

Khanzadas of Mewat: An Ethno-Historical Overview

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Abstract – Mewat is known for the area ‘where Meos’ lives but, historically they shared this region with the Khanzadas and other Muslim and Hindu social groups. Khanzadas were the ruling class of Mewat region and they played an important role in the political affairs of Delhi Sultanate and early Mughal Empire. This paper will give an ethno-historical outline of Khanzadas of Mewat particularly about their origin, conversion, and state formation in Mewat region and their active role in Delhi politics. This paper will further explain why their social, economic and political significance decline after 16th century. This paper will also trace their changing relationship with Meos of Mewat.

Keywords: Khanzadas, Mewat, Meos, Jadon Rajput, Hasan Khan Mewati, Bahdur Nahar.

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Mewat is a historical region of northern India. In the medieval times Persian sources usually referred Mewat as the land of Meos and Khanzadas. During the medieval times the inhabitants of Mewat included the group of Meos, and other cultivating classes such as Khanzadas, Jats, Gujjars, Ahirs, Rajputs, Baqqals, Brahmins, Minas, Thathars, and Malis.[1] During the British India Mewat was lying South of Delhi and including parts of the British Districts of Muttra (Mathura) and Gurgaon, and a considerable portion of Alwar (Ulwar) and some part of Bharatpur.[2] As per the 1901 census, the number of Khanzadas in Rajputana and Gurgaon district of Punjab province was 9,353 and 3,901 respectively.[3] The Khanzadas were more important in the past but, unfortunately due to the partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947, most of the Khanzadas migrated to Pakistan, in the present context Khanzadas represent a very small ratio of Muslim population in the Mewat region. The Khanzadas presently reside in Nuh, Kheda, Madi-Khera, Hawan Nagar, Ghaghas, Tain, Ferozpur and other villages of Haryana and Rajasthan.

KHANZADAS OF MEWAT: AN ETHNO-HISTORICAL OUTLINE

Firstly it seems necessary to discuss about the title Khanzada which seems to be a mark of distinction for these chieftains of Mewat. Broadly, there are three different views regarding Khanzada title. Firstly the Khanzada of Mewat claim that this title given by the Sultan of Delhi that derived from the word Khan Jadu (or lord Jadu) that remained in use as Khanzada. Second it is said to be a changed form of the title ‘Khanazad’ (meaning a slave) which was given to the Mewati chief, when they accepted the allegiance of the Sultans of Delhi.[4] Powlett also observed that the

term Khanzada is probably derived from ‘Khanazad’ for it appears that Bahadur Nahar, the first of the race mentioned in the Persian histories, associated himself with the turbulent slaves of Feroz Shah after the death of the latter, and being, a pervers, would contemptuously receive the name of Khanazad (slave) from his brethren.[5] Cunningham mentioned that during the last two centuries since the territory of Mewat has fallen into the hands of the Hindus of Alwar and Bharatpur. It has become the fashion to doubt the Jadon descent of the Khanzadahs and suggest that the title is derived from ‘Khanahzadah’ “a slave”. But the term is Khanzadah the “offspring of a khan” and not Khanahzadah “the offspring of the house or slave”. The fact is that both brothers received the title of Khan on their conversion to Islam, and therefore their descendants became Khanzadahs.[6]

The Khanzadas claim to have been formerly Jadon Rajputs, and that their ancestors, Lakhana Pala and Sumitra Pala, who dwelt at Tahangarh in Bharatpur, were converted to Islam in the reign of Firoz Shah Tuglaq, who gave Lakhana Pala the names of Nahar Khan and Sumitra Pala that of Bahadur Khan. This origin of the Khanzadas is accepted by Pundit Jwala Sahai Adalati, Maulvi Mazharuddin, Sheikh Makhdum and Hamid Qalander. Cunningham provides ample information about the ancestors of Khanzadas. He writes,

The only Hindu descendants of the Yaduvansi at the present day are the Jadons of the small state of Karauli to the west of the Chambal and at Sablgarh or Jadonvati in the Gwalior territory east of that river; but the Musalmans of acknowledged Jadon descent from a very large portion of the population of Eastern

Rajputana, from Sohna and Alwar on the west to the Chambal on the east, and from the banks of the Jumna to Karauli and Sabalgarh on the south. These Jadon Musalmans are known as Khanzadas.[7]

