

Chaudhary Zabardast Khan : An Unknown Hero of 1857 in UP

Vighnesh Kumar* and Sheetal Tyagi**

Hapur, a district head-quarters in the division of Meerut in Uttar Pradesh played an important role during the Indian Revolution of 1857. The township has a number of muhallas inhabited by both the Hindu Tyagis as well as their Muslim Tyagis brethren, having been converted during the Later Mughal period. Both of them belong to the Bhadsiyani Shasan of the Gautam gotra who are told to be owner of 360 villages around Hapur. Chaudhary Zabardast Khan, the Muslim Tyagi leader of Bhandra Patti, Hapur played one of the most effective roles as a best friend of Nawab Walidad Khan of Malagarh Fort who had been considered the worst opponent to the East India Company. Later on, Chaudhary Zabardast Khan along with his all the six brothers was captured and executed at the Chauraha, now near the tehsili at a point on the Bulandshahr Road, Hapur.

* Professor, Department of History, Chaudhary Charan Singh University, Meerut, Uttar Pradesh (India) E-mail: <vighneshkmr@gmail.com>

** Research Scholar, Department of History, Himalyan Garhwal University, Shiv Nagar, Pokhra, Uttarakhand (India).

JOURNAL OF NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT, Vol. 35, No. 2 (Winter), 2022
Peer Reviewed, Indexed & Refereed International Research Journal

Every year a one month Shaheed Mela is held at Hapur in the holy memory of the Martyrs of Hapur who had laid down their lives opposing the foreign rule.

[Keywords : Indian revolution of 1857, Bhandra Patti, Taga Sarai, Asaura, Gautam gotra, East India Company, Gulaothi, Subedarship of the Provinces of Aligarh and Bulandshahr, Babugarh]

The district of Hapur is a newly formed district in the division of Meerut though its head-quarters of same name. Hapur was declared a newly formed district by Ms. Mayawati, the then Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh on 28 September, 2011 giving it the name of 'Panchsheel Nagar'. This name was changed by the then newly elected Chief Minister Shri Akhilesh Yadav in July 2012. He renamed the district as the 'Hapur District' after the name of the township of Hapur.

Hapur is the township having its foundation in the end of the first millennium of the Common Era. It is said that it was founded by a Dor King named 'Hardutta'. After his name it was called Harpur which in due course of time turned into 'Hapur' which is an easier pronunation.¹ Raja Hardutta is told to found Hapur in 983 C.E.² He had faced Mahmud Ghazanvi attacks on his region.³

During the time of Chauhan ruler Prathviraj, Dor Raja Chandrasen was ruling on the geographical area from Meerut to Aligarh.⁴ He was attacked and finally having been pressed hard. The Hindus were giving resistance from the forts of Meerut and Baran. Finally those were killed at Baran though by treachery of king's own cousin named Ajay Pal 'Lamba' who was rewarded by Muhammad Ghori's slave general Qutubuddin Aibaq in 1193.⁵ Since then the present area of the district of Hapur fell into the control of the Turk invaders, though a series of the continuous resistance given by the Hindus of these districts has been observed. The local people were not willing to bear the intolerant policies of the foreign Turks. This seems to be applicable on the Turk rulers of both the Sultanate and the Mughal periods.

The geographical area of the present district of Hapur remained important even during the East India Company's rule.⁶ A number of heroes of Hapur and nearby villages gave armed resistance to General Gerard Lake's forces. These were solely supporting the Indian cause under the command of Rama Rao, the Maratha captain of Malagarh Fort.⁷ Malagarh is situated on the left bank of River Kali and is well known because of its very strong fort.⁸

The Malagarh Fort also had a strategical position for the Marathas to safeguard Delhi in the last quarter of the nineteenth century.⁹

Madho Rao Phalkia, the Maratha captain posted at Malagarh Fort had to maintain good relations with the local chieftains of the area.¹⁰ The larger portion of the Hapur was under Asaura (the Asaura Riyasat) and the other chieftains of the clan, now known as the Tagas or the Tyagis. One Chaudhary Shyam Singh Tyagi was conferred on the title of the 'Chaudhary Paragana' by Emperor Muhammad Shah 'Rangila'.¹¹

