



Raja Pratap Singh: Bijnor and 1857

¹Sheetal Tyagi and ²Dr. Kalpana Chaturvedi

¹Research Scholar, Department of History, Maharaja Agrasen Himalayan Garhwal University, Uttarakhand, India

²Professor, Department of History, Maharaja Agrasen Himalayan Garhwal University, Uttarakhand, India

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Corresponding Author: Sheetal Tyagi

Abstract

Thousands of remarkable figures, including kings and revolutionaries, remain unrecognized in the Indian freedom struggle, among whom Raja Pratap Singh of Amroha district is notable. Situated in present-day Dhanaura, Azampur, listed in the Ain-i-Akbari as an important administrative unit during Akbar's reign, played a pivotal role during the Mughal period. This area, under the Sambhal Sarkar, saw significant activity, including a notable revolt led by Akbar's relatives Ibrahim Hussain Mirza, Muhammad Hussain Mirza, and Shah Mirza, which was suppressed by Tyagi Zameendars under Raja Brahma Singh's leadership. The Tyagis, especially those of Kashyap gotra, were rewarded by Akbar for their valor. Despite later forced conversions under Aurangzeb, they remained resolute in their faith. Raja Pratap Singh Bahadur, a significant figure in the 19th century, exemplified bravery and strategic acumen during the 1857 Indian Rebellion. Known for his technical ingenuity, he constructed a unique type of gun and mobilized local leaders against British forces. His efforts, alongside other Hindu and Muslim feudal lords, reflect the complex and multifaceted resistance during the Indian freedom struggle.

Keywords: Raja Pratap Singh, Azampur, Ain-i-Akbari, Sambhal Sarkar

Introduction

Thousand of remarkable kings and revolutionaries are still unknown in Indian freedom struggle. Raja Pratap Singh is one of them. He belonged to Amroha district. There exists a long series of the 3, remains of the brick built monumental heritage at the old township of present day ruined Azampur. It is situated in the present tehsil of Dhanaura in the present district of Amroha in Uttar Pradesh. During the medieval period of Indian History, it has played an unparalleled role as for as the Mughal period in general and Akbar's reign in particular is concerned.

Azampur is enlisted in the Ain-i-Akbari as one of the important mahal (Paragana) head quarters by Abul Fazl. He mentions it showing its importance being the three Mirzas' Jagirs in this mahal.

During Akbar's reign, the whole Mughal empire was divided into 12 subas or provinces, every Suba or province was further divided in Sarkars, dasturs and mahals. The unit of mahal is identified by paragana in later times.

Sambhal Sarkar's head-quarters of same name was in the suba of Delhi. This sarkar was consisted of 47 mahals or parganas. Writing about the Sambhal Sarkar, Professor

Vighnesh Kumar mentions:

"At present nearly all the area covered by present district of Amroha, Bijnor, Moradabad, Sambhal and Rampur in the division of Moradabad comprises the area of the Sambhal Sarkar."

Throwing light on the historical fact relating to the Tyagi clan in the Sarkar of Sambhal, he further writes ^[3]:

"It had 47 mahals or parganas. Nearly more than one third or some less than the half of the 47 were held by the Tyagi clan during the Mughal period."

An important and historically unparalleled episode occurred at the pargana of Azampur when three close relatives of Akbar had revolted from there. Ibrahim Hussain Mirza, Muhammad Hussain Mirza and Shah Mirza tried to dethrone Akbar establishing their seat from Azampur and the surrounding areas ^[4]. These were routed out by the Tyagi Zemindars and their co-clan brethren under the able leadership of Raja Brahma Singh⁵, the then crown prince of the Raja of Dhakka belonging to the Ahamali Shasan of the Bhardwaj gotra ^[6].

Azampur was owned by the Tyagi of Kashyap gotra. Still a number of villages, relating to the Kashyap Gotra^[7] Tyagis

are inhabited in the area. The villages of Malakpur, Nannor, Gannaur etc can be mentioned in this regard.

Though the revolt of Mirzas was suppressed in 1566 but they had appeared again on the scene in 1573^[8]. Both the times those were suppressed and as a result the Tyagi Zemindars had been greatly favoured for their uncommon valour by Emperor Akbar. That royal favour was continued throughout his life time. Not only this but the importance was accepted during the first half of his successor's reign. It was recognized continually until the death of Mirza Ali Beg Akbarshahi^[10] who had been posted as the governor of Sambhal Sarkar^[11]. He seems to be a great admirer of the valour and competency of the Tyagi Zemindars in routing out twice the Mirzas. These were then also called as the Chaudharies^[12].

