



Unified Nepal: A Vision Beyond the Battlefield

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ABSTRACT

While the East India Company was extending its dominion through commerce and conquest, Nepal was forging a collective identity through resilience and strategic planning. In consolidating adjoining territories, particularly Kantipur, the Gorkhali Army anticipated southern interference and imposed a blockade around the Kathmandu Valley prior to its capture. In response to the looming threat of invasion, a series of southern fortified positions were established, anchored by the bastions of Makwanpurgadi and Sindhuligadi. When the final clash occurred with the British expedition led by Captain Kinloch in the rugged terrain of Sindhuli in September 1767, the resistance encountered by the Company was not confined to the battlefield; it was embedded in the spirit of a people determined to remain whole, in the seasons, and in the landscape itself. Had Kinloch's expedition succeeded, a unified Nepal might not have emerged. Indeed, after the Sindhuli setback, it would be forty-five years before the British returned, a strategic pause that underscores Nepal's defensive resilience and highlights the limits of imperial ambition along the Himalayan frontier. Although British expansionist aims remained undeterred, the memory of defeat proved indelible. This study adopts a qualitative approach to examine nuanced perspectives within the historical narrative. It argues that Nepal's resistance over imperial expansion was not limited to military valor but stemmed from unity, which consolidated national sovereignty and offered lasting insights for history, governance, and interdisciplinary inquiry.

Introduction

Following the failed attempt to capture Kirtipur in May 1757, King Prithvi Narayan Shah recalibrated his strategy, shifting from direct confrontation to calculated encirclement. To retain control of the Kathmandu Valley, King Jay Prakash Malla sought aid from the East India Company, seemingly unaware of the long-term consequences of such external intervention (Manandhar et al., 2069 BS, pp. 9–10). The Gorkhali blockade strategy proved pivotal in Nepali history, coinciding with the decline of centralized authority in South Asia and the East India Company's shift from trade to conquest, marked by the Battle of Plassey in June 1757 (Tahir, 2021). More than a tactical adjustment, this strategy embodied a nation-building vision, laying the foundations for Nepal's resistance to colonial intrusion.

Amidst the blockade, King Jay Prakash Malla faced two difficult choices. Fully aware of the tide of colonial expansion, he chose the lesser option and allied with the East India Company. His agents, *Vakeel* Muktananda, and a trusted official, *Faquir* Ramdoss (Ramdas), a wandering sage, were dispatched first to Mr. Golding at Bettiah and to Thomas Rumbold at Patna to seek British intervention against the Gorkhali blockade, as described by Bell (2017). Finally, the matter reached the chairman of the Select Committee, Harry Verelst, in Calcutta. Upon receiving Rumbold's grave speculation regarding the Gorkhali rise, the East India Company resolved to send a military expedition led by Captain Kinloch to Nepal (Chaudhuri, 1960, pp. 13–16).

This episode of King Jay Prakash Malla's reluctant alliance foreshadowed similar attempts by the East India Company's covert ally, Mir Kasim, the Nawab of Bengal, to penetrate the Himalayan frontier in 1763. The Nawab dispatched a contingent of approximately 3,500 Bengali soldiers under the command of Gurgin Khan to secure access to the lucrative trans-Himalayan trade corridor via Kathmandu to Tibet and the western frontiers. However, as the Bengali forces advanced, they encountered the formidable resistance from the Gorkhali forces at Makwanpur on January 20, 1763, resulting in a catastrophic defeat marked by the loss of weapons and heavy casualties (Vaidya et al., 2049 BS, pp. 357-359).

Nearly four years later, history echoed in the unforgiving terrain of Sindhuli, where Company forces faced a similarly devastating outcome in September 1767. As Bell (2017) recounts, referencing a letter from Richard Barwell to his father, (senior official of the East India Company), of the approximately 2,400 soldiers led by Captain Kinloch into Nepal, only around 800 escaped, marking a humiliating blow to the Company's imperial ambitions. Confronted with resolute Gorkhali resistance, troops at both Makwanpurgadi and Sindhuligadi abandoned their weapons and scattered in disarray. Their withdrawal was so disorganized and demoralized that they failed to regroup as a coherent military unit.

