

Participation of Mewati People in the Revolt of 1857



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ABSTRACT

As soon as the revolt began, the Mewatis without losing any time, actively participated in the revolt. But the Mewati had to fight simultaneously on three fronts. On the first front, they had to fight against the British army and police; on the second front, they had to fight against the British loyalists such as the Khanzadas of Nuh, the Rajput of Hathin and honds, the Rawat jats of Hotel and the Kayasth of Sahna and on the third front, they had to fight against the Army of the British loyalists states such as Alwar, Bharatpur and Jaipur. The Mewat area of Haryana specially became the centre of struggle against these forces. The brave Mewatis fought and defeated all these powers. They, not only, removed the tyrannical rule of East India Company from the Mewat area of Haryana, but also, the grip of the East India Company became loose, to some extent, in the Mewat areas which were under Alwar and Bharatpur States.

BEGINNING OF REVOLT

The revolt of 1857 began from Meerut on 10th May, 1857. It spread with electric speed. In Delhi in the morning whereas in Mewat in the afternoon of 11th May, 1857. The Revolutionaries declared Mughal emperor Bahadur Shah as in 'emperor of India.' They declared him as their supreme leader.

On 11th May, afternoon 1857A.D. 300 sepoys reached Gurgaon from Delhi and there they received great support from the local population. As hundreds of peasants from surrounding villages and artisans and the poor people of the Gurgaon town joined them without losing any time. Some displeased and impoverished feudals like Nawab Ahmed Mirza Khan and Nawab Dula Jan also joined them. It is Interesting to note that the Rebels did not interest their leadership to the two newly arrived feudal chiefs, but kept it in their Own hands. W Ford who was collector-magistrate of Gurgaon tried to check the rebels at Bijwasan (with the help of Pataudi sawars), a place 12 k.m. from Gurgaon, on the morning of 12th May, 1857A.D. But he failed. The rebels next attacked Gurgaon which was the District headquarter. Ford made the second attempt to repulse the rebels but he failed this time also. Demoralized by his twice defeats he fled to Mathura via Bhondsi, Silani and Palwal. He also took with him four or five clerks, others and all the custom officers of these places. The rebels occupied the district headquarters took rs 7,84,000/- from the district's treasury. They destroyed the houses of the Europeans and the British loyalist and released all the Prisoners from the district jail.¹³

As soon as the revolt began in Mewat many Muslim Mujahiddeen in came to Mewat from the border areas. The most important among them were: Moulavi Nur Ali, Moulavi Muhammad Mured, Maulana Abul Hasan Afghani, Hazar Khastiwala and Dr Nazar Muhammad Badshahpuri etc. The inspired the Meos to participate actively and in a great number in the revolt.¹⁴ The revolt of their efforts remained positive also.

REBELS OF THE JHAJJAR

We also come to know that rebels of the Jhajjar state come to Gurgaon District and inspired its people to revolt. Mr. Nasrullah, the then Deputy Collector Gurgaon, neither took action against these rebels nor informed about their activities to the high officials of Delhi. Although, he was directed to remain present at the headquarter, yet, he left the headquarter and fled to his village Kharja, District Bulandshahar. Therefore, Mr. Nasrullah was declared a irresponsible officer and he was dismissed from the service.¹⁵

As the sturdy and warlike Mewatis come out from their villages and houses in a very large numbers and formed dhar (a mob which was organised to some extent) to abolish the British rule from Mewat. Sader-ud-din, a tall and handsome Meo peasant from pinanghanwa, was providing leadership to them. This peasant leader was a very intelligent and shrewd man, who did his job very seriously.¹⁶

Present leader sader-ud-din first attack was on the British loyalists who were living in the towns. After a little opposition he took under his command, one by one the towns of Tauru, Sohna, punhana, pinenghanwa and Ferozpur Jhirka. To maintain law and order in the Pargana of Ferozpur Jhirka Mr. Ammujan, Diwan of Alwar state, was sent with Alwar troops to Ferozpur Jhirka. But due to Meo rising he could not maintain law and order in the Pargana. Moreover, this step proved very costly for the Alwar state.¹⁷ Ammujan utterly failed achieving his object. In other words it can be said that the town of Ferozpur Jhirka remained under the control of the Meo rebels.

Sader-ud-din and his men had to face many difficulties to take under their control to the khanzadas¹⁸ of Nuh. Hair, they had to face the loyal khanzadas and the local police and the military which were Supporting the khanzadas. Specially, the Meos of Nuh, Adber and Sahapur Nangli participated in this battle. This battle continued for many days. The khanzadas and the Britishers suffered a heavy loss of money and men. A large number of khanzadas were killed and the Rebels occupied Nuh. It is said that Mr. Mackson, a British army officer was also killed in this battle. As Nuh who was the main postal post and therefore the Postal Services were regulated from her between the British government and among the state of Rajputana. This postal post was plundered by the Meo Mujahiddeens.¹⁹

