

RG 76 vol 388 file 536899

175. A Tilton Steele to W.C. Hopkins

San Francisco, Cal., August 19th, 1914.

B 34879

W. C. Hopkinson, Esq.,
Vancouver, B. C.

Dear Sir:



Confirming my telegram to you on the subject of the projected Hindoo revolt in India, in which I warned you of the intention of the Hindoos on the Pacific coast to charter a Japanese steamer to take them across to India, in order to participate in the great rebellion, I will now set forth the sources whence I received this information.

A few days ago, at about the time war was declared between Great Britain and Germany, I met a number of Sikhs scanning the war bulletins opposite the Chronicle office; there were five of them; they were talking among themselves in the Goormockee language, and I gathered from their conversation that something very serious was brewing. I addressed myself to the man who seemed to be the leader of the party, and in Hindoostanee, asked him what he thought of the situation; he was taken aback at first, and seemed surprised, and did not answer my question quite readily, but when I assured him that I was an American merchant, interested in trade with his country, and had been for a number of years a merchant in India, he opened up. He first warned me not to go to India now - he said the whole country would soon be up in arms; that the native soldiery - in fact almost the entire native army was ready to revolt, and was only waiting for such a favorable opportunity as this, when the British would need all their fighting resources in Europe and would not be able to cope with a general uprising in India.

I asked him what assurances had he for making such a statement? It seemed to me, I said, that the natives would be very foolish to get up a revolt when they had no artillery, no modern armaments, and every strategic point in India was in the control and occupation of British troops.

He laughed at that. He said "Don't you know that the Ameer of Afghanistan has arms and ammunition for 1,000,000 men, and as for the arsenals and arms factories in India, the native troops will soon seize them, and get possession of every fort and stronghold before the British troops will be able to muster force enough to withstand them."

And he added "Don't you know that the Guckwar of Bavoda and other ruling princes would be on the rebel side as soon as a general mutiny among the native troops takes place? That everything had been planned to that end - and all that they were waiting for was just such an opportunity as this European war to get the blaze started in India."

I told him all that seemed incredible to me, and he would have to give me more proofs before I would believe him. I then handed him my business card, and asked him to come and see me at my office at 5.30 P. M. any day of the week - he told me his name was Bhagwan Singh, but that he was called "Jakh" for short.

Two days later he called at my office and I had a half-hour talk with him. He mentioned that he had with him a friend by name Barkutullah, who would see me in the near future - a man who would organize the Moslems on the Pacific Coast for the rebellion in India. He said the Sikhs and Mohamedans and Hindoos were all united now, and he was now the leader of the entire community on the coast, in place of Har Dayal. He would not make the mistake H. D. did - and proclaim his plans from the housetops; he would work in secret. Anyway, he added, if he were discovered, he and his associates would be only too glad to be deported to India at this time; "but we are planning to go back ourselves, and we are looking for some Japanese line to furnish us with a steamer to take us back home - there will be thousands of us going back and we have collected thousands of dollars for the purpose. When we arrive in India, we will stagger the Sahibs. Fight! We will teach them 'how' to fight."

He went on in this strain until finally he wound up by asking me to subscribe to the fund, which of course I declined to do.

Shortly after this, I saw Mr. Carnegie Ross and informed him of the affair, meanwhile having telegraphed to you a summary of it.

I went across the bay one Sunday, and met a couple of students who told me that Bhagwan Singh was war-mad - "As long as Japan was an ally of England, it would be futile to attempt a rebellion in India - that Bhagwan Singh and his associates would succeed in fooling a few hundreds of their co-religionists, but that the majority would remain in America."

This was confirmed by a number of Sikhs, Hindoos, and Mohamedans, whom I've met from time to time in San Francisco who told me that they were not going back; the time was not ripe; while they were opposed to British rule, they did not think they would win without the assistance of Japan. That some day, not far distant, Japan would be at war with Great Britain, and then would be their real chance to join hands with the Japanese and kick the English out of India. That most of the Hindoo communities on the coast held these views and would not be drawn back to India for any revolt at this time.

From all this I've gathered that the Hindoos are divided on the subject of a rebellion in India at the present time - that only a small minority are for it, and are endeavoring to find a way to go back either in one steamer or by several, to meet finally in Hongkong for the last leg of their voyage to Calcutta.

Very truly yours,

(Ed) A. T. Steele

A. T. Steele

ATS/MC