates. Kaye also stresses the need to appreciate the 'alarm and disquiet' as he calls it, of the sepoy that made him 'most susceptible to deleterious impressions'.⁶ The soldiers apparently speculated on the increased missionary activity in the cantonments and found it alarming. They also compared the disproportionately small number of Europeans with the number of Indians and nursed false hopes about the chances of a successful rebellion. Recent scholars like Eric Stokes and Rudrangshu Mukherjee have widened the scope of inquiry by extending the causal space from the army barracks to the wider society from which the soldiers came. The complaints and resentments in society at large -- especially among the peasants of northern India now fully subjugated by colonial rule -- about the economic, social and political measures of the government were reflected in the ideas and opinions of the soldiers who, after all, were drawn from the same peasantry.⁷ The resistance of a colonised people found expression in the mutiny of the Company's soldiers.

Causal explanations of this kind are, of course, a standard historiographical practice. In this particular case, its effect is to make the mutiny of the soldiers the last term of a narrative sequence. A chain of events, prior in historical time, is made to culminate in that final event. The mutiny is thus explained narratively by its causal antecedents.

We propose to follow here an altogether different sequence. We will take the soldiers' mutiny as the first term of our narrative. Beginning with the mutiny, our story will follow the trajectory of the soldiers' actions, through various ups and downs of the rebellion to its final suppression and defeat. Our contention is that this other narrative will present us with rich and hitherto unexplored details which will force us to rethink many of our casual explanations.

We will begin then, with the mutiny in Jhansi, the first station to witness an outbreak of rebellion in Bundelkhand, and end with the defeat of the soldiers in the battle of Kalpi in May 1858. The recorded details in the official documents on the actions of rebel soldiers are copious. The soldiers were after all a part of the very body of the state, their intransigence a sign of its vulnerability. In rebellion they carried the deeply threatening possibility of a counter - authority, a counter - state. Their actions from the moment of mutiny to the moment of defeat are recorded with an urgency and a diligence found only among those fighting to save their own lives.

II

It was the soldiers of Meerut who set the ball rolling on the 10th of May. Mutinies followed in several stations of the north.⁸ In Bundelkhand, Jhansi took the lead. On the 5th of June, a day after the mutiny in Kanpur, at about 3 p.m. in the afternoon, some soldiers of the 12th Native Infantry raised an alarm that the magazine had been attacked by dacoits. They rushed to the Star Fort that contained both the magazine and the entire treasure amounting to nearly 47 lakhs of rupees and seized it. By evening many of the soldiers returned to their lines but fifty men with two guns remained behind, occupying the Fort. The Infantry men were joined by those in the Artillery.⁹ Two English officers, Captain Dunlop and Lieutenant Taylor were fired at when they went to the magazine to meet the soldiers and were forced to flee. Soldiers later also fired on Captain Skene when he was having a petition read. Thereafter all the English officials together with their families took shelter in the Jhansi fort. Dunlop and Taylor, however, remained behind in the cantonment.¹⁰ The following day, the 6th of June, both these officers were killed along with two havildars and one sepoy who had been accompanying them.¹¹ Hearing of this the Cavalry broke into rebellion, attacked and wounded their Adjutant Lieutenant Campbell, with a musket ball. The latter too fled into the fort.¹²

By the afternoon of the 6th the entire station was up in arms against the English. All the soldiers assembled at the magazine and then split into smaller groups.¹³ The sowars (cavalrymen) went up to the jail and released all the prisoners. The Jail Darogha, Bakshish Ali and the

barkandazes joined them. Others set fire to the officer's bungalows. Responding to the call of the sliders, the police and the newly raised matchlockmen all deserted their posts.¹⁴ The same afternoon a group of 50 sowars, 300 soldiers and a number of custom and police chaprasis led by Bakshish Ali taking along two guns went up to the town and threw open the Orcha gate to the cry of 'Deen ka Jai' (Victory of Religion).

They next moved on to Lakshmi Bai's palace and demanded assistance from her. All her gaurds went along with the mutineers.¹⁵ At about 3 p.m. the same day, the soldiers made their first attack on the English and besieged the fort. Unable to make a breach, they returned to their lines placing some sowars and chaprasis of the custom and police departments on guard over the gates.¹⁶

The next morning, three Englishmen, Andrews, Purcell and Scot, came out of the fort, disguised as Indians in order to go to Lakshmi Bai for help. They were recognised, captured and killed. Plunder and looting of property of the Europeans and their Indian officials followed. With the exception of the large Agency building, all houses and offices belonging to the firanghis were burnt down. Office records were taken out and a bonfire was made of them in the open field. Some of the soldiers and released prisoners drove about in buggies and carriages all over the cantonment.¹⁷ "The Bengalees were specially singled out for vengeance", the Bengali official wrote in his deposition later, "The following morning a general search was made for Bengalees, and myself and two others of the custom establishment fell into the hands of the ruffians and were hauled up in presence of the rissaladar who ordered us to be kept in confinement until the fort should surrender."¹⁸

Securing two guns from Lakshmi Bai, the soldiers began fresh attacks on Jhansi fort on the 8th morning. Captain Gordon was shot in the head and died. Others in the fort decided to surrender on condition that their lives would be spared. The soldiers agreed not to harm them and around five in the evening the English came out of the fort. As soon as they did so, they were bound and taken to Jhokun Bagh where all of them were put to the sword.¹⁹ Bakshish Ali later related to the Risaladar with much pride and satisfaction that he had been able to kill the "Burra (Bara) Sahib" (Skene, Superintendent of Jhansi) with one stroke.²⁰

The soldiers left Jhansi for Delhi three or four days later carrying with them as much of the treasure and as many of the horses as they could.²¹ It appears from one evidence that soldiers had demanded 1,25,000 rupees from Lakshmi Bai as a price for the throne. The Rani agreed and even paid 15,000 rupees, but before the rest was paid they had left Jhansi.²²

Thirty-two miles from Jhansi, a detachment of the 12th Native Infantry stationed at Kurrera mutinied in the first week of June and all soldiers left their station for Jhansi.²³ On the 10th June, the right wing of the 12th regiment and the left wing of the 14th cavalry rose. Leaving their station, they marched north towards Kanpur. On their way, they passed the towns Guroth and Erich in Jhansi and Gurserai in Jalaun. Erich was reported to have been plundered by them.²⁴

Widespread mutiny evoked opposition among the civil officials as well. During the outbreaks at Jhansi and Nowgong, S. Thomson, the Deputy Collector of Jhansi who was then in Ma tried to raise a body of men from among the local Bundelas in

Gurotha. He failed because the police and tahsil chaprasis declined to cooperate. The latter even refused to give out any money from the treasury without orders from the Emperor in Delhi from whom they said they had received a Shuka (Sealed letter).²⁵

The first set of actions were without doubt designed towards eliminating the British government. The two essential prerequisites for its normal functioning, the treasury and the magazine, were the first to be captured. This on the one hand made it difficult for the English to retaliate and on the other endowed rebels with powers of the displaced state. Next, the officials were physically eliminated and all tangible forms of British rule destroyed. Records and the jail were therefore the two most obvious targets.

What was, however, most striking was the way the soldiers were organised and the manner in which they mobilised others. The false alarm was sounded to gather all the soldiers before the actions were commenced. Here one of the three units of the army -- infantry, cavalry or artillery -- took the initiative while the others followed. The basis on which soldiers were organised to become an instrument of the power of the state now provided paradoxically the groundwork for violent actions against the state. Regimental formations and arrangements were not only retained but furnished the essential structure within which the mutinies were carried out. A mutiny in the headquarters caused battalions in the sub-areas to rise in response. After Jhansi, mutiny broke out in Nowgong and Kurrera while regiments in Hamirpur and Banda awaited news from their corps in Kanpur.

III

It may be useful at this point to describe how regiments in the Bengal Army were constituted and to give a short account of the soldiers in the five towns of Bundelkhand.

A regiment of Infantry of the Bengal Army was constituted by 10 companies, each containing 100 privates, 2 native commissioned and 12 non-commissioned officers.²⁶ It was further split into two wings, the right and the left, of 5 companies each. The highest rank among the Indians was the Subahdar who was followed by the Jamadar; the twelve non-commissioned officers consisted of 6 Havildars and 6 Naiks. Every company had its drummer, fifer, water-carriers or bhistis and sweepers. The English officer commanding the regiment had his second in command and an Adjutant. There were also two non-commissioned officers, ranked Sergeant major and Quartermaster. For every regiment was assigned one English doctor, a Surgeon - major who was assisted by two Indian doctors and one dresser and a compounder.