While this study acknowledges the Battle of Makawanpur, its central focus lies on Captain Kinloch's march from Patna to Sindhuligadi, particularly the phase during which the British expedition entered Nepali territory. The failure of the British campaign cannot be attributed solely to Gorkhali military victory; it also reflects leadership's strategic foresight in consolidating a unified Nepal, adverse weather that stalled artillery movement, collapsing supply lines that persisted until the final withdrawal, and the terrain that magnified these difficulties. This study offers insights for historians, military strategists, and academic institutions seeking interdisciplinary lessons from Nepal's historical experience.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative methodology that integrates close reading of archival sources, secondary scholarship, and textual analysis, complemented by interpretive approaches grounded in scholarly rigor. Documentation of Kinloch's expedition to Nepal is scarce, as most Nepali narratives emphasize Gorkhali valor with pronounced nationalist pride. Yet, *The Journal of Captain Kinloch*, brought to light by Yogesh Raj Pant, remains the sole existing record of the campaign. Interpretive inferences, drawn from in-depth interviews with historians and grounded in military perspectives, were employed to contextualize the socio-political and strategic dimensions of the campaign.

Notably, Kinloch's route to the Nepal Valley remains obscure, marked by inadequate reconnaissance and limited terrain analysis. Complications arise from topographical ambiguities and the anglicized pronunciation of Nepali locations, which hinder phonetic verification. In response, this study emphasizes coordinated research across multiple sources, systematic documentation, on-site reconnaissance of the terrain involved, and integration into historical and defense studies curricula, thereby enabling scholars to reconstruct the events of the campaign.

Colonial Aspirations

During the colonial period, many British officers chose to join the East India Company's Bengal Establishment in hopes of repairing their financial standing at home, despite the relatively modest official salaries. The risk of fatality was significant for officers leading military operations in poorly mapped regions. Nonetheless, their primary incentive lay in the expectation that, as they rose through the ranks, they could leverage their position and status to engage in private trade with Bengal. The prospect of commercial ventures extending from Calcutta to other port cities across South Asia was particularly lucrative (Stewart, 2009, pp. 108-109).

Drawing on a range of documents, Bell (2017) explains that Captain George Kinloch was among several officers appointed to lead the colonial expedition to Nepal, driven not solely by imperial duty but also by personal ambition and the pursuit of lucrative positions within the Company's expanding frontier. In preparation for the campaign, Kinloch markedly minimized the number of officers, selecting exclusively Scottish personnel. This claim aligns with Chaudhuri's account, which notes that the Select Committee dispatched Kinloch without consulting Colonel Richard Smith, the military head, who typically opposed deploying troops into uncharted territory (Chaudhuri, 1960, p. 16).

The East India Company's broader objective was fundamentally commercial, and corruption was rampant among Company officers (Kulke & Rothermund, 1999, p. 216). Despite individual attractions and lucrative motivations, the Company aimed to revitalize its declining trade by securing access to gold and silver, which was essential for minting currency and sustaining its investments in China. However, the strategy targeting Nepal was based on a fundamental misconception: the belief that the Malla Kingdom was a primary source of gold and silver. As Bell (2017) notes, in fact, the precious metals circulating in Nepal originated from Tibet under a coinage arrangement.

Kinloch's Approach to Janakpur and Early Challenges

The Company, following approval by Chairman Harry Verelst on August 10, 1767, resolved to launch a military expedition against the Gorkhali Army. As Kinloch's diary notes, the force set out from Patna on 26 August, advancing in eleven phases across a calculated 96 Kos march (an ancient unit of roughly 2.3 kilometers or 4,000 yards), averaging six Kos per day despite persistent rainfall. With Panauti designated as the Launch point for the final assault on the Gorkhali front, the column pressed northeastward toward Nepal (Raj, 2012, p. 39).

