

**Owners of the Kuchesar Fort : From
the Tyagi Raja to the Jat Rao (A Case
Study from the Third Battle of
Panipat to the Advent of the
British) 1761-1803**

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Kuchesar Fort originally owned by the Tyagi Raja was attacked by Najibuddaula, the then Mir Bakhshi (Commander-in-Chief) of the Mughal empire. This was done just after the Third Battle of Panipat having been fought between the Marathas under Sadashivrao Bhau and the foreign Afghans under Ahmad Shah Abdali. Najib Khan was of the opinion that the Tyagis in general and those of Jalalabad and Kuchesar in particular were staunch supporters of the Marathas. The Tyagis tried their best to regain their old seat of honour and were successful when Mir Bakhshi Afrasiyab had imprisoned Magniram Jat and his brother named Ramdhan Singh. He kept both the brothers in jail in the Aligarh Fort from where they had fled one night. They, by treachery, butchered all the family of the Tyagi Raja along

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with his kiths and kins and thus had captured the historical fort of Kuchesar once again. One of their descendants named Bahadur Singh was styled "Rao" during the East India Company's rule. His son was Rao Gulab Singh who had served the colonial British imperialism during the Indian Revolution of 1857 and was heavily rewarded.

[**Keyword** : Kuchesar Fort, Tyagi Raja, Jalalabad Paragna, Third Battle of Panipat, Govind Ballal Bundele, Ahmad Shah Abdali, Nijibuddaula, Magniram Jat, Ramdhan Singh, Mir Bakhshi Afrasiyab Khan]

Kuchesar¹, the old seat of the Tyagis until the treachery in 1761 having been taken place few days after the Third Battle of Panipat² was fought, has its importance relating to the sub-regional history of Indian empire. It lies in the Tehsil of Syana of the district of Bulandshahr in Uttar Pradesh.³

During the Third Battle of Panipat, the Tyagi Raja of Kuchesar was considered amongst the pro-Maratha feudal lords and so he was suspected by Najib Khan.* After the Battle was over Ahmad Shah Abdali made Najib Khan an 'uddaula' and thus Najib had been styled Najibuddaula. He was raised to the office of Mir Bakhshi,⁴ the Commander-in-Chief of the Mughal imperial army.⁵

Assuming the charge, Najibuddaula decided to crush all the pro-Maratha vessels who were under suspicion. And thus the ruling Tyagi Raja was first of the number.⁶

Giving the details of the Jalalabad, a strong fortified township of Raja Kuchesar's close relatives where one of the most prominent Maratha generals posted in the Ganga-Yamuna Doab named Govind Ballal Bundele was killed, Jadunath Sarkar writes :

"Govind Ballal [Bundele] was an old man of over sixty... His advance to Shahdara was unopposed; all the agents of Najib Khan were driven away from the way, and half a dozen villages in the Sikandrabad region were sacked... The Maratha force lay dispersed in fancied security from Shahdara by way of Ghaziabad to Jalalabad (ten miles north-east of the latter city)."⁷

* Raja of Kuchesar was close relative of the Chaudhary of Paragana Jalalabad (near Muradnagar) situated on the old Badshahi Rasta from Sambhal to Delhi. Jalalabad was attacked on 18th December 1760. An amount of Rs. 1 Lac 10 thousand was sent from this town of Jalalabad to the Sadashivrao Bhau in his camp at Panipat. But 293 out of 300 Maratha cavalymen were on searching and interrogating them captured by the Afghans and were taken to Ahmad Shah Abdali where 500 silver coins from each of those Marathas were recovered. And from this the fact known to Abdali was that that amount had been sent from the Tyagi township of Jalalabad. Where Govind Bundele, the Maratha general was then present.

Abdali's Indo-Afghan Allies were loosing heart and to put reliance, he took a prompt.

Again, he describes :

“The news of Govind Ballal's advance up the Doab had spread consternation among the Indo-Afghans allies of Ahmad Shah for the safety of their defenceless homes....”⁸

Quoting Kashiraj and some other contemporaries, he further adds :

“Here [at Jalalabad] doom overtook them like a bolt of thunder from cloudless sky, in form of a body of five thousand newly arrived Durrani horse, led by Atai Khan and Karimdad Khan and guided by Najib's captain Karim Khan and some spies of that Ruhela chieftain, on 17th December.”⁹

Crossing the Yamuna both the lieutenants after covering 160 miles in one night and day, reached Shahdara about 4 o' clock in the evening of 16th December, 1760. They at once annihilated the Maratha post under Naro Shankar's deputy.