He further added about the origin of Yaduvansis,

The Yaduvansi claim descent from Krishna. Their early history, therefore, consists of a number of the popular tales of Krishna derived from the Mahabharat and the Puranas. The first historical name is Dharma Pala, 77th in the descent from Krishna. His title Pala has come down to the present Karauli Rajas. His date is about 800 A.D. He and his successors are said to have resided in Bayana. The eleventh in descent from Dharma Pala is Vijaya Pala, to whom the building of the fortress of Vijayamandargarh is unanimously attributed. His Son was Tahan Pala, who built the great Fort of Tahangarh, which stands on the crest of the long sandstone range of hills 14 miles to the south of Bayana, and the same distance to the east of Hindaun. From him the Khanzadas trace their descent.[8]

He further added,

His capital was Bayana from which his descendants were driven out by Muhammad Ghor and Kutb-ud-din Aibak who took Tahangarh in 1196 A.D. After this, the Jadon families dispersed and settled whenever they could find a home. One chief, named Tej Pala, found refuge with a descendant of Susarmajit, the Raja of Sarhata, and after a time founded Tijara. His palace is still pointed out in Mohalla Mirdhon of Tejara. Raja Band Pal, the son of Raja Tahan Pal, is said to have emigrated in Samvat, 1173, or A.D, 1116, and to have taken refuge in the hills near Kaman. His son was Ainti Pala, whose son was Adhan Pal, whose son was Insaraj, who had acquired Sarhata, near Tejara. Insaraj had five sons of whom the eldest, Lakhan Pal, was the founder of the great family of Khanzadas.[9]

Cunningham to prove their royal descent quoted Ahmad Yadgar, in his *Tarikh-i-Salatin Afaghana*, says, 'Hasan Khan was a man of royal descent from several generations, and his family had possessed regal power until the reign of Feroz Shah.'[10] Abul Fazl, in his book of *Ain-i-Akbari*, says, 'The Khanzadabs were chiefly converted Januha Rajputs'[11] Their origin and their royal descent are accepted by all including, Powlett,[12] Rose,[13], Ibbeston,[14] Sheikh Makhdum,[15] Channing,[16] and Crooke.[17]

But, Fraser writes that Khanzadas represent them as being descended from the Jadon Rajputs. One account represents the Khanzadas as descended from a Dhanuk (low caste) named Beejul converted to Mahomedanism as before with the title of Khan, and hence Khanzadas.[18] Even the author of Arzang-i-Tijara adds that during marriage, they paid their respect to and worshipped Bejal, their ancestors.[19] It thus appears that one Bejal or Bejbul must have the ancestors of some Khanzada families who might have

embraced Islam during the reign of Firoz Shah Tughlaq.[20]

When and how Khanzadas embraced Islam, religion has not been recorded. It is a common belief that they changed their religion to save their lives; and knowing the plundering habits of the Mewatis and the general turbulence.[21] According to Muhammad Makhdum, the Islamisation of Khanzadas in the Mewat region occurred due to their association with the Sufi saints particularly during the time of Sultan Firoz Shah Tughlaq. It is said that at one time during the hunting expedition Kunwar Samar Pal, and Kunwar Sopar Pal, the son of Jadon Raja Lakhan Pal of Serehta, met with Sufi Saint Hazrat Nasir-uddin Mahmud, Roshan Chirag-i-Delhi, and accepted Islam. Samar Pal was given new name Bahaduer Khan and Sopar Pal as Chhaju Khan. It was the time of Firoz Shah Tughlaq, and the Sultan bestowed them *Jagir* of Mewat.[22] Cunningham stated that, the two brothers may have embraced the Muhammadan religion for the purpose of regaining their estates of Sarhata and Jhirka, which had been annexed to Delhi by Feroz Tuglaq. The fact that the name of Jhirka was then changed to Firozpur seems to point to this conclusion.[23] It seems that they accepted Islam probably to obtain greater power from Emperor Firoz Shah Tughlaq.

As far as the relationship of Khanzadas and Meos are concerned Munshi Sharfuddin and Khanzadas claims that Khanzadas are completely different from the Meo community and Khanzadas are superior to the Meos. Such view further supported by colonial ethnographers and they also claimed that Khanzadas are distinct community to Meos of Mewat. Powlett in the gazetteer of Alwar (Alwar) observed that,

The Mass of the population of Mewat are called Meos. They are Musalman and claim to be the Rajput extraction. They must not however, be confounded with the Mewatis chiefs. They are the Mewati chiefs of the Persian historians, who were probably the representatives of the ancient Lords of Mewat. Mass of population of Mewatis are called as Meos, but they should not be confounded with the chiefs of Mewat called as Khanzadas. He further states that the Khanzada is races, which, though Musلمان like the Meos, are socially far superior to the Meos, who have no love for them. In fact, the expression Mewatis as told by the Persian historians to the Khanzadas usually refers to the ruling class, while Meos designates the lower orders.[24]

