



E-ISSN: 2706-8927
P-ISSN: 2706-8919
www.allstudyjournal.com
IJAAS 2022; 4(4): 159-161
Received: 26-08-2022
Accepted: 05-10-2022

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Military adventurism and territorial occupation under George Thomas in late 18th century Haryana

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Abstract

George Thomas was an European mercenary who came to India during the Turmoil Political conditions of 18th century. He earned great reputation among regional powers with his capacity of Military organization. He rose to prominence and tried his fortunes in the Haryana region and successfully occupied large part of Southern Haryana. He crafted an independent State successfully by overpowering Sikh and Maratha influences in this region. He initiated Military reforms by establishing garrison, recruiting local jets, and paying off pension to the family of soldiers in the form of land grants. Although his rule lasted for 5 years but his initiatives created a stable military labour Market in the region.

Keywords: Mercenary, legacy, polygars, watan, tappal, garrison, Jahajgarh

Introductions

This paper deals with the rise and fall of George Thomas, a European mercenary in Haryana at the dawn of 18th century. Eighteenth century Haryana witnessed a Political Turmoil when Mughal Empire was shrinking and constant invasions from North-western frontier leaving Haryana a battlefield among newly emerging powers of North India. Taking these advantages, some of the prominent powers took initiative in various regions but the most astonishing abrupt rise was of George Thomas a European Valiant Military Commander in Haryana who established an independent territory under his control (1797-1802 C.E). His success story for establishing an independent territory in Haryana reveals the superiority of Modern European military techniques in this region changing or replacing the traditional way of warfare with modern warfare.

Early life

George Thomas was a native of Tipparary in Ireland. He was born in a Catholic Priest family. In His memoirs he clearly accepted that he neither had any formal education nor any military training in Ireland but was keenly interested to try his fortune in India like other fellow Europeans. So, his military organization skill and exploits in India were corely results of his experiences and exploits gained during his stay and services with different Political powers in India. He also mentioned that how, for Europeans, India was a favourable military market for European mercenaries. George Thomas hailing from Ireland was basically a job less fellow in Europe and entered Indiana military Market as one of the European Mercenaries who were in great demand among Indigenous regional powers for their skill and ability of Organization military in a European Modern way. The Success story of European against indigenous regional powers was the Introduction of Modern Military organization. Military History investigation indicates the fact that Indian rulers were in a confused state over reorganising their military and there was no effective military technique to face and fight European Powers from their respective legacy of Pre modern military organization practised earlier. To replace the old system with new was not an easy job. Complexity and confusion prevailed all over 18th century among indigenous rulers. The need of hour before them was only to hire the services of those European familiar or equipped in European Modern military tactics for better performance and response against any eventuality or enemy. The history of Medieval period has indicated the shortcomings of Indigenous ruler to match the military organization and techniques against the central Asia invaders. Coming of Mughal was break through Babur introduced cavalry with artillery and Mughals were invincible in most of battles they fought against Indian rulers.

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In the late 18th century, the forces of indigenous rulers ranged from cavalry without infantry or artillery, through cavalry supported by artillery to mix infantry and cavalry, to infantry with irregular this variety continued despite convincing demonstration of military supremacy of European style artillery and infantry forces. This is the military world in which European introduced their system of warfare. All Responses to the domination of heavy cavalry in the form of lighter guns firing on command. Battlefield success depended on rate of fire therefore training, discipline and a command structure which clearly differentiated officers from man. Indian rulers quickly became aware of the convincing demonstration of effectiveness of this new infantry artillery system. They were aware that it was not only technology but whole regiment system of military organisation including uniform, symbols, discipline, training, command, structure and battle array and hiring the services of the Europeans was the earliest response.

George Thomas reached India in 1782 through an East India company naval ship and landed in Madras, the hot seat of British domination in India. But he deserted the company and joined local polygars and led many military plundering campaigns in nearby regions and his successful campaign earned him reputation as military commander, organising effectively artillery and cavalry with fire armed infantry.

Successful mercenary in India

George Thomas was a welcomed Mercenary among indigenous regional powers fighting with each other during the chaos Political conditions of 18 century and hiring Europeans familiar with some latest European military tactics to take advantage against rival powers. He described in his memoirs how India rulers were in a confused and conflicting state regarding their military tactics and were stick to traditional way of military organization relying completely on Horse riders' bands under various chief which were awarded watan (Jagirs) feudatory perception less competent against skillful to gun and firearms loaded army on foot and horse. The military History investigation testifies this fact that Indian indigenous regional powers were passing a transitional phase regarding military organization and European superiority was establishing in the 18th and 19th Centuries. Watan system was a barrier to introduce to pay off salary to individual soldier. Under such circumstances George Thomas and his services were in great demand like all other European serving various indigenous regional powers in India.

Breakthrough in his career as military commander

George Thomas rose to prominence while serving Pindaries in North India when he led them with skill ful exploits in Delhi and Agra regions and gained much favour and reputation among indigenous rulers. He joined the services of a less known Jagir of Sirdhana under Begum Samru. It was Begam Samru who introduced George Thomas to Haryana when she appointed him the commander of a battalion in her army in 1787 with the task to safeguard her estates in Haryana and Gangetic Doab from Sikhs incursion. He invaded the Sikh territories and captured Sirsa from Bhattis.