Early morning of 17th December, 1760, Afgan lieutenants destroyed the Maratha corp at Ghaziabad, and followed this victory up by immediately pushing on 10 miles northwards to Jalalabad and surprising Govind Ballal who was half nakedly engaged in his bath and personal cooking. According to the contemporary Balkrishna Dikshit's latter from Benares, Govind Ballal was beheaded. His head was taken to the Abdali who finally had sent it to Bhau as a triumphant proof of the downfall of his plan.¹⁰

On Govind Ballal's life and death, the historian remarks :

“On the sandy plain outside Jalalabad, Govind Ballal Bundele at last found that peace which had been denied to him in life.”¹¹

After the Battle was over, Ahmad Shah Abdali entered Delhi. Najib became regent and Mir Bakhshi. Few months later Najibuddaula plotted a conspiracy against the Raja of Kuchesar¹² and provoked the Chitsauna family of Dalal gotra to be in royal favours.¹³ On his initiation, the plot of conspiracy was drawn and one night the Kuchesar fort was attacked. The Tyagis gave tough resistance but could not find them equal to the royal artillery. And so finally those were defeated.¹⁴

Thus, the Jats of Dalal gotra became the master of Kuchesar fort. The Devi Mandir¹⁵ and the 'Sinhadwar' of the Tyagis fort, the

'gate'¹⁶ are the oldest structures and the very evidences of the former Raja who belonged to the Tyagi clan.

Writing about Bhual's decendent Chatar Singh, the fourth in the line of descents from him, Kuar Lachman Singh writes :

"Chatar Singh,... took service under Mirza Ali Beg, jagirdar of Chitsonah. He rose from a muqaddam to a sarbarahkar of the jagir, and on the jagirdar's death took advantage of the disorganization which then prevailed to make himself master of the estate."¹⁷

Chatar singh had two sons named Ramdhan Singh and Magni Ram who had once joined Bharatpur troops in the campaign undertaken by Jawahir Singh while he was trying his best to take revenge of his father's death.

Kuar further adds :

"Najib-ud-dowlah coerced Chater Singh to recall them. Being men of courage and influence he took them into favour, and conferring on them the tittle of Rao and the jagir of Mouzah Kuchesar, appointed them to the chormari office for nine of the surrounding parganahs."¹⁸

It seems that the Tyagis were not ready to leave their claim on Kuchesar, their ancestral seat. An evidence comes from the village of Barauli** and another from Makri, other seats of the Tyagis in Syana. The following piece of information suggests positively in this direction :

"After the reverses which the Bharatpur troops met in the campaign the Jat influence began to decline, and the merchants of Mouzhah Makri, near Sayanah [Syana], complained to Afrasiyab Khan, governor of Koil, of the oppression to which they had been subjected by Ramdhan and Magni Ram."¹⁹

Afrasiyab Khan²⁰ was one of the best lieutenants of Mirza Nazaf Khan,²¹ the then Mir Bakhshi. Najaf Khan was sole responsible for the decline of Bharatpur²². He was the person who had changed the name of the stronghold of the Jats from Ramgarh to Aligarh.²³

It will be appropriate to Have a look on Afrasiyab Khan's Position and capability. Writing about him, the historian records :

** An oral tradition still prevails to that effect in the whole of the region around Kuchesar. Barauli Tyagis were staunch supporters of their clansman the Tyagi Raja and later on those were also attacked and routed out. Those had to migrate from Barauli to another village named Bhataula on that episode. Their descendants are still residing there in the village of Bhataula, Post Sikarpur, District Bulandshahr, U.P.