The Cavalry regiment was also split but into 6 troopers with a total strength of 504 sowars or cavalry soldiers, 13 Indian officers, 54 non-commissioned officers, water-carriers, drummers and fifers. The Rissaladar-major and the second and third Rissaladars were the seniormost among the Indian officers. Kotedafadar and Dafadar were among the highest-ranking non-commissioned officers. In terms of both numbers and ranks, the organisation of English officers in the Cavalry regiment was much the same as in the Infantry.²⁷

It was not until the 1840s that regular army regiments were stationed in the districts of Bundelkhand. Prior to that, there were only temporary outposts of detachments in places like Gurowli and Panwari in Hamirpur with a comparatively large cantonment in Keitah (in the same district) that was wound up by the late 1830s.²⁸ The major military divisions for this region operated from Sagar and Jabalpur. The first proper military establishment was constituted in Bundelkhand for the protection of the Jalaun State, when it was brought under temporary British administration in 1838. Called the Jalaun Legion, it was initially a combined force comprising a regiment of four Cavalry troopers and another of Infantry having eight companies with two brass field rifles and one six pounder gun. Following the provisional acquisition of Jhansi in 1839, two fresh Cavalry troopers and 333 Infantry recruits were added. The force was henceforth called the Bundelkhand Legion with headquarters in Jhansi. The expenses for its maintenance were borne by the Jalaun and Jhansi States.²⁹ The strength of the force in the division was frequently reinforced by fresh recruitments "to preserve the internal tranquility of the States, from the efforts of the turbulent".³⁰ The Legion was stationed chiefly in areas of Bundela stronghold and served the English primarily in combating frequent Bundela uprisings. It was also quite frequently assigned service outside Bundelkhand.³¹ By the general orders of 4th April 1844, the Legion was permanently attached to the Bengal Army and its promotion rolls regularised.³² In the course of the next few years, it was disbanded and replaced by regular army divisions. Some Infantry battalions of the Legion were taken into the regular regiments, the Cavalry was more or less brought up to the

same footing as Irregular Cavalry detachments and the Artillery distributed among different native units.³³ Despite the rather local contingency in which the Legion was raised, the soldiers were chiefly enlisted from outside Bundelkhand since, as English officials explained with characteristic recourse to ethnography, those "belonging to the district having been too accustomed to predatory habits to like discipline, seldom offer as recruits".³⁴ They were principally Muslims, Rajputs, Brahmins and others of lower castes.

By 1857 all the four district towns of Bundelkhand, Jhansi, Orai, Hamirpur, Banda, as well as the sub-divisional centre, Lalitpur, had regular cantonments. The principal town Jhansi had detachments of all the three units of the army. It was the headquarters of the 12th Native Infantry regiment whose left wing was stationed there while the right wing was posted at Nowgong. The right wing of the 14th Irregular Cavalry and a detachment of foot artillery were also quartered here while the left wing of the 14th Irregular was at Nowgong. In the other towns there was usually one detachment or a couple of companies of Infantry soldiers. Stationed in Lalitpur was the 6th Regiment of the Gwalior Contingent and in Orai were two companies of the 53rd and 56th Native Infantry regiments. Troops garrisoned at Hamirpur formed a detachment of the 56th Native Infantry and those at Banda belonged to the 1st Native Infantry. Except for the Gwalior contingent, the headquarters of all the other regiments was in Kanpur.

The 12th Regiment Bengal Native Infantry, colloquially referred to as 'Hote Ka Palatan', was raised in 1763 and had served in almost the entire length of the country from the Carnatic wars in the south to the battle of Sobraon

in the north-west. The 14th Irregular Cavalry was raised as late as in 1846 in Punjab. Formerly the 2nd battalion of the 28th Regiment Bengal Native Infantry, the 56th Regiment popularly called 'Lambroon Ka Paltan', was constituted into a separate regiment in 1815 and served primarily in Punjab. Perhaps one of the oldest regiments, the 1st Bengal Native Infantry also called 'Gillis Ka Paltan' was formed in 1775 and had a long history of service.³⁵ The 12th Bengal Native Regiment had come to Jhansi from Multan five years before and most of the soldiers were men from outside the region.³⁶ The 14th Irregular Cavalry was raised in the north and therefore its men were principally residents of Delhi and its neighbourhood.³⁷

IV

Let us return to our story of the mutiny. The uprising in Jhansi was followed by mutinies in four other towns of Bundelkhand. But the sense in which the regimental structure instilled in the minds of soldiers stationed as far apart as Meerut and Dinapur the feeling of belonging to the same army also provided the framework in which the mutiny in Jhansi was sought to be replicated in other places. Even in their rebellion, they were acting as the same army.

True, in Lalitpur the exact sequence was in some senses reversed. The initiative to withdraw from the station was taken on the 12th of June by the Deputy Commissioner A.C. Gordon and the other English officials who had been frightened out of their wits. The thakurs in the surrounding country had

taken to arms and were assembling in large bodies around Lalitpur. Revenue officials and the police deserted the station. Paradoxically, the English still had hopes in the loyalty of the soldiers of the 6th Regiment Gwalior contingent cantoned there. A false alarm that the Bundelas were looting the bazaar was raised on the afternoon of 11th June and the soldiers came to the assistance of the English with great alacrity. The treasure was removed to the soldiers' lines regarded ^{as} the safest place against any night attack. The officials, however, decided to evacuate the station on the 12th and distributed the remaining money among the soldiers as an incentive for them to accompany the English with only their ammunition. As preparations for departure got under way, the soldiers refused to march and openly declared mutiny instead. When reminded of the money that had been distributed, the soldiers replied that they considered it to be a gift from the King. They also said, "we are servants of the king of Delhi, not a man of us (sic) will go with you, however we wont take your lives, but you must be off". The English officials, thereafter, fled the town.³⁸ The soldiers seized the magazine and treasury and left Lalitpur on the 13th evening.³⁹ As soon as their backs were turned on the town, they were attacked by the followers of Mardan Singh, the Raja of Banpur and other Bundelas. The soldiers escaped by crossing the Betwa into Jhansi territory. They were in Jhansi for three days before proceeding further north towards Orai and ultimately reached Kalpi enroute to Kanpur.⁴⁰

The first to rise in Orai, the district town of Jalaun, were not the infantry soldiers of the two companies of the 53rd and 56th regiments but the chaprasis of the custom department. As news of the mutiny in Jhansi reached

Orai, chaprasis burnt the customs lodge on the chowkies and threatened to kill their officers. The police followed their example. Unable to hold on to the district any longer, the English decided to abandon the town.⁴¹ Browne, the Deputy Commissioner, and Lamb left Orai on the 11th of June.⁴² As Orai fell on the way north from all stations of Bundelkhand, a continuous stream of soldiers from other stations came pouring in. The first to arrive were the mutineers from Jhansi three or four days after Browne and Lamb had left.⁴³ Deputy Collectors Passanah and Griffiths thereafter moved out on the 15th night. The Jhansi troops repeated the standard series of actions. They released prisoners from the jail, plundered government treasure and property left behind by the English and other Christian inhabitants, burnt and destroyed the records and all public and private buildings. Three of the fleeing Englishmen fell into their hands; all of them were killed. The soldiers remained in Orai for only one day. A week later, soldiers from Nowgong came and plundered a few of the revenue establishments and the treasury. A company of the 53rd Native Infantry posted at Orai which had been sent to Jalaun with treasure mutinied and captured Passanah and Griffiths while they were escaping and brought them back to Orai. Forcing the two English officials to pay a heavy ransom, they let them go. Passanah and Griffiths were next seized by the servants of the Chief of the principality of Gurserai and were taken to the soldiers from Lalitpur who arrived at Orai on the 21st June.⁴⁴ Finally all soldiers left for Kanpur.