The expedition progressed without difficulty until early September, when it encountered serious obstacles at the Bagmati River. Although the exact crossing point remains uncertain in the records, the scarcity of canoes and the river's muddy banks severely hindered the transport of artillery, rendering several routes impassable (Raj, 2012, p. 40). To overcome these challenges, the *Phousdar*, charged with revenue collection under the Patna government, worked in coordination with the *Hircarhas*, the Company's messengers and intelligence agents, to organize logistics across territory nominally under Patna's jurisdiction. After nearly twenty-six hours of effort, the crossing was finally achieved (Raj, 2012, p. 43).

Kinloch's expeditionary force encountered relentless operational hardships as it entered the dense jungle. As the column pressed forward in a northeast direction toward Janakpur, it came upon a dilapidated road whose surface was impassable for the British artillery, necessitating urgent repair work. At the same time, Dhandao (Dana Dev) Choudhary, the food supplier contracted by the Company, had lost contact, and provisions grew perilously scarce (Chaudhuri, 1960, pp. 17–19).

Kinloch's diary records that upon reaching Janakpur, Faquir, a promising guide from Jay Prakash Malla, was informed by the village head, Balram, that the settlement lay eerily deserted. The expedition soon came across a vacated mud hut with an angular tower, identified as an outpost constructed only four years earlier by the Gorkha king, where a collector had once been stationed to administer the region and collect contributions (Raj, 2012, pp. 51–52). Although the outpost symbolized the extension of Gorkha authority, Kinloch noted only its abandonment and offered no evidence of a formally ordered evacuation.

However, according to Prem Singh Basnyat (personal communication, October 21, 2025), the apparent absence of habitation en route to Janakpur was not incidental. Rather, it constituted a strategic maneuver orchestrated by King Prithvi Narayan Shah, a deliberate act of disruption designed to deny the invading force both resources and human contact. In this context, it was not merely a military tactic but a psychological terrain, an invisible battlefield where silence, scarcity, and isolation became instruments of resistance.

Similarly, Triratna Manandhar (personal communication, March 14, 2025) observes that this tactical bearing, designed to deprive the advancing colonial force of local sustenance, went largely unrecognized by Captain Kinloch. His operational focus remained confined to the physical terrain, overlooking the subtler dimensions of indigenous resistance and adversarial defense. It may be inferred that, in disregarding this invisible architecture of resistance, where absence itself was weaponized, Kinloch failed to perceive that the conflict was already being waged in the realm of perception, patience, and indigenous foresight.

At one point, Binod Thapa (personal communication, March 19, 2025) notes that the Faquir, who had initially assured Kinloch of local support, gradually withdrew and lost confidence as his provision of necessities proved acutely deficient. His hesitation may be seen as the first ripple of doubt, subtly upsetting the fragile alliance between King Jay Prakash Malla and the East India Company; however, this remains an interpretive inference rather than a firmly documented fact.

Kinloch's March to the Hills

Bell (2017) notes that the subsequent four-day march toward Sindhuligadi proved even more punishing, as the movement of guns and ammunition became unmanageable. Escalating food shortages, treacherous terrain, the severe impact of the monsoon, and mounting fatigue made certain compromises inevitable. Kinloch's diary further observes that even nature appeared to conspire against the expedition: rain, once a neutral element, turned hostile, drenching the roads and softening the earth until it could no longer bear the weight of British artillery. In this convergence, terrain, weather, and tactics blurred into a single, unrelenting challenge.

On 14 September, at Janakpur, the *Bildars* (expedition engineers) struggled to construct a ford for the artillery, forcing Kinloch to station a company of troops to guard the immobilized guns (Raj, 2012, p. 46). His diary further notes that Sepoy desertion had already begun in early September, with fourteen men abandoning the camp under the weight of hardship and despair as the column advanced toward Sindhuligadi. These desertions underscore the limitations of an expedition best described as a tactical or operational-level venture, intended mainly to obstruct the Gorkhali. The martial spirit of the native troops, whom Kinloch referred to as "black" in his diary, resembled that of mercenaries, and their absence reflected both physical exhaustion and managerial deficiencies as the march pressed on across unfamiliar terrain.