“Najaf Khan’s extensive fiefs and the crownlands which he administered as regent of the empire were thus held by his agents at the time of his death: the Middle Doab (Aligarh and Jaleswar districts) by Afrasiyab Khan, Saharanpur with nominal right to the Karnal district across the Januna by Mirza Muhammad Shafi, Shekhawati and Mewat with its centre at Kanud by Najaf Quali Khan, and the Agra-Dholpur region including the conquests from the Jats by Muhammad Beg Hamdani. These districts now..., caused a paralysis of government for nearly a year (1782).”²⁴

Later on, on 9th April 1782, after these days of mourning Mirza Najaf’s death, Afrasiyab Khan was created regent (Mukhtar) and commander-in-chief (Mir Bakhshi, Amir-ul-umara). In this context, the eminent historian remarks :

“When the three days of mourning after Mirza Najaf’s death were over (9th April 1782), the emperor called to his presence all the leading military officers of his late general and asked them to sit down in the ante-room of the diwan-i-am and elect a new chief for themselves. they could not agree as the Mughalia captains refused to obey Afrasiyab Khan for having been born in Indian and a slave. The emperor next paid a visit of condolence to Najaf Khan’s sister and invited here to make the choice.”

She named Afrasiyab Khan. That noble was created regent (Mukhtar) and commander-in-chief (Mir Bakhshi, Amir-ul-umara) with the title of ‘Ashraf-ud-daulah’.²⁵

On Kuchesar and Makri episode, Afrasiyab took immediate action which has been recorded as follows :

“The governor invaded and sacked Kuchesar and took Ramdhan and Magni Ram prisoners. He confined them in the fort of Aligarh, but they made their escape and presented themselves before the commander of the Marhatta force at Ramghat, who appointed them to the Amilship of the parganahs about Muradabad.”²⁶

Both of the brothers tried their best to take Kuchesar back. Ultimately they could get the success about the year 1782²⁷. The Tyagi Raja’s descendants were routed out from the Kuchesar Fort.²⁸ Those were massacred at night while all of them were sleeping. The Gate-guards are told to commit treachery this time.

In this context, the following piece of information is quite relevant :

“At the latter [Moradabad] place they collected their adherents, and while Afrasiyab Khan was engaged in the measures for his own defence they recovered possession of Kuchesar. This occurred about the year 1782.”

“Just after three or four years of Kuchesar’s recovery Magni Ram, the chief of the Dalal family annual Jama of forty thousand rupees. The lease and jagir were confirmed by Mirza Akbar Shah, the heir-apparent of Shah Alam, in 1203 Hijri (1794 A.D.), and again by the British government in 1803.”²⁹

His seal and the amulet, which contained a description of the place where the treasure of the family was buried³⁰, remained in possession of his widow.

The treasure was said to be four crores of rupees, and Ramdhan Singh was anxious to get possession of it as well as of the seal.³¹

Ramdhan Singh, the elder brother was eagerly discovering any method if night be found to get the success. Finally the was come out in form of internal marital relation. Throwing light on the case, Kaur writes :

“The only condition on which the widow agreed to deliver the seal and amulet to her brother-in-law was that he should marry her. Ramdhan Singh accepted the condition, but as soon as he had obtained the coveted articles he repudiated it.”³²

Ramdhan’s family was cursed never to be happy³³. It was believed that because the family of Chatar Singh Dalal was arisen through treacherous acts and brutal massacre of the Tyagi Raja of Kuchesar, while all the family was sleeping. It had to remain cursed forever. There also prevails even an oral tradition which gives a hint to that effect that the Ramdhan’s ‘vansha’ would never survive. And few years later it became really so.³⁴

During the last decade of the eighteenth century, rise of Ramdhan Singh was still going on. He had received in 1790 Muqarrari lease of the Puth, Syana and Thana Farida parganas and talluqass of Datyana and Saidper. The following is the evidence :

“In 1790, he got from the king’s officers the muqarrari lease of the Parganahs of Puth, Sayanah, Thana Farida, and Talluqahs Datianah and Saidpur, besides the jagir of Kuchesar, an annual