As for the Indian civilians in Jalaun, the tahsildars and thanadars did not display any outright hostility to the English though many took service with Kesho Rao the Chief of Gurserai and Tai Bai, former Rani of Jalaun. It was,

however, the barkandazes, chaprasis and guards who joined the rebellion early, were with the mutineers in plundering the town and then entered the service of Kesho Rao. Barkandazes of Atta in Kalpi tahsil and of Bangra in Kunch were later reported to have behaved violently in demanding their pay from the tahsildar. Some 70 or 80 barkandazes of the Bagri tribe employed in the district now took off in a body in 1857 and started plundering.⁴⁶

Mutiny in Kanpur certainly foreshadowed similar actions from splinter detachments at Hamirpur and Banda. In view of the impending crisis, Lloyd the Collector of Hamirpur raised fresh levies of 500 men and brought in Jamadars, chaparasis and barkandazes from surrounding tahsilis and thanas. The Chiefs of the neighbouring States of Chirkhari, Behri and Baoni also furnished 100 men and one gun each. On the 14th morning, some troops arrived at Hamirpur from Beoni. Their headmen Rahim-ud-din withdrew the guns posted over Lloyd's compound and turned them on the house. Meanwhile, prisoners were released. Faced with such a critical situation, two officials Lloyd and Grant together with officers who escaped from Kanpur, Raikes and Browne, prepared to flee. Their horses were made ready and saddled in charge of two sowars who were also given some money for expenses on the road. The sowars carried off the horses crying out to the approaching mutineers that the 'sahib-log' were running away. The four got away while the rest of the English officials and their families who remained behind were killed.

Bundela auxiliaries now joined other soldiers in plundering the station. Apart from government and private property belonging to the English, wealthy men were also

looted. Jerimiah, the Christian preacher, together with his family was killed. The Bengali babus for *writing English were attacked and all their possessions taken away*. Mutineers also fired on boats carrying sepoy of the 44th and 67th regiments disarmed at Agra and plundered them. Meanwhile the Subahdar of the 56th Infantry regiment proclaimed the rule of Delhi in Hamirpur, he himself professing to be the Emperor's Agent. Lloyd and Grant who had been hiding in a village three miles from the Jamuna were discovered on the 18th and brought before the Subahdar. They were taken to the Kacheri compound the following day, bound to trees, made to kneel, and then shot dead.⁴⁷

A troop of cavalry and a company of Infantry came from Kanpur on the 20th of June to assist soldiers in removing the treasure from Hamirpur. All left the station on the 21st while the Bundela auxiliary soldiers returned to their respective villages.⁴⁸

Villages in the district of Banda had been up in rebellion since early June but the three companies of the 1st Native Infantry had remained perfectly compliant. F.O. Mayne, the Collector, sent treasure through detachments officered by Indians who *honorably acquitted themselves of their trust only a few days before the outbreak at Cawnpoor*.⁴⁹ The rest of the money was also placed in the custody of the soldiers in the infantry lines and both Mayne and Bennett, the officer commanding the detachments, felt that the soldiers warranted such faith.

In view of the prevailing insurrection all around, however, the English officials prepared for every contingency. To provide for any kind of emergency that might arise, Mayne ordered that grain and atta be stored in the jail for the

purpose. This immediately sparked off widespread fear among the najibs of the jail that the grain stored would be mixed with cowbones for their consumption. Mayne forestalled a mutiny among these najibs by severely reprimanding them and threatening them with punishment and dismissal. Two proclamations were put up in the city calling for the extermination of the Christians but these caused no immediate reaction in the town.

A verbal message sent by Muhammad Sardar Khan, the Deputy Collector at Chilla Tara ghat on the northern borders of the district, that mutinous cavalry troops were crossing the Jamuna into Banda was conveyed to Mayne in an open Kacheri. It spread around and some people took to plundering the town. English women were taken to the Nawab's palace for safety. Soon after a few sowars crossed the river at Chilla-Tara and set up a green flag at the village of Chilla, while reports reached Banda that soldiers from Kanpur were marching towards this district. "A different tone was soon manifest in the Police", Mayne recollected, "they no longer obeyed order with their usual alacrity, and not a single man, horse or foot, could be obtained for extra levies".⁵⁰ Having taken shelter in the palace, Mayne was convinced that while the Nawab was sincere in his friendship with the English, his followers were determined to kill them, "our enemies were within the walls, even more numerous than those outside", he observed.⁵¹

The soldiers of the 1st Bengal Native Infantry in the barracks of Banda declared mutiny on the afternoon of 14th June, the same day that their counterparts rose in Hamirpur. They refused to give up a single rupee out of the treasure remaining with them. They also sent word to the Jail Darogah

that the grain stored in the jail and the two guns which Mayne had ordered to be brought to the palace were not to leave the place but should await orders from their Subahdar who was marching with troops to occupy Banda. The soldiers seized the magazine that contained some 80,000 rounds of cartridge and three times that number of blank cartridges.

The English officials in the palace decided to make one last attempt at recapturing the guns and ammunition from the soldiers with the aid of Ali Bahadur and his 125 retainers. As the Nawab's men were assembled at the palace courtyard, they marched straight off to the cantonment "singing the Jehad and calling upon all Muslims to exterminate the firanghis".⁵² Soldiers in the lines sounded the alarm and armed themselves. English officials fled the station and Banda like all neighbouring towns of Kanpur, Allahabad, Fatehpur and Hamirpur was left to the sepoys and the local residents of the town.

All former English establishments and offices were plundered and burnt down. On the 15th morning, a company of sepoys marched to release the prisoners from the jail and took possession of two guns, ammunition and all commissariate stores kept there. The Ajaigarh troops sent by their Rani to assist the English now joined the 1st regiment. Accompanied by the chaprasis and jail najibs, the soldiers and auxiliary levies plundered the treasury and the missionary school in Banda. Europeans in the school were released only after they were converted to Islam. Many among the leading merchants of the town, possibly to save themselves, distributed sweet-meats to celebrate the overthrow of English rule.⁵³

In places where there were isolated units, soldiers lacking the support of their regiment, frequently resorted to desertion. A detachment of the 42nd Native Infantry posted in Sagar had been stationed at Malthone in southern Lalitpur. Following the outbreak in all the towns in the north, Major Gausson, the officer commanding, ordered it to return to Sagar. Instead of doing so, most of the soldiers and their Indian officers of both Infantry and Cavalry deserted their station.⁵⁴ Soldiers accompanying a group of European fugitives from Mahoba on their way to Banda gradually began to drop out during their march especially when villagers threatened to attack them. There were eventually half the original number left. Drummers and bandsmen had deserted even before the English started.⁵⁵

Mutiny, we have said before, does not dissolve a body of soldiers, it turns them as a body into rebels against the state. Even as rebels, soldiers in 1857 maintained not only the military organisations of their regiments but also the hierarchy of rank and order within each regiment. In Jhansi, most decisions were taken by Kala Khan, a Risaladar of Cavalry and Lal Bahadur, a Subadar of Infantry, the seniormost ranks held by the Indian in the army. Lal Bahadur had been the only junior commissioned officer present in Jhansi in June 1857 and had tried hard to stop the soldiers from turning into rebels.

But there is more to the notion of an army than merely its organisational structure. There is also the fundamental idea of the army being an arm of the state, proclaiming by its very constitution as an army the corporeal power of a legitimate political authority. An army is an army loyal to political authority. A rebel army

must proclaim its loyalty to an alternative political authority. In Hamirpur, when the Subahdur of the 56th Infantry, took command after the mutiny, he did so by proclaiming the rule of the Emperor.

V

Overthrowing the English from their positions of authority was the first step in the political designs of the soldiers. That first moment of rebellion over, they were nearly everywhere inclined to move out of their cantonment and to proceed towards Delhi or Kanpur. Those were the perceived centres of that alternate political order to which they had to proclaim their loyalty. The soldiers of Meerut showed the way and the administrative structures that emerged in these two towns, served not only as models but provided the general direction for mutinies all over northern and central India. The decision of every rebel unit to move towards the centre was thus part of an implicit strategy, to build, uphold and strengthen an alternative supra local political order - in short, a state.

Rarely therefore would the soldiers be involved with routine day - to - day affairs of local administration once an alternate structure of government had emerged around a former Raja or Rani. However, in the process of assuming power, these local potentates had to reckon with the authority which the soldiers acquired as those who had overthrown the British. Quite often, the Rajas could take charge of their regions only after the soldiers had formally

sanctioned the move. Indeed the soldiers often developed powers to a council of ministers and retained for themselves a major share in decision-making. This was particularly true for a region like Bundelkhand where there was always the physical presence of soldiers during the entire period of the rebellion. Not all of them left the towns and even when they did others from stations in the west and the south arrived on their way north. And after Delhi and Kanpur were lost, Kalpi became the centre of resistance as everyone assembled there for the final battle.