On 19 September, the British column faced severe setbacks. That night, the camp was situated in a dry gorge at *Khirkhire* Khola near Viman (Dhakal, 2017, p. 61). A sudden outbreak of torrential rain, accompanied by high-velocity winds, thunder, and lightning, devastated the encampment. Fragile branches collapsed, injuring numerous soldiers, who were completely drenched. Four Sepoys drowned, and approximately fifteen thousand rupees' worth of supplies, including ammunition, were lost. The remaining food provisions were swept away, compounding the crisis (Raj, 2012, p. 54). The unexpected devastation revealed the vulnerability of the British force to Nepal's unpredictable climate, a shock to Kinloch, who had never confronted such conditions.

While the exact site of *Khirkhire* Khola remains uncertain, Sagar Kumar Dhakal (personal communication, 10 October 2025) explains that local Sindhuli narratives correspond with Kinloch's account, indicating that the episode most likely took place near Sindhulimadi, a region historically associated with strategic maneuvers during the unification campaigns. Amidst the crisis, Kinloch even briefly contemplated abandoning the campaign.

Despite adverse and apprehensive circumstances, Kinloch resolved to press on. As the British expedition advanced, intelligence indicating that the Gorkhali defenses had been vacated, leaving only about 200 soldiers, brought a brief sense of relief. At 1300 hours on September 20, 1767, Kinloch's delegated forward command to Lieutenant Hogan while appointing Mr. Logan as interpreter to facilitate coordination (Raj, 2012, pp. 61–62). Yet the Gorkhali maneuver remains difficult to interpret: Nepali archives do not explain the evacuation, and the possibility that it constituted a deliberate attempt to lure the British into a favorable pass warrants further examination within defense studies.

On 21 September, the expedition continued from Sindhulimadi despite the previous night's devastation. Kinloch records that he crossed the Kamala River less than

thirty-two times. The bullocks pulling the carts, along with elephants and camp servants, were thoroughly exhausted, and soldiers' boots were on the verge of disintegration due to the relentless abrasions of sharp stones. The physical condition of Sepoys deteriorated rapidly: wet stockings became treacherous on the slippery terrain (Raj, 2012, pp. 71-72). Although the Select Committee advised withdrawal under such conditions (Chaudhuri, 1960, p. 25), Kinloch's resolve and leadership drove him to continue toward the destination.

Sindhuligadi: Fortress of National Resolve

On 22 September, at around 9 am, Kinloch received information about approximately 300 enemy soldiers located on the very hill that the column was advancing along. Faquir, candid on this occasion confessed his ignorance about the situation ahead. He promised to arrange a local guide to lead the column to the nearest hilltop, but the assured guide failed to appear. Nevertheless, Kinloch decided to continue his advance with optimism. As darkness fell, the troops were forced to encamp in Baisejangar (Raj, 2012, pp. 63–64). This detail is also echoed in Dhakal's rendering of the diary account.

On September 23, Lieutenant Hogan led a battalion-sized advance party toward Dungerebas (Sindhuligadi-Jitpur) via its southwestern slope (Raj, 2012, p. 67). Despite supply frustrations, Kinloch's diary records the day as unexpectedly swift and triumphant, with his troops seizing Sindhuligadi following a decisive assault. In close combat, eight men were killed; though Gorkhali fighters attacked fiercely, they were repulsed, leaving bloodstains along their retreat, and one fighter was captured alive. The British lost three soldiers, and had 137 wounded (Raj, 2012, p. 72).

Kinloch's diary records three days of inactivity following the capture of Sindhuligadi. The principal challenge ahead involved negotiating the steep hill and securing the pass. Although the diary provides little clarity on the location of the pass, Dhakal notes that Pauwagadi (likely pass) lies approximately one Kos uphill from Sindhuligadi. Given the scarcity of Nepali secondary sources and the diary's silence on Gorkhali maneuvers, Manandhar and Rathaur (2022, p. 44) note that Sardar Vamsu Gurung and Sriharsha Panth, each commanding detachments, were positioned to confront the expeditionary force, while Vamsha Raj Pande remained further back to reinforce the frontlines. Altogether, approximately 700 Gorkhali soldiers strengthened their defenses, using stone fortifications.