The historic clan of the Tyagis of Asaura was so strong in the eleventh century CE that those had murdered Raja Hardutta.¹² Those days he was ruling over the area.¹³ The Tyagis of Asaura had attacked and killed the Raja in the fort of Hapur in the first quarter the eleventh century. The incident took place some where in the time bracket from 1017 to 1025 C.E. Raja Hardutta's son and successor did not try to take revenge of his father's murder. This evidence shows the strength and importance of the Tyagi clan in the early decades of the eleventh century C.E. They were remained untouched. These are Brahmins of Gautam gotra and are called as the 'Bhadsiyans'.¹⁴

This family branched out and founded a number of settlements including those of the Bharai Muhalla, Taga Sarai and Bhandra Patti - all the colonies the old township of Hapur and the villages of Achheja, Chamri, Sabli and few more. The branch of Taga Sarai and Bhandra Patti had to face religious conversion much late though the original village of Asaura had undergone the conversion some more years earlier.¹⁵

Actually the Bhandra Patti and the Taga Sarai are closer to each other and during the Later Mughals they had been facing the religious conversion. As the case fit for the division of property, they had disputes among them.¹⁶ It was some where in the eighteenth fifties. Prior to it the elder brother had given the ancestral buildings to the younger one and had settled in the adjoining border that is the Taga Sarai muhalla.¹⁷ In next generation they were at very good terms and same was during their third generation. But it could not remain same as there arose a family dispute on some proprietary rights over some villages in their possessions. At this juncture Chaudhary Roop Ram, the uncle (Chachajan) and Chaudhary Zabardast Khan, the nephew (Bhatije Raja) were seen against each other.¹⁸ It was whispered that at least at three different occasions

Chaudhary Zabardast Khan had attempted to kill his Chachajan Chaudhary Roop Ram.¹⁹ The last incident is noticed in the oral tradition that Chaudhary Roop Ram was aware of his nephew's ill intension and had started sleeping at night in the campus of the Radha Krishna Temple while on his bed at the roof of his home he was in practice to put two pillows length-wise on bed and giving to them one chadar so that all his households had to take the impression that Chaudhary Saheb was sleeping at his home as usual. Once in a summer at one dark night it happened that Chaudhary Zabardast Khan, taking naked sward in his had entered the house through its roof and seeing his Chachajan Chaudhary Room Ram on his bed, he attacked.²⁰ It was quite dark. He could not understand that there was Chaudhary sleeping or not. He and few of his brothers were satisfied making Chaudhary Roop Ram's end but when in the morning their informers gave them the information about Chaudhary Sahib being quite well, they were deadly ashamed. Till then they were even not on talking terms but the 'muh-lagey' households were taking liberty in terms of getting money and provisions. Chaudhary Roop Ram was very influential personality while Chaudhary Zabardast Khan was quite equal to him in persona but slight dark in colour having 'Badi Mata ke Daag' on his face. He was tall, few inches more than six fit, brave and smart but his mind was totally against his uncle Chaudhary Roop Ram. In open, he was to maintain his high family reputation and has broader prestigious position among all the Bhadsaan Tyagis of 360 villages. So what attempts he had made might be caused to loose his high social status. So both the parties, though knowing the naked truth, were showing as if nothing wrong was there in their family. It was the need of the hour to which the khandani family was going through. Disputed villages were of different nature, some being crown lands and so directly related to the Mughal Emperor Bahadur Shah 'Zafar'.

The temple between the Taga Sarai and the Bhandra Patti built by Chaudhary Roop Ram still exists there at Hapur. The Chaupal of Chaudhary Zabardast Khan is still being used for community functions and ceremonies. The descendants of both the uncle and his nephew still live with love and togetherness as well.²¹

During the Indian Revolution of 1857, Chaudhary Zabardast took Indian side.²² He was in close terms with Nawab Walidad Khan whose neice through his elder sister had been married with Prince

Jawan Bakht, the son of Emperor Bahadur Shah and Begum Zeenat Mahal. Thus he had an effective approach directly to the Emperor. He was expecting a lot thinking of receiving royal favours through that channel.²³

And really, he was right. As a matter of fact Nawab Walidad Khan had his bestly trusted friend in him. In Nawab's son's marriage party, it was Chaudhary Zabardast Khan who was there at Muzaffarnagar to perform the rituals of bridegroom's father in absence of Nawab Walidad.²⁴

