

## Revisiting “Anglo-Rajput Return to Bijnor” in 1857-58 through Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan’s Tarikh-i-Sarkashi-i-Zila Bijnor

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*Quoting G. B. Malleson, Hafeez Malik mentions a term- ‘Anglo-Rajput Return to Bijnor’ to show the defeat of Nawab Mahmud Khan and his nephew Ahmad Allah Khan’s Jehadi Party during Indian Revolution 1857-58 in Bijnor District of the Rohilkhand Division. The scholar has taken the Chaudharies i.e., the Hindu Chieftains mistakenly as Rajputs, though the fact is some different. The first and foremost among the energetic Hindu chieftains was Chaudhary Pratap Singh, who himself was not a Rajput. He belonged to Tyagi Brahmans. The Chaudhary of Nihtaur, Chaudhary of Seohara, Chaudharies of Ratangarh and Chandpur were all Tyagis. Chaudharies of Bijnor: Nain Singh and Jodh Singh belonged to Jat community while Chaudhary of Kanth was a Bishnoi. Chaudharies of*

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**JOURNAL OF NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT, Vol. 36, No. 2 (Winter), 2023  
Peer Reviewed, Indexed & Refereed International Research Journal**

Rajput origin were only those of Sherkot and Haldaur. In the light of these facts a suitable term may be “Anglo-Jehad Victims Return to Bijnor”.

**[Keywords :** G.B. Malleson, Hafeez Malik, Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan, *Tarikh-i-Sarkashi-i-Zila Bijnor*, Anglo-Rajput Return to Bijnor, Jehad, Mareh Khan, Ahmad Allah Khan, Tajpur, Haldaur, Bijnor, Sherkot, Kanth, Nehtaur, Seohara, Nagina, Najibabad, Chandpur, Ratangarh, Nawab Mahmud Khan, Bhambu Khan, Rohilkhand]

Writing about Rohilkhand in “Introduction” of his transliteration of Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan’s *Tarikh-i-Sarkashi-i-Zila Bijnor*, a book in Urdu, Hafeez Malik, quoting G. B. Malleson, throws light on the fact relating to Indian Revolution of 1857 categorizing it into ‘Anglo-Rajput Return to Bijnor’. He comments<sup>1</sup> :

“Rohilkhand was the only region in Northern India where the British were routed during the Revolt. Again, while reading Sir Sayyid’s pleas for help, one should recall that the British had postponed their assault on Rohilkhand purely for tactical reasons to concentrate their strength advantageously, they were obliged to give priority attention to the outbreaks in Oudh and in Delhi itself. The campaign to retake Rohilkhand, when it came in April 1858, was easy.”

Again, he remarks<sup>2</sup> :

“The British district officials returned to Bijnor for triumphal entry with the Hindu chiefs who had continued their struggle against the Pathan rebels. The spectacle of this joint Anglo-Rajput return to Bijnor was a detail which Sir Sayyid could not bring himself to record in his own book.”

In fact, historically it is not right to impose the postulate ‘Anglo-Rajput return to Bijnor’. In the district of Bijnor, there were following most prominent Hindu chieftains, who, being pressurized by the *Jehad* of Mareh Khan and Ahmad Allah Khan, came forward with arms to resist them to save the general Hindu public.<sup>3</sup>