In this connection, Basnyat claims that the Gorkhali strategy was to allow the column to cross Dungere Bhanjyang before launching the main assault. He infers that the Gorkhali command may have rapidly mobilized its defenses in anticipation of a confrontation. Sardar Bamsu Gurung, tasked with defending Dhungerebas-Jitpur, remained concealed until the expedition had crossed the point, effectively leaving the force encircled. Similarly, Treasurer Bir Bhadra Upadhaya commanded the fort at Pauwagadi, located approximately one Kos northeast of Sindhuligadi (Manandhar and Rathaur, 2022, p. 44). The expedition, therefore, was unprepared for what lay ahead in the following hours

The date 27 September 1767 marked a critical moment, as the expeditionary force prepared to advance. Kinloch records that a letter from Hardy, who had been in the advance party the previous night, instructed Ensigh Osborn to stage a false attack. Along the route,

several improvised fortifications were observed on the reentrant leading to the pass. Yet the specific pass Hardy referred to remains unclear; Dhakal, however, suggests that it may have been Sola Bhanjyang near Khurkot, believed to have been held by a detachment of Gorkhali troops (Raj, 2012, p. 77).

In the early hours of 27 September, Kinloch dispatched two companies of troops ahead. Shortly thereafter, the Hircaraks returned with grim news: the advance party had been ambushed with deadly force at the pass, which Dhakal identifies as likely Seudeni, near Pauvagadi (Raj, 2012, p. 80). According to Kafle (2010), the colonial troops were overwhelmed by shock upon contact, forcing them to retreat toward abandoned earthworks. There, camouflaged spikes injured their feet while volleys of arrows and stones rained down. In the ensuing confusion, panic-stricken soldiers scattered, while troops positioned behind opened fire, causing casualties from friendly fire. Although Kafle's account is difficult to corroborate, Kinloch's observation of the Black officers' hesitation lends it some plausibility. He further records that while these officers hesitated, Mr. Logan attempted to secure a nearby hillock but lost his middle finger, prompting Kinloch to assign Ensign Hardy to lead the advancing column (Raj, 2012, pp. 80–81).

Meanwhile, Kinloch ordered Hardy to lead an additional four companies of troops to clear a passage to continue the advance. Throughout the day, Kinloch's diary provides no account of what transpired, but the casualty figures indicate an inexorable outcome (Raj, 2012, p. 83). Kinloch recounts that at this juncture, he had hoped to establish contact with agents of King Jay Prakash, but intermediaries never appeared, leaving the expedition without the anticipated support from the host. Faquir's information was also found to be misleading and unreliable, nevertheless, he suggested an alternative route that bypassed the ambush site.

On 28 September, Kinloch's expedition reached a crucial turning point. The dense undergrowth and steep slopes had been fortified with stoneworks, from which the Gorkhali defenders launched arrows and hurled stones. All possible exits were deliberately blocked with dead logs (Vaidya et al., 2049 BS, pp. 368–369). This corroborates Basnyat's inference that the advance guard was likely cut off and overwhelmed by defenders using indigenous weapons with lethal precision. Kinloch further notes that, compounding the misery, no water could be found in the vicinity. Pressing on despite these hardships, the force advanced to the Dummann (Raj, 2012, pp. 78–79), which Dhakal identifies more precisely as Dhan Mana.

In total, five attempts were made to break out of the encirclement, each ending in failure and additional casualties. Kinloch's predicament was compounded by the conduct of the native officers and soldiers, whose inability to maintain discipline, cohesion, and proper formation under sustained attack proved disastrous (Chaudhuri, 1960, pp. 26–28). By the end of the day, the expedition's momentum had collapsed, and further losses were incurred during the retreat. On the night of September 28, Kinloch convened Lieutenant Hogan, Hardy, Ensign Osborn, and Mr. Woodman to reassess the situation and revise the operational plan (Raj, 2012, pp. 82–84).

On 29 September, the expedition veered westward, negotiating multiple streams, river crossings, steep inclines, and a treacherously rocky path through Beem Singh (Bhimsen) Pass.