On 10th day of May, 1857 the Revolution out broke at Meerut and soon it had expended in all the directions.²⁵ On 11th May Emperor Bahadur Shah (though forcefully)²⁶ accepted to lead it. Soon the city of Delhi and the Red Fort became important. Those days Nawab Walidad Khan of Malagarh was not at Malagarh Fort but he had been there in Delhi and so as an eyewitness to 1857 at beginning at Delhi and the Red Fort. He saw almost all of the events being occurred. After two weeks, he appeared in his district along with a royal Farman in which he had been assigned the subedarship of the Provinces of Aligarh and Bulandshahr including the neighbouring areas by the Mughal Emperor.²⁷

On the other hand, Mr. Sapte, the Collector and Magistrate of Bulandshahr had some intelligence that Walidad Khan was provoking the people at large against the rule of the East India Company.²⁸ So taking its notice, he wrote a letter to Walidad Khan not to do what was reported. The correspondence between the two has its historical importance being the primary source in nature relating to 1857.²⁹

Walidad Khan was assisted by the Rajputs and the Gujars considerably from the inner side of the district while at Hapur he had already his best friend in Chaudhary Zabardast Khan.³⁰

Chaudhary Zabardast had six more brothers and one sister.³¹ Being the eldest brother, he was the head of the family after his father's death. He bravely made some plans to effectively assist Nawab Walidad Khan's forces. He had made all the necessary arrangements to control the Hapur and nearby area upto the middle of both the sides of the highway between Hapur and Gulaothi and similarly that of Hapur and Meerut. Hapur being in Meerut district was on the strategic position being situated on Ambala-Meerut-Agra-highway as well as Delhi-Garhmukteshwar-Moradabad-

Rampur-Bareilly-highway. One more important road led to Delhi via Sarawa, Begamabad and Loni increased its importance.

It is interesting to note that Walidad Khan's presence in the district caused a fear in the minds of the British officers. It is evident from the paragraph number 361 of the 'Report' sent to the Commissioner of Meerut by the Collector of Bulandshahr. It is as follows³² :

“It was very distressing not to be able to respond to the repeated calls for assistance, but our hands were completely tied by the presence of Nawab Wuleedad Khan, who had a strong mud Fort, Malagurh, about 4 miles from the station. This man was a near relation of ex-King of Delhi, with whom he was staying when the outbreak occurred; but he had returned to Malagurh, about 26th May, deputed by the ex-King as Soobah of the Provinces of Boolundshuhur and Allygurh, which fact he himself admitted to me, but himself by saying, unless he had come out under some such pretense he would not have been able to escape from Delhi, which he had been detained an unwilling guest of the King.”

In his next paragraph, he further mentions³³ :

“Not withstanding his profession of loyalty, I suspected him from the very first, as he had brought with him a considerable number of mutinous sepoy and Nujeebs, and had, I knew, several guns; and I heard on all sides he was mediating treachery. His presence at Malagurh completely paralyzed us; the moment we moved out any way from the stations, we felt convinced he would at once have come down, and with his guns would easily have prevented our return, and thus cut off communication with Allyugrh and Agra, - the sole object of our holding Boolundshuhur.”

Writing about the interior of the district of Bulandshahr, he writes³⁴ :

“Reports from the interior of the District In fact, with the exception of the Malagurh man no person of consequence than gave us any uneasiness”

Walidad Khan was to take Gulaothi so that communication upto Hapur could be made easy and thus the Indian side could have an upper hand. It was to serve the purpose in more effective and wider way to take the Delhi-Garhmukteshwar highway in own

control that had to be resulted in safe travelling from the Bareilly side from where new enforcement was to be warm welcome in Delhi.

If Gulaothi had been captured, the rest was the work of Chaudhary Zabardast Khan. This strategic position of Hapur can be benefitted after taking Gulaothi in their control. On the other side the British side was simultaneously trying its best not to loose Gulaothi at all. It can be understood from what has been reported in para. no. 376. It is as follows³⁵ :

“The next day Wulleedad Khan threw a strong picket into Gulowtee, our Police of course having to fly. Our little party went to Baboogurh, the stud station, about 4 miles from Hauppur towards the Ganges, and from which we could watch the Ghat at Garhmookteesur, for which we now had ascertained for a certainty the rebel troops from the Rohilkhand station were making.”