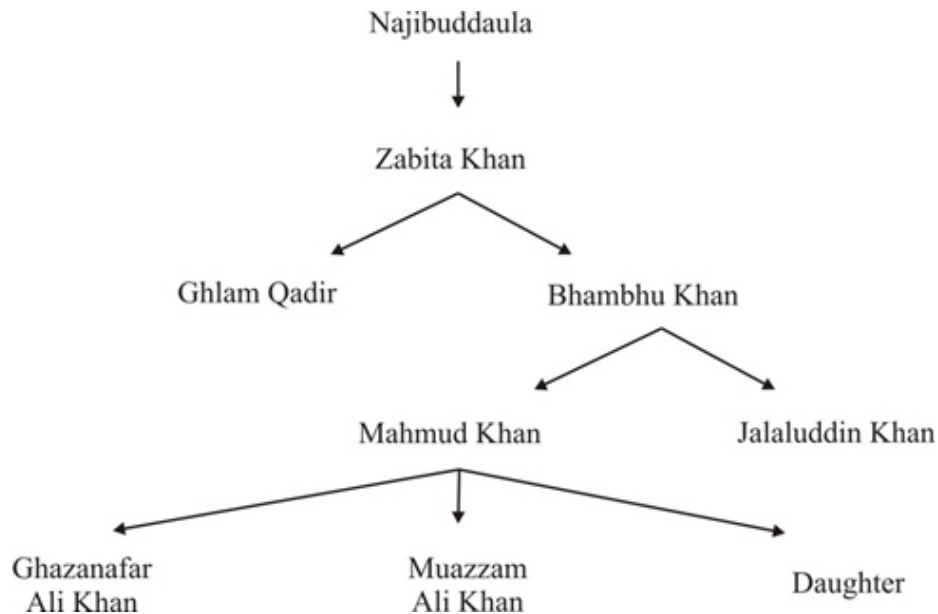
The Chaudharies of the district of Bijnor, who tried their best in their different capacities to save the Hindus from the fury of *Jehad* during 1857-58 can be listed as follows :

Tajpur <sup>4</sup>	Chaudhary Partab [Pratap] Singh	Tyagi Brahman
Haldaur <sup>5</sup>	Chaudhary Randhir Singh	Rajput
	Chaudhary Budh Singh	Rajput
	Chaudhary Maharaj Singh	Rajput

Bijnor <sup>6</sup>	Chaudhary Nain Singh Chaudhary Jodh Singh	Jat Jat
Sherkot <sup>7</sup>	Chaudhary Umrao Singh [Golden Bird] Chaudhary Shivraj Singh Chaudhary Basant Singh	Rajput Rajput Rajput
Kanth <sup>8</sup>	Chaudhary Narain Sahai*	Bisnoi
Nehtaur <sup>9</sup>	Chaudhary Laikhraj Singh Chaudhary Man Singh	Tyagi Brahman Tyagi Brahman
Seohara <sup>10</sup>	Chaudhary of Seohara	Tyagi Brahman
Nagina <sup>11</sup>	Bishnois of Nagina	Bisnoi
Chandpur <sup>12</sup>	Chaudhary of Chandpur	Tyagi Brahman
Ratangarh <sup>13</sup>	Chaudhary Ummed Singh Chaudhary Sitaram	Tyagi Brahman Tyagi Brahman

During Indian Revolution of 1857, the division of Rohilkhand, having its divisional headquarters at Bareilly was consisted of 6 districts named Bareilly, Shahjahanpur, Pilibhit, Badaun, Moradabad and Bijnor including Rampur District which was a princely state in this division.

The Bareilly District was the first to declare independence under the leadership of Khan Bahadur Khan. It was taken as a catalyst in the district of Bijnor by Mahmud Khan, the eldest son of Bhambu Khan<sup>14</sup>. The genealogical table is given below<sup>15</sup> :



Under the newly founded Nawab’s regime, the prominent personalities posted at the responsible positions for the district administration should also be looked upon as follows<sup>16</sup> :

Mahmud Khan	the Nawab
Azmat Allah Khan	the Nawab’s Deputy
Ahmad Allah Khan	Joint Magistrate (Nawab’s nephew)
Ahmad Yar Khan <i>alias</i> “Kallan Khan”	Commander-in-Chief
Habib Allah Khan	Paymaster
Muhammad Abd Allah Khan	<i>Tehsildar</i> of Nagina

During 1857, there were 62 Government employees in the district, among them 3 were Covenanted officers<sup>17</sup>:

Mr. Alexander Shakespear, Collector and District Magistrate (His wife and father were also there in his family at Bijnor).

Mr. George Palmer, Joint Magistrate and Mr. John Curie Crawford Wilson, Judge and Special Commissioner.