Time does not remain same forever and it became true to the Tyagi Chaudharies of the newly founded Riyasat-i-Brahamabad^[13]. The Battle of Hasanpur was fought against the emperor's royal forces and Raja Deshraj had to laid his life down in the battle field^[14]. Raja's younger brother named Kunwar Chandrasen was made was prisoner and had been converted to Islam forcibly^[15]." The staunch supporters including the Chaudharies of Azampur got set back. Those were already suspicious on the religious point of view. It was during the third decade of seventeenth century A.D. Their co-clan brethren of Bachhraon had been converted into Islam few decades back.

After a full half century the Tyagies of Chuchaila Kalan were on Aurangzeb's target^[17]. During the reign of Aurangzeb, those ere forcefully converted after a Military expedition by the Mughal Royal forces^[18].

On the apposite bank of River Ganga. not far from Azampu. 81 out of 84 villages of the same Kashyap Gotra were converted forcibly during Emperor Aurangzeb's rule^[19]. Now the religious conversion was a thing of terror in the eyes of the Hindu Chaudhary families of Azampur and so they had taken an oath never to be converted what cost might have been paid by them^[20].

But the geographical situation was completely full of tension and fearfulness^[21]. So this family could save itself for the long period of next 50 years when some where in the begining of the eighteenth century, one Balram Singh, the headman of Azampur Chaudharies had shifted to Bastha situated in the district of Bijnor^[22]. He was succeeded by his son Ram Kishan who had shifted his family seat from Azampur to Tajpur.* The following genealogical table shows the family tree:

Balram Singh ® Ram Kishan ® Kiddha Singh ® Jairaj Singh ® Raja Pratap Singh Mentioning about Raja Pratap Singh. historian writes^[24]:

"Raja Pratap Singh Bahadur, the head of the then Tajpur estate in the district of Bijnor during the third quadruple of the nineteenth century, was genius, brave, calculating and diplomatic person."

On 13th May. 1857 the information about the outbreak of Indian Revolution at Meerut (10 May) was in public in the Bijnor On 8th June. Mr. Alexander Shakespear, the Collector of Bijnor with his whole party quit the district The charge was taken over by Nawab Mahmmad Khan. Sonon both the Hindus and Muslims took a decision to resist the British. The following paragraph is worth seeing in this context^[25]: "During the Indian Revolution of 1857, he along with the

other Hindu feudal londs took the decision to resist the East India Company in their respective regions of influence Some of the prominent Muslim and Hindu Zemindars assembled at one place to hold the meeting and it is said that the decision thus taken was to pick arms against the Colonial British Imperialism."

Taking oath unitedly to resist the British was solemonized by putting hand on the Koran and the holy Ganga-water^[26]. But soon the Jehadis from Delhi entered in Bijnor and Marhe Khan and others had declared war upon the infidels^[27]. In their opinion, the Hindus were also the Kufirs and thus anti-British war had been turned into anti Hindu war as well^[28]. It had shaken the scene in thus changed behaviour of the Muslim contingents of Nawab Mahmud Khan, the then successor of Najibuddaula. The same historian's comment upon this is worth mentioning^[29]:

"The fateful day of taking oath on the Koran and the Holy Ganga water was no more because of the declaration of the Jihad against both the Europeans and the Hindus. This is an extra-ordinary example responsible for the failene of Indian Revolution of 1857 in the district of Bijnor."

Pratap Singh Sahab had a scientific mindset and a technician's brain. He has made a particular type of gun in jijail category. Actually it was Raja Pratap Singh who was considered the bravest as well as the wisest among all the Hindu chieftains of district of Bijnor at that time. It is shown also by the references made by the eye witness and contemporary famous writer named Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan who was pro-British whole of His life time. Sayyid writes^[30]:

The Chaudhris held a round of discussions amongst themselves. in view of their overriding concern at this heavy blow against one of the leading men of the District. With one voice, they agreed to make an effort to take back the fortress from Ahmad Allah Khan, and to mobilize their men at Dhampur. On July 31.1857 the following leaders banded together: Chaudhari Randhir Singh and Chaudhri Budh Singh. Raises of Haldaur, with two artillery pieces, Chaudhari Pratap Singh with a jezail, and the chaudhris of Kant with an artillery piece. In one village after another. the drums were sounded to mobilize the population: this call to mobilize was heard everywhere in the district. As hostage for Ghasa Singh and Basant Sing. the Chaudhris seized Nadir Shah Khan. Hasan Raza Khan. and Sabit Ali Khan, who were relatives of Mahumud Khan and his agents at Dhampur. At the same time they killed two sowars of the Nawab. The Nawab was in a tight corner as a result of this mobilization. His men were being seized and killed wherever they went. Some of his soldiers were killed in the village of Nangal. Some of his letters that had been dispatched to Ahmad Allah Khan were also taken. I saw in Chaudhri Umrao Singh's possession an authentic letter sent by Mahund Khan from Bijnor, and another equally authentic letter of Azamat Allah Khan I write at this point the exact texts of the sentences in these letters that deal with this contest.

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