And really it was the 18th day of June, 1857 when a force under Major Thatcher came out from Meerut. Taking this newly arrived force, a fresh attack on Gulaothi was planned and executed. For a while it seemed that Chaudhary Zabardast Khan had to retreat but soon all the followers had joined each other and Gulaothi was regained by them. In this courageous event, the role of Hapur warriors under the command of Chaudhary was noticed unparallel.

Till then Walidad Khan was the real master of the area and this historical fact is mentioned as follows³⁶ :

“Wulleedad Khan, of Malagurh became master of the Boolundshuhur district.”

Just after a period of one complete month from the date of the outbreak of the Indian Revolution of 1857, Walidad became the master of the Bulandshahr District on 10th June, 1857.³⁷

The planning for taking the area right from Hathras upto the outskirts of Meerut was the role cum of Indian side under the leadership of Walidada Khan which was to be expended thus from Gulaothi to Meerut by Chaudhary Zabardast Khan and his allies. Chaudhary Hardayal Singh³⁸ of the riyasat family of Asaura and dozens other were ready to take the arms up against the British. The gun was ready at the Burj point Asaura under the leadership of Chaudhary Hardayal Singh.³⁹ The Tyagis, the Rajputs and the Giyars at large were designing and trying the their best to execute the revolutionary plan.

But due to the Fall of Delhi on 20th September 1857, the revolutionary cause was met a great disaster. Indian revolutionaries still were holding the stations of Bulandshahr, Aligarh, Khurja, Hapur and a number of to other. The Jhansi Brigade was also doing its best in this area assisting the revolutionaries. The following piece of information is worth mention in this context⁴⁰ :

“We reached Boolundshuhur on the morning of the 28th [September 1857]. It would be useless for me to describe the action, which was fought on that day and which ended in the complete route out of the Jhansi Brigade, posted in a strong position to oppose our entrance to the Station.”

On the 28th day of September, 1857 at the end of a three hour fierce battle at Bulandshahr, the revolutionaries had to loose the station.⁴¹ Their 2 guns were also recovered. Mr. Lyall attached to the ‘Watron’s Horse’ ha been mentioned for this bravery in the dispatch of Major Ovary, Commanding the Cavalry portion in this battle.⁴²

The revolutionary plan conceived remained an aborted effort because of the Fall of Delhi. The British blow up the Malagarh Fort on 1st October, 1857 by lieutenant Home, of the Engineers, in person himself died in that.⁴³

At Hapur Chaudhary Zabardast Khan and all of his sin younger brothers were captured and killed. Chaudhary Hardayal Singh was also captured and was brought on the site of their execution the very people tree from which the dead bodies were hung there. Chaudhary Roop Ram with the help of some baniya could bargain with the British Officer to forgive Chaudhary Hardayal Singh. On it, Chaudhary’s minor son Debi Singh, giving a lot of money in silver and gold, remained successful to make the release of his father possible.⁴⁴ The brutality of the British during 1857-58 was seen on its worst which was a common phenomenon observed in all the district of the than North-Western Provinces now known as the Uttar Pradesh.⁴⁵

Notes and References

1. A. Fuhrer, *The Monumental Antiquities and Inscriptions in the North Western Provinces of Agra and Oudh*, Allahabad, 1891, p. 10; Edwin T. Etkinson, *Statistical Descriptive and Historical Account of North Western Provinces of India*, Vol. III Part B. Allahabad : Govt. Press, p. 384.