Among 5 Uncovenanted ones, the ‘English writers’, there were 4 Europeans named Lemaistre, Head Clerk in the Magistrate’s office; Johnson, clerk; Murphy, clerk in the Prosecution Division (his wife and 4 sons); Hewitt (not a regular employee) and one Babu Kali Charan, English writer in the Collectorate. In the list of ‘Infirmarary’, Dr. Knight, Civil Surgeon and Babu Tara Chandar Sen, Indian doctor at the infirmarary are named.

Listed in the “Uncovenanted Indian Officers”, there are 4 persons on a Serial nos. 11, 12, 13 and 14. On serial no. 11 is given the name of Muhammed Rahmat Allah Khan, Deputy Collector and Deputy Magistrate, on 12 is Sayyid Ahmad Khan, *Sadr Amin* [sub-judge], then on 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> are Pandit Kalka Prasad, *Munsif* of Nagina, and Imad Hussain, *Munsif* of Dhampur [belonging to the family of Hafiz Rahmat Khan of Bareilly] respectively.

Next, under the title of “(V) Tehisldars [a *tehsil* is a sub-district] there are 5 names. On Sr. no. 15 is mentioned the name of Turab Ali, *Tehsildar* of Bijnor, who was honorably reinstated to his position). On 16 is the name of Sayyid Qasim Ali, *Tehsildar* of Chandpur (was reinstated to his position), on Sr. No. 17 is Maulvi Sayyid Qadir Ali, *Tehsildar* of Nagina (was reinstated to his position); then on 18 is Sadiq Ali Khan, *Tehsildar* of Dhampur (absent); and on Sr. No. 19 is

mentioned the name of Ahmad Allah Khan, *Tehsildar* of Najibabad, a nephew of Nawab Mahmud Khan (a rebel).

It is a fact of greater historical value that in the beginning of Nawab's rule over the Bijnor District, Nawab Mahmud Khan and his nephew Ahmad Allah Khan, both, were eagerly waiting for the Hindu - support, though the representative of the Hindus at Bijnor were there in persons of Chaudhary Nain Singh and Chaudhary Jodh Singh. Both the Chaudharies were already suspicious to Nawab's intension. To bring these Hindu representatives in Bijnor, out of suspicion, firstly Ahmad Allah Khan went to the Chaudharies to make every assurance that the Nawab would remain unharmed to them. One more step ahead, Ahmad promised them to remain united against the British. He then got success in getting the Chaudharies' assurance. The Chaudharies came into alliance by taking oath on holy Ganga-water but they clearly refused to go to attend the Nawab at the Collectorate. Ahmad, then putting seal on the *Qur'an*<sup>18</sup> took oath of fidelity and mutual alliance in the ensuing war against the East India Company's rule. This worked in the right direction and both the Chaudharies agreed to go to Nawab alongwith him. Again, both the Nawab and Ahmad Allah Khan putting seal on the *Qur'an*<sup>19</sup>, took oath for never to harm, but to support each other in the ensuing war of 1857 against the British forces.

Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan, in the very starting of his book *Tarikh-i-Sarkashi-i-Zila Bijnor*, in its "Chapter I-Spread of the Mutiny" mentions one Chaudhary Pratab Singh *Rais* of Tajpur in the first line of third paragraph. Mentioning the date of 16<sup>th</sup> May, 1857 in second paragraph, he describes again in the para<sup>20</sup> :

"On the same day [16<sup>th</sup> may, 1857] sixteen thousand rupees that Chaudhari Partab Singh, *Rais* of Tajpur had sent to Bijnor to meet his assessment was taken into treasury."

The aforesaid Chaudhary Partap Singh is not of a Rajput origin. He was the most leading Tyagi Brahman *jagirdar*<sup>21</sup> who belonged to the Kashyap *gotra* and had a graceful ancestry, relating to one Raja Bachhraj Tyagi, whose historical important as Governor of Amroha goes back to the Prathviraj III of the Chauhan dynasty of Ajmer-Delhi.

Undoubtedly Chaudhary Pratab Singh, *Rais* of Tajpur belonged to the Tyagi, a class having only limited higher gotras of the Brahmins.<sup>22</sup> He was a Tyagi and not of a Rajput origin.