Immediately after the rising, soldiers in Jhansi demanded assistance from Lakshmi Bai threatening to kill her if she did not meet their requirements or if she extended any help to the English. They had earlier imprisoned Nazim Hussain, the Revenue Tahsildar and Ahmed Hussain the Tahsildar of Jhansi before the other officials voluntarily joined them.⁵⁶ On the departure of the soldiers, as Lakshmi Bai set out to take control of the situation, one of her first measures was to raise an army. She not only recruited local men and those provided by the neighbouring Rajput thakurs and zamindars, but also included in her service a number of soldiers of the British army. Her force was constituted by about 300 Vilayaities, (Afghan mercenaries) 500 sowars and 80 sepoy of the Scindia's contingent who were disarmed at Asirgarh in the Nimar district of the Central Provinces.⁵⁷ In the new government that was set up in the name of the Rani, her officials wielded effective power. Several among them were former civil officials in the British government. Bakshish Ali the Jail Darogah, Muhammad Bux the Jamadar of prisons, Kashinath Bhaiya, the Tahsildar of Pundwaha, Lalu Baksh, Jharu Kunwar, Nana Sahib, Lakshmi Bai's father, Moro Balwant were among those who formed

a kind of council that for all practical purposes ran the government in Jhansi between July 1857 and March 1858.

Following the departure of the soldiers from Hamirpur, the Deputy Collector Wahiduzaman took over the administration of the town under directions from the Lieutenant - Governor of the North-Western Provinces. On the 29th of June, however, Nana Saheb sent an order from Kanpur that Wahiduzaman should manage the district in his name. On the 1st of July, the Peshwa's rule was proclaimed in Hamirpur and on the 3rd, a second proclamation was issued to the effect that Poona and Satara had fallen and the English had been exterminated. Landholders were ordered to pay their revenue to the Nana's agent. Wahiduzaman sent parwanas to the tahsildars and thanadars of the district asking them to remain at their posts and act in obedience to the Nana.⁵⁸ The Indian officials accepted the new order until they heard of the English reoccupation of Fatehpur and Kanpur at the end of July when most of them left for their homes.⁵⁹

In Banda on the 14th evening, Ali Bahadur the former Nawab proclaimed his rule and with some policemen made arrangements to prevent the plundering of the town. Next morning, this was replaced by another proclamation, issued by the soldiers which said, "Khulq Khoda Ki, Mulk Badshah Ka, Hukm Subahdar Sepoy Bahadur Ka". Ali Bahadur, now forced to acknowledge the prerogative of the soldiers, treated them to sweets. The soldiers summoned all civil officials and told them that they would be retained in their respective appointments. The slaughter of cows was forbidden in the town. Mir Furhat Ali, the Tahsildar was seized and sentries posted over the tahsil treasury. A council was formed

with the former officials to run the government while Ali Bahadur remained its titular Nawab. Muhammad Sardar Khan, the previous Deputy Collector was appointed the Nazim on a salary of Rs. 1,000, Mir Inshalla made Sipah Salar, Mirza Vilayat Hussain became the Naib Resat, Mirza Imdad Ali Beg in charge of the Finance department and Mir Farhat Ali the Munserim or assistant to the Nazim on a salary of Rs. 400/-. Men were recruited as soldiers from the Jais pargana of Awadh to which Mir Inshalla himself belonged.⁶⁰

Kesho Rao, the Chief of Gursarai, had assumed temporary charge of Jalaun after the overthrow of the English. Most of the amlah took service with him. In time, however, Kalpi emerged as the centre of rebellion as soldiers from the north came flocking to this town in the wake of English counter-march. Muhammad Ishaq, a former Thanadar acting as Nana Saheb's nazim came to Kalpi and established control over a number of neighbouring villages. His jurisdiction extended to parts of Kanpur district as well.⁶¹

In their concern for upholding and strengthening the new political order soldiers took steps to patch up local differences that often surfaced between contending pretenders to power. In Banda, for instance, the chief officers among the soldiers paid a visit to Ali Bahadur and held a council of war. The Nawab's right to rule over Banda was disputed by Dhowa, a Chieftain of Ajaigarh. The soldiers ruled that pending a reference to the Nana of Bithur, the Nawab should assume charge of the country on their departure.⁶²

The trajectory of the uprising, at least for sometime after this, evolved through the constant mobility of soldiers. Further descriptions of the actions of these regiments in Bundelkhand are hard to find; they seem to have been lost in the crowd of soldiers who rushed in a body to their destinations in the north. Leaving Jhansi behind, the soldiers first halted at Mote, thirty-five miles southeast of the town on the 13th of June. Here they plundered the treasury and took away with them as prisoner, Niaz Ali, the Deputy Collector.⁶³ They headed north for Delhi and were reported to have encamped between the Delhi and Ajmere gates together with the Nasirabad, Rohilkhand and Jullundhar troops. Rohilkhand, Nasirabad, Jhansi, and Hansi forces comprised the division that was to be commanded by Bakht Khan. The troops which reached Delhi were about half the number of the original force in Jhansi, the rest having joined services with the Scindia and the Holkar, neither of whom were with the rebels.⁶⁴ The Jhansi troops were next heard in September, to have taken up a strong position before the town of Bulandshahr together with their artillery and assisted the other insurgents. On the 28th morning, the existing British force attacked and defeated them and drove them out of town. The soldiers dispersed in different directions.⁶⁵ The destinations of the other regiments are not known except through stray references. The other wing of 12th Regiment Native Infantry and 14th Irregular Cavalry at Nowgong were reported to have been in Kanpur in August 1857.⁶⁶ The Hamirpur Jail Battalion was identified in April 1858 among rebel forces that fought the English in Karbari in Banda.⁶⁷

Soldiers kept together, in their original regimental formations not only while moving from one station to another but also in action. Once again, the soldiers of Meerut set the trend. They were seen "coming up (to Delhi) in military formation, ... in subdivisions of companies with fixed bayonets and sloped arms". At the magazine in Delhi, the King's soldiers, it was observed, "took up their posts in regular military style, posted their arms, received their orders and behaved altogether like regular soldiers".⁶⁸ This was demonstrated most dramatically when soldier prepared for an impending battle, as we shall see when we come to the battle of Kalpi.

The sense of belonging to a corporate entity, a single body of men, was inculcated in the company's soldiers in their everyday life in the army. They lived in cantonments, mostly situated at some distance from the towns and usually alongside the civil lines where the English officers lived. The town of Jhansi, for instance, was about a mile from the army barracks and the adjoining civil lines.⁶⁹ The day for a soldier began with the music of reveille and closed with the beating of retreat while the last post was played late at night. Parades in the morning and evening ordered by the sound of kettle drums were the unailing rituals of the cantonments every day. All soldiers marched in one uniform wearing similar accoutrements varying with respective ranks to the call of their commanding officers. They slept in barracks in their 6 feet by 2 feet cots, the only allowance made for a personal space.

VI

Why did the soldiers rebel ?

We have decided on a narrative which begins with the mutiny and proceeds forward in time. We will not, therefore, look for antecedent causes. Let us listen instead to what the soldiers said after they had mutinied. Why did they rebel ? Without exception, they answered in the idiom of religion. We have before us not only the official reports on soldiers' actions but also letters and proclamations written by the rebels themselves in which they declare their reasons for turning against their masters. While drawing upon their experience as a corporate body for organising actions in the mutiny, soldiers drew upon their wider social traditions when conceiving the struggle in terms of a cause and an ideology. The widely shared opinion among the English officers that 'The soldiery had a hard religious panic'⁷⁰ was substantially corroborated by the language used in these written addresses sent out to mobilise men in the cause of rebellion. Here the uprising was described not so much as a struggle for political ends as an imperative, a sacred duty, for upholding religion which stood threatened by the English rule. It was a contest for the preservation of faith; therefore its outcome had to be either the victory or the defeat of religion.

This was the framework, conceptual and ideological, with which all the actions of the rebels found meaning. An early address sent by the Hindu and Muslim soldiers assembled at Delhi to the Infantry, Cavalry and Artillery regiments cantoned at Lahore exemplified the manner in which such letters

were phrased. "The Hindu and Mussalman soldiers", it stated, "have without any motives of worldly gain fought for their religion, destroyed the Tyrants and enemies of their Faith and are prepared to war with the upholding of ever the religion of the Hindus and Mussulmans. May God banish the Tyrants".⁷¹ A similar letter brought from Delhi to Jhansi informed that the whole army of the Bengal Presidency had mutinied and as the regiment stationed at Jhansi had not done so, men composing it would either be regarded as outcastes or as having lost their faith. On receiving this note, five men, Debi Singh, Naurang Singh, Jai Singh and Jaidin Singh resolved to act and prevailed upon others, the need to do the same.⁷² Not only in their proclamations, even as they went to battle, the rebel soldiers raised religious flags and marched or mustered attack to the cry of deen. In Jhansi, they forced open the city gates to the call of Deen Ka Jai (Victory of Religion).