As Chaudhuri observes, the defeated Sepoys, exhausted in both body and spirit, struggled to ascend the formidable Mahabharat Range (Chaudhuri, 1960, p. 21). Chaudhuri further notes that the demoralized column pressed on along a narrow footpath choked with dense, toxic undergrowth. After three arduous days, the colonial force finally reached the abandoned fort at Hariharpurgadi (Chaudhuri, 1960, p. 23). Kinloch's diary also reveals that eight days of torrential rainfall rendered the rivers between Sindhuligadi and Cockojuro (identified by Dhakal as *Kokhajor Khola*) impassable.

Bell (2017) notes that a silent mutiny occurred within Kinloch's camp during the arduous march toward Hariharpurgadi. A faction of discontented Sepoys, including several officers of local Bengali descent, instigated disorder. Kinloch's journal also highlights the dire conditions of the expedition: nighttime cold compounded the suffering of troops already weakened by widespread illness, likely malaria, while dwindling provisions failed to meet basic nutritional requirements. Mounting dissatisfaction ultimately forced Kinloch to disarm certain factions on the ground and convene a military court of inquiry to restore discipline (Raj, 2012, pp. 92–93).

Subsequent revelations indicate that Faquir had furtively departed for Kathmandu, further complicating the situation (Raj, 2012, p. 87). After a few days of absence, in the first week of October, he reappeared bearing a disheartening report: local stragglers, whom Kinloch disparagingly referred to as *Junglee people*, had been rallied to obstruct the expedition and had occupied all strategic passes across the Mahabharat Range, effectively sealing access to the Valley (Raj, 2012, pp. 90-91).

In this episode, Jay Prakash's aide Vakeel was notably absent, despite Kinloch's anticipation of his close aide Faquir, along with part of his detachment, had been overtaken while Gorkhali forces were securing one of the passes near Hariharpurgadi. Kinloch had previously reported suffering from a severe fever while retreating from Sindhuligadi, as his men continually called out for provisions. Weakened by illness and malnutrition, he became physically debilitated and mentally fragile. In this exhausted state, his anxieties about battle manifested in dreamlike visions, and he began to speak incoherently in his sleep (Raj, 2012, pp. 101-103).

On 17 October 1767, Kinloch's diary terminates abruptly upon his arrival at Hariharpurgadi, leaving historians with unresolved questions regarding the subsequent course of events. Colonel W. Kirkpatrick (2021, p. 409) observes that the gradual accumulation of logistical and strategic difficulties ultimately broke Kinloch's resolve. All approaches to the Kathmandu Valley had become increasingly impregnable, particularly at a distance of approximately eleven Kos from the city. At that point, Manandhar et al. (2077 BS, p. 72) express their observation in a similar fashion that the remnants of the expedition managed to cross the Bagmati River and establish a temporary camp in the Bara–Parsa region despite severe hardships of the season.

In a similar line, eminent Nepali historian, Dinesh Raj Pant (personal communication, October 20, 2025) reflects that the Gorkhali forces could have pursued the diminished remnants of the English expedition at their final encampment. Prithvi Narayan Shah, however refrained from such an action, adhering instead to a strategic principle articulated in the *Dibya Upadesh*

जाई कटक नगर्न्, भिकी कटक गर्नु: it is wiser to draw the enemy into one's own terrain of advantage than to confront them on theirs, especially when the adversary retains positional or tactical superiority.

On account, Basnyat observes that the expedition route, from Janakpur through Ranibas, Sindhulimadhi, Dungerebas, Goungkhola, Dhungre Bhanjyang, Sindhuligadi, and Khurkot, was deliberately redirected based on updated intelligence regarding British movements, thereby drawing the enemy into terrain favorable to Gorkhali defenses. This tactical maneuver is corroborated by Kinloch's diary, which records deserted earthworks along the Sindhuligadi route and the ridgeline of Hariharpurgadi, strategically positioned to cover the anticipated axis of the British advance. Manandhar and Rathaur (2022, p. 44) similarly note that these defenses were commanded by Ramkrishna Kunwar, featuring the deliberate coordination behind the Gorkhali strategy.