Powlett further explains that in the social rank, Khanzadas were far above the Meos and though probably of more recent extraction, they are better Musalmans. Unlike the Meos, they say their prayers, and do not let their women work in the fields.[25]

Pratap C Aggarwal also stated that there is evidence to show that the Khanzadas were more Islamized than the rest of the Meos. Their dress, names, and

customs had undergone more change than those of the other Meos. Perhaps because of this and also because of the difference in their economic and social status, the two groups had stooped intermarriage. It is evident that the Khanzadas constituted a distinct group among the Meos.[26]

But such views questioned by many scholars, for instance, Shail Mayaram claims that Khanzadas today claim independent and distinct genealogies, but the evidence suggests that they were part of the larger group called the Mewatis that included ancestors of the Meo clans. Mayaram quote Persian historian Yahya Bin Ahmed, who makes it quite clear that the followers of the 'Khanzada' Bahdur Nahar are Mewatis or Miwan. She further described that Bahadur Nahar's own grandson is referred to as Jalal Khan Meo.[27]

Amir Ali also asserts that in the past Meos known as Khanzada during medieval India.[28] The local Meo historian Saddiq Ahmed Meo claims that Khanzadas are a branch of one of the Meos *got* called Khanjadu. He further claimed that Meos one of Ghowal *got* and Khanjadu *got* and their ancestors are one.[29] The Urdu work *Arzang-i-Tijara* also informs us that a branch of Jadon Rajputs and the Meos were notorious for plunder, arson and lawlessness in the Mewat region and had created a serious law and order problem for Delhi Sultanate.[30] Even Cunningham considered the lands of Khanzadas as the Jadon branches of the Meos or Meos.[31] Interestingly most of Persian historians also used the term 'Mewattis' to describe Meos and Khanzadas of Mewat.

Further, it is also evident that Khanzada chiefs enjoyed the support of the Meos. An early 16th-century ballad 'Hasan Khan ki katha' by Narsingh Meo of Kajhota village of Mewat reveals that not only did Meos constitute the majority of peasants but the army of Hasan Khan Mewati also had a large number of Meo soldiers. The Khanzadas' chiefs established matrimonial relationships not only with the Meos but also with Meena.

But, this is a fact that during colonial India Meos and Khanzada were distinct communities and this fact is clearly evident in local and ethnographic works of colonial India. Then the question emerges when and how both Meos and Khanzadas became distinct communities. In this regard a local Meo history states that a distance began to develop between the Khanzadas and Meos as the former began to intermarry with the other Muslim groups and increasingly began to adopt Islamic ritual practices particularly during Mughal India.[32] Shail Mayaram observed that later British writers distinguished between the Meos and the Khanzadas, but they became differentiated only at this stage of Mewat's history, when for a brief period the Khanzadas were co-opted by the Sultanate.[33] Interestingly in 1857 revolt Khanzada community of Nuh was loyal to the British government and aided them and fought against the Meos or Mewati rebels. Khanzadas of Nuh town were in the league with police personnel and tough

resistance to the Meos in occupying the different areas of Mewat and particularly the Nuh town. But Meos in 1857 revolt targeted them along with British.

No doubt Khanzadas were the ruling class of Mewat region. Khanzadas were the first Muslim chieftains in Mewat who played an important role in socio-economic and political history of this region. Bahadur Nahar is better known to Mewat history as a founder of the Khanzada community of Mewat. Nahar Khan which is popularly known as Bahadur Khan or Bahadur Nahar played a crucial role in the post Feroz Shah Period. In the early days of their rule, Indori, Kotla, and Tijara used to be their capitals, later they extended their territory up to Alwar town which became their capital.[34] His name appears before and after Timur's invasions, (1398) being actively involved in the politics of Delhi. Aqlaim Khan, Jalal Khan, Ahmad Khan, Alawal Khan, and Hasan Khan as chieftains respectively succeeded Bahadur Khan. Hasan Khan Mewati was well known chieftain of Mewat, who fought against Babur in the battle of Khanwa. Hasan Khan Mewati still lives in the heart of millions of people living in Mewat. He is still remembered as a brave warrior who fought shoulder to shoulder with Rana Sangha and his allies against the Babur, the founder of Mughal empire in India. The Khanzadas had attained a high political and social status in the royal circle in Delhi. At the time of Sikandar Lodhi their influence increased further on account of the fact that the wives of Allawal Khan and Sikander Lodhi were real sisters.[35]

The Khanzadas were the first Muslims to introduce Islamic culture in Mewat. Cunningham observed that Khanzadas have constructed many mosques in the Mewat region. For example, Bahdur Nahar built a fine stone mosque at Kotla in 1399 during the rule of Muhammad Shah.[36] Hasan Khan Mewati built a mosque in Tijara.[37] Some other mosques built in other towns and villages of Mewat region.