VII

We must be careful not to be misled by the term 'religion'. It appears in that form in the English documents of the period and we, writing in the English language, are forced to use it. In Hindustani, the terms used were deen or dharam. Religion, as the rebels used it to justify their rebellion, did not mean the theological or ritual principles of a sect or an order. It was used quite consciously to unify, not to divide. And in this sense 'religion' was that which was threatened by English rule, specifically by Christianity. Those who had faith in deen or dharam had to see the alien Christian religion as heresy and

had to resist it. In their resistance to the alien religion, Hindus and Mussalmans were brothers.

There was, of course, a practical need to mobilise men for military action against the British. Religious evocations were therefore often juxtaposed with material allurements in practically every ishtihaar specially those meant for the soldiers. But it would be a useless exercise to separate the two and ask which was the 'real' incentive to action. The soldiers in Delhi promised that each soldier in the rebel army would be remunerated at the rate of 12 rupees per month, in death he would achieve eternal martyrdom. The Delhi Proclamation issued in the name of the Emperor in May 1857, after spelling out the contingency that justified such an uprising, concluded, "Thirty rupees to a mounted, and ten rupees to a foot soldier, will be the salary of the new servants of Delhi".⁷³ In what seemed an exaggerated account, it was described, "Day by day perwunahs were extorted from the King, addressed to particular regiments of the British Indian Army, promising monthly salaries of thirty rupees to infantry soldiers and fifty to cavalry, if they would join the king's Army. In every instance the King's perwanah had the effect of causing the soldiers to mutiny and make their way to Delhi".⁷⁴

Ishtihars or administrative notes specifying the organisation and arrangement of troops and their respective salaries were issued periodically. One such issued on the 6th of July 1857, for instance, clarified that for every regiment, Infantry or Cavalry, there would be one Colonel as commanding officer, one major as second in command under him and one Adjutant. Duties and emoluments commensurate with each rank were also set out.⁷⁵ Issued on the same day a

proclamation of Nana Saheb stated that the "pay of a Colonel shall be 500 rupees, and his allowance 250 rupees; the Major's pay shall be 500 rupees; and the Adjutant's allowance, in addition to his pay as a subadar, shall be 150 rupees".⁷⁶ One proclamation indicated the categories of rewards that each person, Hindu or Musalman, would receive in addition to his pay for killing or bringing in alive any European.

*For each dead body (Europeans)	: <u>Rs.</u> 500
For Collector, Judge in or any one of equal rank alive	: 10,000
For Colonel, Major or Captain or any one of equal rank	: 13,000
For Governor or Chief Justice or any one of equal rank	: 50,000 ⁷⁷

It was provided in another such promulgation that "who ever dies in battle, his widow will get 3 rupees monthly pension".⁷⁸

A whole range of preparations for mobilising and organising soldiers went into the long struggle waged over Delhi between 8th June and 20th September 1857, the day the English finally succeeded in occupying the city. Kanpur fell into English hands with less resistance. Henry Havelock entered the city on the 17th of July.⁷⁹ As a political powerhead, however, Nana Saheb ably assisted by his lieutenant Tantia Topey was much more active than Bahadur Shah. After his defeat at Kanpur the former Peshwa evolved alternate strategies of action. He mobilised forces and planned an attack on Kanpur to recover it from the English. Rules specifying different scales of pay were published by the

order of the Peshwa for the enlistment of Vilayatis. Further details regarding enlistment into one or the other branch of armed forces and organisation of troops were also put down.⁸⁰ Nana Saheb and Tantia Topey moved south and chose Kalpi in the Jalaun as the new centre of their political activities around October 1857.

VIII

Bundelkhand meanwhile was being constantly traversed by soldiers marching first to Kanpur and after Nana Saheb's defeat there, assembling at Kalpi. Those coming from the east or south-east stopped at Banda, those from the west and south west bivouaced at Jhansi. Between September and December 1857, a continuous stream of soldiers poured into Banda. On the 2nd of September, the 7th and 8th Regiment Native Infantry from Dinapur came and plundered the surrounding area of Banda as far as Kalinjar.⁸¹ In September again, soldiers of the 50th Regiment Native Infantry arrived at Banda on the 27th after having mutinied at Nagode. On the 29th, Kunwar Singh and a few thousand men including those of the 40th Native Infantry were received by Ali Bahadur. A great number of other detachments continued to reach Banda while more were called from Awadh. The soldiers here tried to patch up the differences which surfaced once again between Ali Bahadur and the Chieftain of Ajaigar. Failing to make the latter agree to a reconciliation, soldiers joining the forces of the Nawab inflicted a crushing defeat on his rival. Fresh soldiers of the 5th Irregular Cavalry arrived from Bhagalpur on the 15th of October. Nana Saheb was

said to have written to Kunwar Singh to join him in an attack on Kanpur. Kunwar Singh left for Kalpi on the 25th of October while the 7th and 8th Regiments with some other soldiers started for Chilla Tara with three guns. Subahdar Mehtab Ali of the 8th Native Infantry stayed back at Banda commanding detachments of different corps which he formed into one regiment. The Nawab had his own army of 1,000 Infantry soldiers, 600 Cavalry troops, 10,000 matchlockmen and 15 guns.⁸² Reinforcements of soldiers continued to pour into Banda. Six fresh regiments arrived in the district around the end of November. Four of the regiments were reported to be at Manow and two at Surdwa near Rajapur on the 21st. They were said to have come from the east.⁸³ Early in December, two companies of the 32nd Regiment arrived; on the 31st, some sowars of the 5th Irregular Cavalry seized and murdered the Kotwal of Banda on suspicion that he had been corresponding with the English magistrate.⁸⁴

IX

It was the assemblage of soldiers in Kalpi that set the stage for the next and perhaps final round of encounters between the English and the soldiers. Their organisation here, the structure of political arrangement that was set up, represented in a microcosm the wider struggle of the soldiers. Moving south, Tantia Topey occupied Jalaun and the Kuchwahagar region and put up Muhammad Ishack formally as the agent of the Nana in November 1857. The authority of the Chief of Gursarai, the English nominee, was thus laid aside.⁸⁵ Kalpi as the new headquarters now drew soldiers from various directions. They arrived from Jhansi, Banda and Mandla; the

Gwalior contingent on the orders of Tantia Topey came from Mhow (near Indore).⁸⁶ Together the soldiers formed a fairly large army of 12,000. They occupied the Kalpi fort and furnished it with guns, ammunition and their treasure. They then resolved to march to Kanpur and attack the English establishment there.⁸⁷

Leaving a detachment at Jalaun with 8 guns, 400 men and a seventh part of their magazine at Kalpi, the army crossed the Jamuna and reached Kanpur around the 1st of December. Reinforced by forces from Awadh, they were able to occupy most of Kanpur till the 6th of December but were finally beaten back by fresh British forces on the 10th. The soldiers now returned to Kalpi to rally around Tantia Topey.⁸⁸

Tantia Topey's strength, however, lay in the soldiers he commanded; his authority was derived from the mutineers. Without the soldiers, neither the Nana nor Tantia Topey would have made any difference to the politics of Bundelkhand. For all effective purposes, they only represented and signified the strength of those innumerable soldiers up in arms against the English.

As a mark of their claims to legitimacy, the rebels set up an entire, administrative establishment in Kalpi. Papers found later show that English forms were observed both in the civil department and the military organisation. Some papers related to villages in the Kanpur district as well.⁸⁹ One of the first steps taken by Tantia Topey and Nana Saheb towards building up a defensive strategy was to mobilise the support of the local chiefs and bring them together. Fresh letters and proclamations were sent to inform all of the progress

of the rebellion, the dangers it faced and the need to safeguard it. Messages carried open calls for action, for outright war against the enemy. The enemy was, once again not identified as a political antagonist only but as a threat to Islam and Hinduism. The encounter was one between Christian heresy and the purity and sanctity of the religions of Hindustan. The battle cry was 'religion in danger' : it was not only legitimate but in fact imperative to go to war. The agents of pollution and desecration had to be purged; hence all Europeans had to be killed. All of those ranged on the side of religion had to come together. The cause of religion did not allow for neutrality. If one did not join the rebellion, one risked being regarded as a polluting agent, an infidel and a Christian. He would have to be destroyed.⁹⁰

On the 31st of December 1857, Tantia Topoy sent letters to a number of local rulers in Bundelkhand and Central India formally announcing the appointment of Syed Muhamad Ishaq as aide-de-camp to the Peshwa for the management of affairs in Bundelkhand. Muhamad Ishaq who was already in Kalpi was to write to all the Chiefs and the latter were in turn asked to send back their replies to him.⁹¹ Ishaq's letter followed soon after on 2nd January 1858. It appealed to all the Rajas for assistance.