Bell (2017) notes that Kinloch's failed expedition inflicted heavy losses and irreparably harmed the Company's reputation. Kinloch's defense, citing seasonal misjudgment and reliance on Nepali agents Faquir and Vakeel, was deemed untenable. On 12 January 1768, the Select Committee decided to relieve Captain Kinloch of command and convene a military court of inquiry. Bell further recounts that Kinloch began to question the very premise of his engagement, lamenting the absence of recognition from the same Company he had sought to assist.

Chaudhuri (1960, pp. 29–31) records that Rumbold's persistent bid for a second attempt collapsed despite his appeals to the Select Committee. Karna Sen of Makwanpur urged Kinloch to mount another expedition, but the Company, having redirected its reserves to Madras, rejected the proposal. The directive to Kinloch was formally revoked on February 10, 1768. Kinloch, the celebrated hero of Sindhuligadi, died on May 10, 1768, and by September, Kantipur had fallen under Gorkhali control.

Beyond the Guns and Battlefield

Ram Chandra Prasain, local landowner from Sindhuli, volunteered logistical support by providing food supply for the Gorkhali forces. Others, including Jaya Narayan Thapa and Chumpan Singh Thapa, reportedly contributed to manpower mobilization for recruitment (Manandhar & Rathaur, 2022, p. 44). As noted by Bell (2017), some Nepali historians have recounted the use of stirred-up hornet nests as a defensive strategy, although this vivid detail remains uncorroborated in Kinloch's diary. These accounts illustrate that resistance was not confined to the battlefield alone; rather, it relied on local initiative, resourcefulness, and communal solidarity.

Historian Kamal Raj Singh Rathaur (personal communication, October 14, 2025) notes that the Gorkhali fighters were motivated volunteers drawn from diverse backgrounds and age groups. Armed with traditional weapons, they defended their homeland using locally sourced provisions, *khatte*, *sattu*, *sakhar*, and *malpuwa*, reflecting the self-reliant character of the resistance. Rathaur's observation finds corroboration in Kinloch's diary, where, in describing the capture of Sindhuligadi, Kinloch praises the bravery of the Gorkhali defenders and notes that their ages did not exceed eighty (Raj, 2012, p. 72).

Bell (2017) and Chaudhuri (1960, p. 32) note that the Company attributed the failure at Sindhuligadi solely to Kinloch through a court of inquiry, without considering his repeated appeals for a second attempt from Bara. This emphasis on individual accountability reflects broader imperial practices of attributing setbacks to personal error, whereas the Gorkhali campaign was characterized by collective mobilization and a shared vision of nation building.

During the Malla period, Italian Capuchin missionaries, led by Giuseppe, were warmly received. Prithvi Narayan Shah, however, remained wary of their presence and the potential risk of intelligence leaks to the East India Company (Chaudhuri, 1960, p. 32). Following the Sindhuligadi episode, he expelled foreign agents, Kashmiri merchants, Capuchins, Faquirs, and Gosains from Nepal (Sharma, 1965, p. 233). This marked a decisive turn in foreign policy, rejecting external influence and guarding against colonial infiltration, while simultaneously asserting cultural sovereignty through ideological boundaries.

Conclusion

Amid fractured allegiances and shifting borders in the mid-18th century, King Prithvi Narayan Shah's statecraft fostered a vision of a unified Nepal. That vision extended from the Gorkha heartlands to the hills of Sindhuli, and even beyond Tirhoot, where Nepali people of diverse backgrounds mobilized to defend sovereignty. As unity consolidated, the British East India Company advanced into the conflict, only to encounter an adversary sustained not by sheer firepower, but by communal solidarity, geographic advantage, and adaptive strategy. Kinloch's reliance on conventional strength faltered against resistance rooted in cohesion and terrain.

The Company's defeat at Sindhuligadi in 1767 left a profound psychological imprint, causing the East India Company to refrain from further incursions into Nepal for nearly forty-five years. Yet, nearly two and a half centuries later, Nepal remains challenged, its collective identity fractured by chronic political instability, internal conflict, and elites competing for power rather than cultivating solidarity (Bhatta, 2016). Nepal's institutions, politicians, and citizens must learn from history and consolidate the strength that arises only through unity. The soul of a nation is safeguarded as much by its cultural spine as by its military shield.

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