Thereafter the Rawat jats of the region near Hodel and the Rajputs of Hathin, who were supposed to be on the part of the (British) government were attacked with the help of the Surat JatS of Hodel and the pathans of seoli.²⁰ The fight continued for several months in which the British loyalist suffered heavy losses. On receiving message from the Rawats, the Britishers sent a British force from Delhi to Hodal for their help. But in spite of government's help, the Rawats were completely routed out.²¹

Major W Eden, political agent at Jaipur had an opportunity to pass through the Mewat region in the way to Delhi in the middle of June, 1857A.D. at this time, there were 6999 Spoys and 7 guns under his command. But finding Mewat, in a most 'deplorable state of anarchy' he thought it advisable to settle it before going to Delhi.²² But he soon realised that the work he had taken in his hand was not an easy one. He was offered stiff opposition by thousands of Mewatis between Tauru and Sohna. If he had not been in possession of artillery, his force would have suffered heavy losses.²³

Major W. Eden halted at Sohna for three days. On the other hand, W Ford the collector magistrate of Gurgaon, proceeded from Mathura and reached Mohana via Hodal, Palwal and Chensa. There 'they (Mr. Ford,³⁰ Europeans, custom officers and fugitives from Delhi and others who had joined Mr. Ford at Hotel) were hospitality entertained by Mir Hidayat Ali, risaldar of the 4th irregular cavalry, a gentleman who was subsequently rewarded by a grant of the village in Jagir.'²⁴

We also come to know that during the stay of the Europeans at Mohna Mr. Khushal, Hardev and Tulsi Ram all the residents of Mohna, also provided very possible assistance to the Europeans along with Mr. Hidayat Ali, Risaldar, of the same village, as it is clear from the petition dated 11th August 1858 filled by the above mentioned three villages to the concerned British authority. The essence of the petition is: 'our village has been assigned as jadir to Mr Hidayat Ali Risaldar, in lieu of his services rendered during the revolt. We beg to say that the British officers stayed at village during the revolt then we also along with risaldar provided all types of help to them. He has been rewarded solely, whereas he is the chief of one locality (thok) of the same village. There is all probability that he will misuse his powers therefore, we request you that either this village may be granted as Jagir to we people in lieu of our services or the government may keep it under its control as earlier.'²⁵

On the 8th June Mr. Ford left Mohana for Sohna, which he reached on the 9th June, 1857A.D., and here he joined major Eden.²⁶ This force (Mr Eden's force) afterwards marched to Palwal and Hodal, and on the 1st July, 1857A.D. Mr. ford

joined The British camp at Delhi, where he stayed until the 13th October, 1857A.D.²⁷ On the other hand when Mr. Eden was somewhere in the middle of Palwal and Hodal, and then there was a rebellion among his own troops and a powerful group of them lead by Thakur shivnath Singh, an ex-minister of Jaipur even made a murderous attack on him.²⁸ Under these circumstances, Eden had to return to Jaipur at once, leaving Mewat in the hands of the sons of the soil.²⁹

Under such circumstance a contingent of the Meo mujahiddeens was also sent to Delhi from Mewat for the help of the Rebels there on 25th June 1857A.D.³⁰ The Mewatis occupied Delhi- Alwar Road very soon and thus disconnected the contact between the Britishers and the King of Alwar state. In such a situation they could not maintain contact with each-other.

In conclusion it can be said that the Mewat area of Haryana had obtained freedom from the rule of the East India company and now was under the rule of the Mewatis who considered the Mughal emperor as their rulers.

How was Mewat governed during the period which began from the end of the company's rule in Mewat and ended with the restoration of the British rule there? We come to know that zilladars were appointed to run the administration of the districts. These officers were appointed by Bakht Khan Lord governor-general Bahadur on behalf of the emperor.³¹ As Abdul Haq was appointed ziladar of district Gurgaon.³² To run the administration of the Tahsils, Tahsildars were appointed, as tahsildars were appointed at Palwal, Hodal, Gurgaon and other places.³³ As the condition at this time was quite abnormal and there was paucity of money in the treasury, More over there was utter deficiency of the able and experienced officers with the Mughal emperor. Therefore, under Such circumference, the emperor issued appeals to the people 'to manage their own efforts' and ensured their own safety by providing leadership to the Able men of their locality. Accordingly, in the pargana of Mewat, the local leaders and Chaudharies undertook the management of the locality.³⁴ Accepting Bahadur Shah as their Emperor, the Meo leaders and Chaudharies did correspondence with his Majesty and arranged The villages of Mewat and did other works according to the Royal instructions.³⁵

The responsibility of collecting revenue was on Ziladar, subordinate revenue officials and on local Chaudharies but, generally they field in performing their duties. As a result of it the land revenue was collected with the help of the Army. As rupees 2,00,000/- were brought by the troops from district Gurgaon to Delhi by June 1857A.D.³⁶ The emperor issued firmans to the peasants and zamindars of Mewat and instructed them to head over there land revenue to his grandson, Abdul Bahadur and Mohammad Bakht Khan.³⁷ To maintain law and order Police officers were appointed throughout the region. Their work was to check the pillage, highway robberies and murders etc. in their respective areas. It was but natural that in such circumference the proper arrangement could not be done.