"My master, Sreemunt Maharaja Reshwa Bahadur at the sacrifice of every ease and comfort as well as of his wealth, property etc., has for the purpose of defending the religion both of the Hindoos and Mchomedans prepared himself to slaughter the followers of Christ as they are the enemies of the faith of the Mussulmans and Hindoos. The said Maharaja has by waging a war with the Christians put several of them to the sword and has resolved not to refrain himself from killing them as long as he breathes

his vital air, and to annihilate at once the people of this race now in India. The object which the Maharaja has in view to expel all the Christians from Hindoostan is not to take possession of the territories and property of the Rajahs and Chiefs of India, or to assume the supreme command of the country, but on the other hand, it is his sole desire that after a victory shall have been obtained over the enemy, all the chiefs may in peace enjoy the possession of the territories which they formerly possessed, and pass their days in the enjoyment of ease and happiness. If all the Chiefs for the purpose of defending their religion and faith, join together and be of one mind, and render as much assistance as they respectively can it will not be difficult to annihilate through divine favour all the remaining Christians. Under the orders of the aforesaid Sreemunt Peshwa Bahadur, I beg to inform you all that in a recent war at Cawnpore, our force has for some reasons, retreated, and that troops are now being assembled at Cawnpore. It will be a friendly act on your part, if you now render assistance by sending troops and guns without loss of time. My employer warmly hopes that all the Chiefs of Bundelkhand will will be of one mind to assist him in the undertaking, as formerly the Peshwa of Poona, when he was in power, rendered assistance to the Chiefs of this country and paid every regard to their honour and dignity. Under these circumstances it is hopes that you should as soon as possible despatch to Calpee in charge of a trustworthy person such number of men and guns as you may be able to furnish^a.⁹²

An identical letter signed by Tantia Topoy dated the same day was also circulated.⁹³ It is interesting how religious concerns, historical antecedents and practical strategies were braided together into an account that served both as a description and an evocation. Tantia Topoy

addressed a separate letter to Diwan Sardar Singh, the Ruler of Chirkhari, notorious for his loyalty to the English. Dated 3rd January, it exhorted the ruler to assist the Peshwa and unite with the others in defence of his religion. The letter ended with the threat, "should anybody dispute these orders, I shall consider them in the same light as the Sahibs. It behoves you to join in the cause of religion. Don't fail to send money and troops in our assistance".⁹⁴

Dewan Sardar Singh received another letter written on the 2nd of January by two Subahdars of the army.⁹⁵ The purpose of the letter was to inform the Chief of the arrival of some Infantry, Cavalry and Artillery troops at Jalalpur and to ask him for assistance. "You have obtained possession and now rule over the British district in Bundelkhand, and it is therefore incumbent on you to hold yourself steady in the cause of 'Deen'.* Once again, actions were in some senses anticipated even before they were performed. "... if you send Troops and money according to your means we shall know that you are for the 'Deen', and those who do not furnish either, will be considered against the 'Deen'. A few days later, a curt note to the recalcitrant Chief demanding immediate reinforcements was virtually an ultimatum to all to support rebellion in the cause of religion."⁹⁶

Meanwhile in Kalpi, soldiers were strongly entrenched. They had 12 large and small guns inside the fort while steps were being taken to defend and fortify the town. Batteries were erected along the ghat of the Jamuna and also on the Hamirpur road while guns were positioned over the fort. Half the bridge over the Jamuna was broken and boats from all the ghats extending from Jagmanpur in Jalaun in the north to Hamirpur down south were captured in order to prevent English

forces from ferrying across from Kanpur. Fresh levies were also raised from among the local people. Tantia Topey collected about 2,000 men in Kuchwahagar.⁹⁷ The rebel force in Kalpi was reinforced by soldiers from Fatengurh and around a thousand Mewatis from Kanpur.⁹⁸ A detachment of troops was now sent from Kalpi to Jalalpur, a town on the Betwa in the Hamirpur district. The Raja of Chirkhari was then asked to supply these troops with provisions and additional auxiliaries.⁹⁹ The Raja instead deputed a force of 1,600 men and four guns to attack the soldiers.¹⁰⁰ The attack was repulsed with great loss to the rebels.¹⁰¹

Contingents of soldiers were dispersed in other stations as well. They added to the number of men that Lakshmi Bai and Ali Bahadur commanded at Jhansi and Banda. Approximately a thousand soldiers and sowars fortified the town of Jhansi.¹⁰² Seven regiments with fourteen guns marched from Banda towards Chilla Tara to guard over the ghat on the Jamuna early in January.¹⁰³

The first rebel offensive was directed against the Chirkhari State which was to be attacked because "the Raja does not support the rebels",¹⁰⁴ as Tantia Topey wrote to the Nana on the 31st of January. Subahdars and other officers of the Gwalior contingent wrote to their counterparts serving the Raja of Chirkhari with appeals to join them in their fight for religion. "Come forth having a regard for your faith and your spiritual welfare. The pay of each sepoy would be ten rupees per month and that of a subahdar or other officers higher according to his rank".¹⁰⁵ Chirkhari was invaded on the 1st of February and its Raja forced to pay three lakhs of rupees to the conquering force. A part of the sum was sent to the Nana while the rest kept back to meet the

wages of soldiers.¹⁰⁶ Assistance of men and arms was sought from Ali Bahadur and Nana Saheb. A parwana dated 17th February addressed to the gardars and soldiers in the service of the Chattarpur State asked them to join the force with arms and ammunition in defence of religion. "Should you not feel interest in your religion you are to give a decisive answer", it said.¹⁰⁷ Nana Saheb issued the following proclamation on the 26th of February,

"The Chief of Chirkhari did not come to terms with the government neither did he embrace the course of religion, that infidel having no regard for religion is prepared to fight The Chief (of Chirkhari), sides with the English against the supporters of faith. Therefore declared that everyone should consider him as an Englishman and send him to hell. After Chirkhari is taken, everyone will receive a gratuity equivalent to one month's pay, the heirs of those who fall in action will be provided for. The city after it is taken will be plundered. The men of the army will be allowed to plunder goods upto the value of Rs.1001. Plunder exceeding that will belong to the government. Men who act contrary will be denied one month's pay in gratuity. Everyone should know these orders and act accordingly".¹⁰⁸

The city and fort of Chirkhari were finally captured by rebel forces on the 1st of March. Most of the Raja's soldiers either joined the mutineers or deserted. Many of his own servants declined to serve him after the rebels gained possession of the city. The few troops remaining with the Raja retreated into the fort but displayed a strong spirit of resistance. They refused to fight and thus the Raja was forced to call a truce.¹⁰⁹ In honour of their victory, soldiers fired 22 gun salutes.¹¹⁰

J.H. Carne, an Assistant Magistrate on duty at Chirkhari and present during the seige and capture of the town, observed the organised and systematic way in which soldiers conducted these operations.

"The (the rebels) received reinforcements from Calpee of from 300 to 500 sepoys. They could affect their relief parties; while some fought, others rested, as one set was observed going away, another was seen coming to take their places, even during the continuance of the conflict. They had their bugle calls during the last grand assault, and each separate band of matchlock - men was led on and performed its assigned task under the tuition evidently of some of the smartest sepoys who had been instructed by us in the art of war. They had their hospital doolies, and they appeared to have a large and well regulated bazar with abundance of supplies. They in short, displayed all the active energies of the battlefield ..." 111

Series of orders issued practically every day from Kalpi in the name of Tantia Topoy strikingly illustrate the meticulous planning and organisation that went into the soldiers actions.¹¹² A strict hierarchy of ranks was specified for each regiment with a Brigadier-Major in command, followed by Subahdar - Major, Havildar - Major, Jamadar, Naik and the soldiers. Officers were held responsible for ensuring discipline as well as for correcting any recalcitrance on the part of the soldiers under them. Regular inspection and muster rolls and daily drill were compulsory. Change of guards at 10 a.m., 4 p.m. and 10 p.m. were also mandatory. For hearing representations or dispensing justice, periodic courts represented by one soldier, one sardar and Jamadars of Infantry and Artillery together with Moulavies and Pandits

were summoned. Certain actions were strictly proscribed; for instance, no noise was to be made, no fire to be lit, no ryots to be molested, no wood to be taken from government godowns without prior sanction, no filth to be thrown around. Every offence would call for an appropriate punishment. The orders went into every detail of arrangement and organisation. Each regiment was to have a doctor and several such doctors were placed under a superintending surgeon. Provisions were assigned for the families of those injured or killed. Strict orders were given for enlistment, recruitment and discipline. Of the soldiers who escaped from Jhansi, five were apprehended and hanged.