During the time of Akbar Khanzadas were *zamindars* in large numbers in *sarkar* of Alwar, Tijara and Sahar of Agra *suba*. The *sarkar* of Alwar had total 43 *parganas*, whereas Khanzadas of Mewat are found in 18 *parganas*. They were sharing *zamindari* rights in Tijara *pargana* with other cultivated castes like Meos, Jats, and Ahir.[38] They had matrimonial relations with the Mughals. Powlett mentioned that Humayun seems to have conciliated them by marrying the elder daughter of Jamal Khan, nephew of Babur's opponent, Hasan Khan Mewati, and by causing his great minister, Bairam Khan, to marry a younger daughter of the same Mewati.[39]

Interestingly since 16th the socio-economic and political position of the Khanzadas declined drastically. The Khanzadas do not find any mention as *Mansabdar* either under Akbar or Jahangir. However, under Shahjahan one Firuz Khan Mewati's name appears in the imperial services.[40] The author of *Arjung-i-Tijara* says that due to fear of the Meos, many Khanzadas' families migrated eastward

and took to trade in the Gangetic cities, while some joined the military service of the Rajput Narukas and British.[41] But the Khanzadas who had been living in the villages of Mewat as *khudkashta* peasants or zamindars were oppressed by the Meos. The Non-Archival records of Alwar state highlight that many Khanzada villages were forcibly evacuated by the Meos. The Main reason for the Meos occupation of the Khanzada –owned lands were high soil fertility and availability of sweet groundwater for irrigation.[42] Commenting on the decline in the Khanzadas's power and wealth and speculating on their fate, Fraser writes

The Khanzadas some centuries ago, did, beyond, possess extensive property in this district (Gurgaon) and the ruins and tombs in the vicinity of Sohna forcefully attest their past importance. The power of Khanzadas is popularly stated to have waned about three centuries ago, when they were supplanted by the Meos. What has become of them? Have they gradually merged into the conquering class? Have been destroyed in the struggle for property occurring under weak government.[43]

F. C Channing too mentions

In Alwar...the Khanzadas have fallen from the ancient rank, and now possess but few settlements. I have a suspicion that they are more intimately connected than they acknowledge with the Meos whom they seem to me to resemble in personal appearance. They don't ordinary intermarry with Meos, but the Meo inhabitants of Ghatwasan, Poul, Nasirbas, Kherli Khurd and Muhammadbas in the Ferozpur Tehsil profess to have been formerly Khanzadas, and to have become Meos by intermarriage.[44]

Powlett also observed that there is not a single *jagir*, or rent-free village held by a Khanzadas in Alwar state. Some still remain in Nuh and Sohna of the Gurgaon district.[45] Powlett further writes that "There are twenty-six Khanzadas villages in the Alwar state in most of which are proprietors themselves work in the fields and follow the plough.[46] Mr. O, Dwyer has remarked, "they are now in a very depressed state, lazy cultivator, quarrelsome, and querulous; in fact, they combine the apathy of the Rajput with the Meos litigiousness and disregard of truth. Their villages are badly cultivated as they are averse to labour themselves and do not get any aid from the women"[47] This proves that Khanzadas were no more important social, economic and political group of Mewat since the strong rule of Akbar and his successor. During late 19th century their many customs, traditions, betrothal and birth ceremonies were quite analogous to the Hindu community of Mewat region. Currently they give up many un-Islamic practices and become more Islamic.

CONCLUSION

This is fact that Khanzadas were the rulers of Mewat between 14th to early 16th century. They also play an

important role in the social, cultural, and economic history of the Mewat region. The Khanzadas were also the first Muslims to introduce Islamic culture in Mewat. They also had forged their social identity as the local elite of Mewat and by the end of the 16th century owned many zamindari rights in many *parganas* of the region. After the strong rule of Akbar and rise of regional power in Mewat region the socio-economic and political position of Khanzadas declined drastically due to many reasons. Currently they are in very small numbers in Mewat and they also started marriage relations with the Meos. So, it clear from above that they were very important social group in medieval India but now they lost their relevance in Mewat region and about to completely merge with Meeos of Mewat.

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