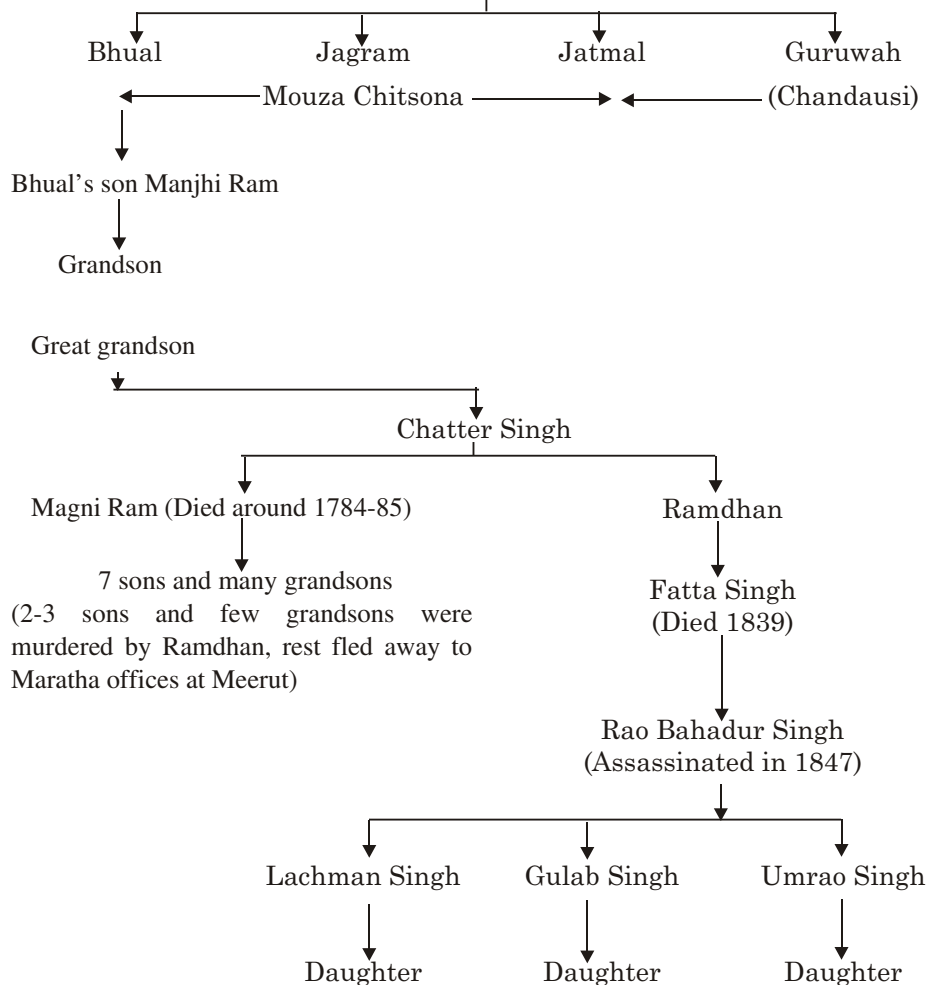
jama of forty thousand rupees. The lease and jagir were confirmed by Mirza Akbar Shah, the heir apparent of Shah Alam in 1203 Hijri (1794), and again by the British Government in 1803.”³⁵

Rao Ramdhan Singh was really a cruel man. Who plotted the assassination of his own real brother late Magni Ram’s sons and grandsons. He died in 1816, Nevill records :

“Ramdhan Singh died in prison in Meerut in 1816 and the grant was settled with the original proprietors, but the jagir of Kuchesar was given revenue free in perpetuity to his son Rao Fateh Singh, by Lord Moira in the same year.”³⁶

Mandoti family expelled from the village by the village panchayat³⁷

(On account of unknowingly killing of Brahman’s cow’s female calf)³⁸



Notes and References

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12. Interview. op. cit.
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18. Ibid.
19. Ibid.
20. Jadunath Sarkar, op. cit., 39, 56, 68, 71, 76, 77, 84, 96, 101.
21. Ibid.
22. Ibid.
23. Ibid., 68. Writes Jadunath Sarkar :

“From his sick bed in Delhi Mirza Najaf Khan sent his trusted lieutenants Afrasiyab Khan and Najaf Quli Khan into the middle Doab and Mewat respectively for attacking the Jat possessions there. The former conquered parganahs Sadabad, Jewar etc. and after a three months’ siege secured the capitulation of Ramgarh, the strongest Jat fort in the Doab, by a money composition (April 1775) and named it Aligarh after the patron saint of these Shias.”

24. Jadunath Sarkar, op. cit., p.145.
25. Ibid., 146.
26. Kuar Lachman Singh, op. cit., 173.
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