This emphasis on regularity, order and discipline apart, instructions provided for certain contingencies. News of confrontations elsewhere, such as in Chirkhari, were regularly reported. This period coincided with the Holi festival during which the soldiers were repeatedly asked to display utmost restraint. They were to be on the alert all the time, they were to use no obscene words among themselves or to outsiders and were to refrain from throwing coloured powder on one another. The Kafirs were close at hand and any lapse on the part of the soldiers could lead to adverse consequences. Troops were to be always in readiness. Strategies of alternate defence were worked out and detachments from every regiment were deployed in different outposts. Officers were occasionally transferred from one regiment to another and were asked to organise and supervise advance pickets. Promises were made to meet all backlogs of pay.

The orders specified, in other words, how a soldier should behave, how a regiment should be organised, how a representation made, how business in each department should be transacted. Every step was written and possibly circulated - when and where a court would be held, for instance, and who would preside. Troop movements, both of the rebel forces and the English, were also reported without fail. There was nothing random, arbitrary or impulsive in the soldiers' actions during the mutiny of 1857.

X

The English counter-insurgency forces marched upon Bundelkhand in February 1858 and Sagar was occupied on the 15th. Hugh Rose the General Officer in Command, thereafter prepared to march north towards Jhansi.¹¹³ The Rajas of Shahgarh and Banpur were the first to offer resistance to the English. Tantia Topey wrote to Nana Saheb that after settling affairs at Chirkhari, he intended to proceed with men and arms to join the Rajas in Lalitpur.¹¹⁴ On the 3rd of February, Gangadhar Bhaia with 3 companies and 2 rissala (cavalry) units left Jhansi for the south. They returned after a week when Lalu Bakshi leading a detachment of 2,000 men encamped at Pichhor to check the advance of the British troops.¹¹⁵ Small bands of soldiers were sent to Rath and Panwari in Hamirpur and Mau in Jhansi. Tantia Topey informed the zamindars of Mau that he would halt in their village on the 16th of February and they were to arrange provisions for 25,000 men and 4 batteries. If they failed, they would be punished.¹¹⁶

In order to strengthen the defence against the marching army, the road leading to the Pass of Narhat was barricaded. Hugh Rose, however, detoured and chose to enter through the Madanpur Pass which he attacked on 3rd March before the rebel forces could get there. Soldiers of the 52nd native infantry together with 7,000 Bundelas now arrived in defence of Madanpur. But they were defeated by the British army.¹¹⁷ A brigade under Brigadier C.A. Stuart captured the fort of Chanderi on the 17th of March.¹¹⁸ All obstacles were thus cleared for the British march towards Jhansi.

The forces under Tantia Topey moved west from Chirkhari having occupied Mau Ranipur and Burwa Sagar, intended to march upon Orcha.¹¹⁹ In the wake of an impending British attack on Jhansi, soldiers with Tantia Topey were unable to decide whether to attack Tehri (Orcha) or relieve Jhansi. Some proposed that they should attack Orcha and thereby prevent reinforcements from reaching the British army. Others suggested marching straight to Jhansi.¹²⁰ The force was about 25,000 strong, though the number of regular soldiers was perhaps not more than 2,000. They had 27 guns including an English 18 pounder.¹²¹

Soldiers meanwhile congregated at Jhansi. While Lakshmi Bai and some of her advisers procrastinated over the next course of action,¹²² the soldiers refused any reconciliation with the English. Hasan Ali Khan Risaladar and other military officers sent representations to Lakshmi Bai's officials that if the Rani did not intend fighting the English, they should be relieved of their services and their arrears of payment.¹²³

Hugh Rose, however, allowed little time for deliberations as he marched ahead of the Central India Field Force and besieged Jhansi on the 21st of March. The assault began on the 26th but the defence proved too strong to be easily overpowered. Tantia too set out for Jhansi intending to attack the besieging army from the rear. Its main body arrived at Barwa Sagar on the 30th and the following day crossed river Betwa to take up positions in order of battle opposite the rear of an English camp. They lit an immense bonfire on a rising ground as a signal announcing their arrival to soldiers in Jhansi. It was answered by salvos from all batteries of the city and shouts of joy from their defenders. The battle began on the 1st morning. Serious combats took place between the insurgents under Tantia and the counter-insurgency forces before Jhansi, the former fighting hard and adroitly. Garrisons manning the walls at Jhansi kept up a rapid and constant fire from all their guns. Rose's army eventually defeated their adversaries but could not rout them.¹²⁵ They split into two, one made for Kalpi and the other returned to Mau Ranipur.¹²⁵

Rose now turned to Jhansi. The British force entered the town on the 3rd of April and occupied it the following day. All the defending soldiers retreated into the fort which the English captured after a hard battle on the 5th. By the 6th, Jhansi was in English hands.

The rebel army in Jhansi consisted of some 10,000 Bundelas and Vilaities, 1,500 sepoy, including 400 cavalry troops with 30 to 40 guns defending both the city and fort. The fort had a natural line of defence which was reinforced by arrangements made by the soldiers. A tower called the 'white turret' was raised in height and armed heavily and a

number of batteries were set up in different strategic points over the fort. From all of them a constant fire was maintained. Recounting the operations at Jhansi, Hugh Rose remarked, "Everything indicated a general and determined resistance". "The Chief of the Rebel Artillery was a first rate Artillery man; he had under him two companies of Golundauze. The manner in which the Rebels served their guns, repaired their defences and reopened fire from Batteries and guns repeatedly shut up, was remarkable. From some Batteries they returned shot for shot. The women were seen working in the Batteries and carrying ammunition. The garden Battery was fought under the black Flag of the Fakeers". It was after the English captured the palace and town that the mutineers lost heart and Lakshmi Bai's escape on the 4th night marked the beginning of their retreat. Among the officials, Lala Bakshi and Moro Balwant, Lakshmi Bai's father, were captured. The latter was hanged on the 19th of April at Jhokun Bagh.¹²⁶

Reverses at the hands of the British temporarily dislocated the rebel forces. They dispersed in small bands in various directions. Tantia Topey went to Bhandere north west of Jhansi close to the borders of this district and the Datia State, while others reached Gursera. Their ultimate destination was Kalpi where all were to assemble for the final battle against the British army. Kalpi now received large contingents of soldiers who began to make fresh arrangements for its defence. All roads around Kalpi to a distance of one mile from Chowrasi Gombuz to the bank of the Jamuna were destroyed and ditches and trenches were dug along them to obstruct British forces. Posts with 200 men each were put up in different corners - five in the east

and south, two in the west, 4 in the north towards Jamuna and two in the east tightly fortified the town and fort of Kalpi. Sowars patrolled around all night and no one was allowed to enter or leave the place without being thoroughly searched. They collected 200 boats at different ghats. The total strength of the soldiers in Kalpi before Tantia Topoy joined them was roughly 10,000 men - 2,000 sepoys and 4,000 new levies besides others. They were armed with 15 large and small guns.¹²⁷ Tantia Topoy and Lakshmi Bai with their forces reached Kalpi in the second week of April, to be shortly joined by the Rajas of Banpur and Shahghar.¹²⁸

Hugh Rose left Jhansi for Kalpi on the 26th of April. For the defence of Kalpi an advanced guard was arranged in Kunch, 23 miles south west of the town on the road to Jalaun. 10,000 soldiers with 12 guns, commanded by Tantia Topoy and Lakshmi Bai entrenched themselves at Kunch, determined to prevent Rose from reaching Kalpi.¹²⁹

Meanwhile, in the east, the British forces made a decisive entry into Banda under the command of General Whitlock. They won a major victory at Bhowraghar on the 19th of April and the defences of Ali Bahadur and his army collapsed. About three to four thousand soldiers escaped to Kalpi.¹³⁰