He was assigned the Jagir of Tappal worth Rs. 70000 In come. He gave befitting reply to the Sikh invaders and extended his territory. But due to the increasing influence of French commanders in the court of Samru Begum, he has to

face hostile attitudes of the Begam and left Tappal for ever with his 250 soldiers.

Services under Maratha

George Thomas started his new assignments under Maratha governor Apa ji Khande Rao, the Maratha Faujdar of Saharanpur with the command of one regiment. He at the order of Maratha governor led a successful campaign against the rebellion Mewatis in Haryana region and charged revenue and taxes. He also led some important plundering campaign in southern Haryana and subdued all the rebels. He established himself as sole prominent representative of Maratha powers in Haryana. No contemporary warlord escaped George Thomas's attention. His master Apa Khande Rao made him Jagirdar of Jhajjar region and in 1794. George Thomas extended his area upto Pattodi. This was the beginning of his successful exploits in Haryana Regions. Sensing the favourable conditions, his ambition rose to craft an independent territory in this region, but he had to settle many issues and concerns with the rival groups of Afghans, Sikhs and Rajputs surrounding his territory. In 1797 after the death of his master Apa Khande Rao he left Marathas that proved a turning point in his career. He started with the jagir of Jhajjar to establish and independent territory in Haryana.

Rise of George Thomas as an independent ruler in Haryana: 1797 C.E. to 1802 C.E.

George Thomas has a unique place in the History of Haryana like a shooting star, Meteor as his territorial Occupation last not more than 5 years from 1797 to 1802. But it was important as he Equipped and acquainted with Modern European military organisation, surpassed all contemporary indigenous regional rival powers of Sikhs, Rajputs and Afghan chiefs in the region of Haryana at large for some period and showed his superiority in military organization in the region of Haryana. And he was successful in breaking through the traditional way of military organization in the region.

George Thomas made up his mind and initiated the process to establish his independent territory. The Political conditions of the region were also favourable. The people of the region were under constant threat of plundering campaign of Sikhs Chiefs and Maratha leaders, and it was a ruined region due to the constant plundering campaign of different Afghan, Sikh and Rajput groups despite the fact that Haryana was a gateway to the central Asian invaders. Although he had in his possession not a big army but had the advantage of to be superior in his military organization ability and skill compared to his rivals.

He first consolidated his position by founding a new garrison town between Jhajjar and Dadri named GeorgeGarh locally known now as jahajgarh. It was a Fortified military camp cum town. It was here that he fought a series of battles against Marathas led by French Officers. Then he started his military campaigns and successfully occupied the regions of heart land of Haryana, consisting of Rewari, Karnal, Rohtak, Sonipat, Jhajjar, Bhiwani and Hissar. All his territories extended 200 km north south and same length east west. This 8000-mile area yielded twice as much as Patiala state. He not only gave befitting defeats to the Afghan, Sikhs, Maratha and Rajputs chiefs but subordinated the local *watandars* of this region. He also gave protection the local population from the plundering activities of. He rose to high in Haryana as a military

commander from the position of mercenary. Under the 18th century conditions of political instability and uncertainty it was a great achievement of George Thomas who tried his military skills and with a small but effective army to unify Haryana. Although its boundaries were fluctuating and was surrounded by *Marathas, Sikhs, Rajputs of Shekhawti and Bikaner*.

Record attested the facts that his Territorial Occupation had 353 villages, 14 Parganas worth income of 2 Lakhs 86000. Maratha sardars also rewarded 151 villages worth income of 1 lakh 50000. Rupees. He also was a successful administrator. He sensed the importance of establishing military cantonment garrison for a secure territorial occupation. He rebuilt the walls of Qila of Hansi and repaired the fort left by Chauhans long ago. Thus, Hansi became the central point of his occupied territory. More fortification measures were taken here and within a short period Hansi emerged a flourishing force or town with more than 6 thousand people residing here. He established a mint in Hansi. Sika a sahib were released from the mint having his name. He also established a military factory where small European style Cannons and firearms with rifles look were being manufactured. He also initiated some other military reforms. He recruited local people like jats in his army. He started a new way to pay off serving soldier as pension in form of land and encouraged them to settle in Haryana. So, this was new system of colonisation in Haryana through Sipahis. Introducing Haryana into a stable military labour market. He declared himself Raja. As quoted by him in his memoirs

“I established my capital here, rebuilt the walls long since decayed and repaired the fortification (fort of Chauhans) as it had long been deserted at first I found it difficult in providing for inhabitation. But by decrees I selected between five and six thousand persons whom I allowed every lawful indulgence. I established a mint and coined my own rupees which I made in current in army and county as from the commencement of my career at Jhajjar, I had resolved to establish Independence. I cast my own artillery, commenced making my own muskets, Matchlocks powder in short, made the best preparation for carrying on as offensive and defensive war.”

Due to hostile environment and constant pressure and penetration from the Marathas under the leadership of Daulat Rao Scindia, George Thomas failed to contain his independence. As he rejected subordinate offer of Marathas the French commander, De Boigne led the Maratha armies against him at Jahajgarh and Hansi. George Thomas lost 3 months long war. As a part of terms of surrender, he quit Haryana forever, but he left the memory of a caring commander in Haryana as he instituted a system of pension and compensations and for those who were wounded in his services and this benefit was also extended to widows and children of sepoys killed in wars. He died on his way in Bengal but left his ultimate memory and valiant commander in the history of Haryana

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