2. Ibid.
3. Henry Miers Elliot and John Dowson, *History of India as told by its own Historians*, Vol. II pp. 320, 414, 458; E. B. Joshi, *Uttar Pradesh District Gazetteers Meerut*, Lucknow : Department of District Gazetteers, Govt. of UP. Govt. Branch Press, 1965, pp. 30-31.
4. Vighnesh Kumar, *Meerut Ke Panch Hazar Varsha*, Meerut : Hastinapur Research Institute, 1996, p. 95.
5. Ibid.
6. Richhpal Singh Tyagi, *Hapur ka Swatantrata Sangharsha ka Itihas* (in Hindi), 1976, p. 106.
7. Interview, 23.05.2005 Late Shri Krishna Kumar Tyagi alias Kisso Babu (73 years), Asaura, [then in the district of Ghaziabad], Distt. Hapur, UP.
8. Vighnesh Kumar, *1857 in 1857 : Original Mutiny Narratives*, Vol I, Meerut : Hastinapur Research Institute, Meerut, 2013 p. 89
9. Vighnesh Kumar and Mudit Kumar, *1857 ka Viplava* (in Hindi), Meerut : Hastinapur Research Institute, 2008, pp. 138-49.
10. Kuar Lachman Singh, *Historical and Statistical Memoir of Zila Bulandshahr, North-Western Provinces*, Allahabad : Government Press, 1874, p. 18.
11. Vighnesh Kumar, *Ghaziabad ke Char Hazar Varsha*, Meerut : Hastinapur Research Institute, 2006, facing page 220.
12. Ibid., p. 39; Edwin T. Atkinson.
13. H. R. Nevill, *Bulandshahr : A Gazetteer being volume V of the District Gazetteers of the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh*, Lucknow : Government Branch Press, 1920, p. 142-44.
14. Interview, 20.05.2004, Faseeh Chaudhary, Bharat Gun House, Hapur, and some 3 dozen more persons of the muhallas mentioned.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid.
20. Interview, 20.10.2022, Chaudhary Margoob Tyagi, one of the direct descendants of Chaudhary Zabardast Khan, Samayra Colony, Bulandshahr Road, Hapur, U.P. and some more than 50 descendants of Chaudhary Zabardast Khan, Bhandra Patti, Hapur, U.P.
21. Ibid.
22. Ibid.
23. Ibid.
24. Interview, 20.10.2022, Chaudhary Margoob Tyagi direct descendant of Chaudhary Zabardast Khan, Samayra Colony, Bulandshahr Road,

- Hapur, U.P. and some more than 50 descendants of Chaudhary Zabardast Khan, Bhandra Patti, Hapur, U.P.
25. Jawahar Lal Nehru, *The Discovery of India*, (First Published by The Signet Press Calcutta, 1946), *Jawahar Lal Nehru Memorial Fund Teen Murti House*, New Delhi, First Impression 1981, Nineteenth Impression 1999, p. 325; Vighnesh Kumar, *Smarika, Three Day International Seminar on Hastinapur and Kuru-Panchal through the Ages 3000 B.C.- 2000 A.D.*, Meerut : Hastinapur Research Institute, 2003, pp. 63-64; Vighnesh Kumar, *Exploring 1857*, Meerut : Hastinapur Research Institute, 2011, pp. 24-25; Vighnesh Kumar, *1857 IN 1857*, op. cit., pp. 42-44.
 26. B. R. Agarwala, *Trials or Independence (1858-1946)*, New Delhi : National Book Trust India, First Edition 1991, Reprint 2001, pp. 1-9.
 27. Ibid.
 28. Ibid.
 29. Vighnesh Kumar and Mudit Kumar, op.cit.
 30. Ibid., pp. 87-91.
 31. Ibid.
 32. Vighnesh Kumar, 1857 in 1857, op. cit., p. 84.
 33. Ibid.
 34. Ibid., p. 85.
 35. Ibid., p. 87.
 36. *Narrative of Events Regarding the Mutiny in India, 1857-58*, Vol. I, Calcutta, 1881, Paragraph no. 257; Vighnesh Kumar, op. cit., p. 61.
 37. Vighnesh Kumar, op cit., p. 86.
 38. Vighnesh Kumar and Mudit Kumar, op. cit.; Vighnesh Kumar, *Uttar Pradesh ke Swatantrata Senani Chaudhary Raghbir Narayan Singh (Asahayog Andolan se Meerut Adhiveshan Tak)*, Meerut : Hastinapur Research Institute, 2009, p. 1.
 39. Ibid.
 40. Vighnesh Kumar, op. cit., p. 88.
 41. Ibid., p. 89.
 42. Ibid.
 43. Ibid.
 44. Ibid.
 45. Vighnesh Kumar, *The Baraon Estate (A Brief History)*, Meerut : Hastinapur Research Institute, 2010, pp. 17-20. ★