As a final touch to the defences in Kalpi, Nana Saheb issued fresh parwanas, urzees and proclamations to various people including some brahmins in the Deccan, the thakurs of Kuchwahaghar and all the Chiefs of Bundelkhand seeking help and co-operation in the defence of religion.¹³¹

The major difference between these proclamations and the ones issued earlier lay in their contexts. When Nana Saheb sent the second set of appeals, the jehad (war for

religion) had suffered defeat and was facing a crisis. The imperative need was to gather together all of one's forces. Appeals were now not only made to a wider cross section of people but such assistance and aid were categorically specified and every category priced and tagged. They were more in the nature of a catalogue of demands placed on different sections of people to be paid back in accordance with their worth. Although the source of legitimacy was still derived from religion, religious and ideological idioms were to some extent set aside by the emphasis on more tangible allurements and threats. Nana's letter to all the zamindars, chiefs, merchants, bankers and sugar-dealers ran as follows :

"... whoever amongst the Zamindars shall join me, accompanied by his men with provisions for them and ammunition, will receive credit for the price of those articles in the accounts relative in the revenue of his Zamindari, and also a remission of the whole of the revenue for two years, and afterwards of 4 annas in the Rupee per annum for 8 years. That whoever amongst the Zamindars shall afford me aid, only in grain, bean etc. as well as in balls, bullets and gunpowder, will obtain credit for the same in the accounts relating to the revenue of his Zamindari, and a remission of the rent for one year, and afterwards of 4 annas in the Rupee for four years". The threat followed,

"... whoever amongst the Zamindars from a feeling of regard for the English upon whom the wrath of God has fallen for their evil intention of converting Hindoos and Mahomedans to Christianity shall hesitate to render services to the Sirkar or shall oppose, or desert it, or shall not procure supplies, will be visited with due punishment". (emphasis mine).

Similar incentives and threats of chastisement were extended to Khundsaris (sugar-dealers) and bankers. They would receive Khillats and Sanads (certificates) for their good conduct. "These certificates will contribute to the exaltation of their dignity and honour in the estimation of their compeers". For every one lakh of rupees offered, bankers would get an interest of 2 per cent till the principal was liquidated, 1. 1/2 p.c. for 50,000 deposited and 1 p.c. for every 25,000. That was the minimum amount the Sirkar (government) would receive as credit.¹³²

XI

Rose attacked Kunch on the 7th of May. In spite of strong entrenchments that the defending forces threw around the town, they could not combat the flank movement of the British army which occupied the town and the old fort after an hour's fighting.¹³³ The rebels now fell back on Kalpi, the last bastion of their defence. Marching through Orai and Attah, the first brigade of the Central India Field force arrived and encamped on the right bank of the Jamuna on the 15th, taking up a position about 4 miles below the fort of Kalpi. The 2nd brigade reached the following day. Another column under Brigadier Maxwell was to take up grounds across the Jamuna and on the 18th, Colonel Riddell with the Etawah column marched south from Etawah.¹³⁴

The rebel force was composed of the Gwalior contingent, one of the best drilled and organised regiments, troops from the different states in Central India, several regiments of the Bengal Infantry such as the 52nd, Cavalry

troopers from Kotah, a chosen band of Vilaities and a force of the Nawab of Banda, consisting of a large number of Cavalry that included the 5th Irregulars dressed in their red uniforms. Kalpi was their best fortified stronghold in Central and Western India, containing perhaps the only arsenal full of stores and ammunition.¹³⁵ The fort had a subterranean magazine and four foundries for making cannons.¹³⁶ Under the leadership of Tantia Topoy, Rao Saheb, Nana's nephew, Lakshmi Bai and Ali Bahadur, the force entrenched in Kalpi was unusually strong. The regiments retained English equipments and the form of organisation. Infact, even the words of command for drill and grand rounds were given in English.¹³⁷

The rebel occupation of Kalpi prevented the British armies of the west and the east to combine and also exposed to attack armies engaged in operations in the Doab, along the Ganges, in Awadh and Rohilkhand.¹³⁸ Kalpi was thus a crucial centre of power which the rebels wished to defend and the British were determined to oust.

Soon after the battle of Kunch, Tantia Topoy, the astute strategist, secretly escaped to Gwalior. With the purpose of mobilising the Mahratta and Gwalior divisions of the Scindia's army, he wished to form a second line of defence here. Once the army mutinied, the Scindia would give in; once he did so, most of the Princes in Central India would be inspired to resist the British march.

The force in Kalpi was thus left at the command of Rao Saheb, Nana's nephew. Rao Saheb posted troops on all the three roads of approach to Kalpi. He himself held the chowk (crossing) on the Kunch road, with 1,500 Infantry 4 guns, and

600 Horse mostly of the 5th Irregular cavalry, while the 32nd Native Infantry with 2 guns held the Jalalpur road, and 700 Vilaities and one gun stood on the road leading from Jalaun. The Gwalior contingent, 2,000 strong, garrisoned Kalpi.

Hugh Rose, however, left these roads to his left and moved on to a village, Gulowlie upon the Jamuna, and assembled his army there on the 19th of May.¹³⁹ The final contest began on the 22nd. The soldiers at Kalpi decided the day before to attack the British position at Gulowlie at 8 the following morning. They swore on the waters of Jamuna that they would drive the British force into the river or die. After defeating the English at Kalpi, they intended to move against Whitlock's army in the south. Opium was distributed among the troops, in anticipation of the desperate struggle.¹⁴⁰ The assault began as decided with grim determination. The English force suffered initial setbacks, but finally routed the rebels. Batteries set up by the British across the Jamuna opened fire on the fort of Kalpi the same day.¹⁴¹ The defeat at Gulowlie proved disastrous for the rebels. They had put in all their resources for the assault; on being repulsed they were easily overpowered by the British forces. Rose advanced on the town on the 23rd. The defenders continued to attack, pressing on boldly under the cover of ravines. But all their determination and dogged resistance could not combat the British army. Rose entered the town on the 23rd and the soldiers fled in disorderly bands. Rose found the fort evacuated. The rebels were pursued for some time but most of them were able to cross over into Gwalior.

Tantia Topey had left Kalpi some days before the battle; the other leaders left during or immediately after it.¹⁴²

Thus was sounded the death knell of the soldiers rebellion in Bundelkhand. As far as this division was concerned, the mutiny of 1857 had ended.

Soldiers and their leaders now rushed westwards. They occupied the fort of Gwalior on the 1st of June; Scindia's soldiers offered them little or no resistance. But the British army was in close pursuit. They entered Gwalior in two columns and the battle over the city began on the 16th. By the 19th of June, all was over. The British forces had won.¹⁴³

XII

The rebels under Tantia Topey, Rao Saheb and Ali Bahadur fleeing south-wards from Gwalior now embarked on the last lap of their struggle, marked by flight, pursuit, defeat, dispersal and flight again. They broke into three divisions, the first led by Tantia Topey and Rao Saheb, the second constituted by the Gwalior contingent and the third under the Nawab of Banda.¹⁴⁴ They first headed west towards Jaipur in Rajasthan, then broke south, crossed this division and entered Central India again moving south-east in the direction of Bhopal. Tantia Topey reentered Bundelkhand crossing the Betwa and marching towards Lalitpur and Tehri. He occupied Lalitpur on the 16th of October 1858 and plundered it.¹⁴⁵ But the pursuing British forces once again forced him to cross the Betwa and make for the Deccan. Entering Hoshangabad, he was pushed westwards reaching Chota Udaipur close to Baroda. From there he once again headed northwards via Banswara to Zirapur, south of Kotah. At Zirapur, his forces suffered a crushing defeat at the hands of the British

on the 29th of December.¹⁴⁶ But the intrepid soldier resumed his march. Tantia Topoy was finally apprehended at a village called Mohudia close to Sironj on the 7th of April 1857. His hide-out was given out by Raja Man Singh who had been caught earlier.¹⁴⁷ He was court martialled on the 15th of April and sentenced to death.¹⁴⁸

This was how the mutiny of the soldiers in Bundelkhand came to an end. But they had thrown open the question: Who were the legitimate rulers of the country? The people of Bundelkhand now came forward with answers. Rebellion and resistance continued in Bundelkhand long after the last gunshot of the soldiers had been silenced. The mutiny had ended, but the revolt continued.

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FOOT-NOTES

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16. Deposition of Sheikh Hingun, F.S.U.P., op.cit.
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