As earlier period the communal harmony maintained throughout Mewat during the uprising of 1857. Since the Meo adopted Islam there has been a long tradition of communal harmony in Mewat. Even during the company's rule the Meos also presented a striking example of a happy combination of Hinduism and Islam. They like Hindus avoided sagotra marriages, retained their brahmana purohitis in most of their socio-cultural ceremonies; celebrated the Hindu festivals of Holi, Diwali, Dussehra etc. and put on clothes of Hindu style. The Hindus on the other hand showed marked respect for Muslim Pirs and Faqirs and went regularly to their shrines for making offerings. They tracked the Meos as their brother.³⁸ The feud between the men of Kot and Bahin villages is also a striking example of communal harmony in Mewat.³⁹ During the revolt of 1857 the Hindus and the Muslims fought unitedly against the company's Government and its loyalists. For instance, the Meos (Muslims) attacked and killed the 'loyal khanzadas,' their own brother, at Nuh.⁴⁰ Next, the Rawat Jats of Hodel village and the Rajput of Hathin who were supposed to be on the side of the (British) government' were attacked by a large gathering of Surat Jats of Hodal, Pathans of seoli and the Meos.⁴¹ On another occasion the Meos joined with Ahirs and attacked on the notorious Rajput of the pargana of Bohra.⁴² From the above mentioned account it is quite clear that there was complete communal harmony between the Hindus and the Muslims of Mewat during the uprising of 1857. A large part of Mewat (Slightly more than half territories of the state) was under the state of Alwar whereas a small part of Mewa (almost one third part of the state) was under the state of Bharatpur. Therefore. here it is necessary to see that what was the attitude and reaction of the kings of both States as well as of the people, who were living in the Mewat areas of these States, towards the uprising of 1857?

Rao Raja Pratap Singh (25th November, 1775 to 26th December, 1791 A.D.) a scion of the Naruka branch of the Kachhwahs started his career with a patrimony of two villages and a half (Macheri, Rajgarh and half of Rajpura) and closed it as the founder of the Alwar Raj.⁴³ He occupied the Fort of Alwar from the Jats on 25th November, 1775 A.D. (Mangsar Sadi 3, samvat 1832) and that laid the foundation of the Alwar state. On the Recommendation of Najaf Khan, a Mughal noble, a Sanad, title of Rao Raja and a mansab of 5000 was given to Rao Raja Pratap Singh.⁴⁴ He was recognised by the Imperial government as a Rajah fully independent of his tribal overlord. Taking advantage of the circumferences which were prevailing in Bharatpur and Jaipur States he extended his state very much and the Meos

played a very important role in the extension of his state.⁴⁵ Thus he built up a Kingdom which today embraces 3,158 square miles territory. Rao Raja Pratap Singh was a bold, clever, diplomat and a very big opportunist and therefore, he, from a small Jagirdar of two and half villages became an independent king.

After the death of Rao Raja Pratap Singh his adopted son Bakhtawar Singh (1791 A.D. to 1815 A.D.) became the King of Alwar state.⁴⁶ He with the help of his vakil Ahmad Bakhsh Khan concluded an offensive and defensive treaty, with the Britishers and provided his best possible help to the Britishers against the marathas in the last Maratha war. As a result of it the Parganas of Ismailpur and mundawar together with the talukas of Darbarpur, Ratai (karni-Kot), Mandan, Gilot, Sarai, bijwar, Neemrana, Dadri, Badhwana, Bawani Khera and Loharu etc. were granted to Rao Raja. Rao Raja granted Loharu to his vakil Ahmad Bakhsh Khan as a reward. As the Parganas of Dadri, Badhwana and Bawani Khera were far away from his state therefore these were taken from Rao Raja and in place of these the Parganas Tijara, Tapukara and kathumar of Mewat were granted to him in 1805 A.D. Rao Raja also obtained Kishangarh from the Britishers.⁴⁷

To keep control over the Mewatis and specially on the Meos Rao Raja Baktawar Singh adopted the policy of coercion and conciliation. When the Meos of Tijara rebelled during his reign against the authority then Rao Raja used this policy. For instance: 'Tijara was placed by Maharao raja in the charge of one JahaZ, a chela or slave, who, by exchanging turbans with the principal Meos, established friendly relations with them, so that when ordered to send the leading Meos into Alwar, he had no difficulty in getting them to come to a feast, where they were all seized, Curried to Alwar, and compelled to pay Rs 10,000/- for their release. One Bhagwan Dass was sent to release the money, and appressed the Meos much. He was joined by jahaz, who plundered (The) villages Ladla, palasli, Nemli and Alapur. Khavani Meo of Lapla was an active insurgent and being seized by Jahaz was put to death.'⁴⁸

Being imbalanced of mind in the last days of his life, it is said that Rao Raja became a Muslim opponent. As the mosques were razed to the ground; the Tombs of Ghalib Sahid at Alwar and that of Sayyed Jalal-ud-din at Bharatpur were dug out and dwelling of of Kamal Chisti at Alwar, was destroyed observing of Namaz and offering the sacrifices were forbidden.⁴⁹ These action of the rao Raja provoked the Muslims of Delhi and the complained of these actions to the Mughal emperor.

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