In the same chapter, below just one paragraph, Sir Sayyid describes about the arrangement of the security of the city of Bijnor as follows<sup>23</sup> :

“The Magistrate had begun to make proper plans for the disturbances. Regular army sowars (troopers) on leave in Bijnor were called to duty; irregular troopers were also hired, while police officers were instructed in writing to increase the number of constables to an appropriate degree. To protect the city itself, Chaudhari Nain Singh, *Rais* of Bijnor, was authorized to maintain regular night patrolling.”

About the night patrolling job assumed by Chaudhary Nain Singh, he further mentions<sup>24</sup> :

“Accordingly, he [Chaudhary Nain Singh of Bijnor city] was doing so; in addition, Mr. Alexander Shakespear, the Collector and Magistrate, and Mr. George Palmer shared in these night patrols and surveillance.”

Throwing light in point no. 10, “Additional Plans for Bijnor and Bijnor District”, he further writes about Chaudhary Nain Singh<sup>25</sup>:

“Rebelliousness grew in the District after the jailbreak... Accordingly the Collector, with the help of Chaudhari Nain Singh, hired two hundred [200] men to put up pickets in different places and block the roads about the city.”

To meet out the challenge what a wise plan was selected by the Collector is thus described by Sir Sayyid<sup>26</sup> :

“Among those selected for this work were Shafi Allah Khan, brother of the wretch Ahmad Allah Khan and Sa’d Allah Khan *Rais* of Barhapur and also a former police deputy in Nagina. These men were honourable, and they had at their call many Pathan soldiers, companions, and members of their brotherhood. It also served a useful purpose for our weakened administration to take heed of them and win their gratitude. It could turn them into well-wishers of the authority and, in addition, divert the attention of those who might otherwise stir up trouble in the District... All the Hindu and Muslim *Rais* of Nagina issued a joint request that Nathe Khan, the wood merchant, should be put in charge of patrolling, with a suitable Company of men. Perhaps if they had not made this request, Nathe Khan would then, as a leader of ill-disposed, have

started to create trouble. This request was accordingly granted; and the order to petrol was given to Nathe Khan.”

Appreciating Mr. Alexander Shakespear’s vision, he further writes<sup>27</sup> :

“It is clear from this entire report that our District Magistrate was not deficient in foresight, that each and every plan he adopted was valid and popular. Indeed, a better plan than his could not be devised.”

The last days of May came and went. The night patrol of the city of Bijnor was under the supervision of Chaudhary Nain Singh as well. On first day of June, Mahmud Khan, the Nawab came there from Najibabad. He was an uninvited guest. In the meantime, Chaudhary Pratap Singh had a long discussion with the District Magistrate.

Going through the “Chapter III Transfer of Power to Nawab Mahmud Khan”, the starting heading is [Point no.] “I- Rejection of Administration by the Chaudharies”. In it, he further mentions:

“At that time there was no way out except to hand over the District to that wretch Mahmud Khan, but our Collector, considering the need for prudence and perhaps for the sake of some indirect advantage, asked Chaudhari Randhir Singh, *Rais* of Haldaur, and Chaudhari Pratab Singh, *Rais* of Tajpur, if they would be able to carry on the administration. They had to admit their incapacity for this task.”<sup>28</sup>

The District Gazetteer, in this episode, records<sup>29</sup> :

“He [Collector] had previously ascertained that the Chaudharis were utterly unable to hold the country against Mahmud Khan, and had consequently made over charge to the Nawab, enjoining him to protect all private and public property, and to keep an account of the money expended, but not to collect revenue.”

In the night of 6-7 June 1857, Mr. Alexander Shakespear, the Magistrate handed the charge of the district over to Nawab Mahmud Khan. Assuming the charge Mahmud Khan left the Collector’s office at once. It was around 3:00 am. And surprisingly, before the dawn, the people of Bijnor heard the ‘*Munadi*’ on cattle-drum to the effect<sup>30</sup> :

*“Khalq Khuda ka, Mulk Badshah ka,  
Huqam Nawab Mahmud Khan Bahadur ka”.*

But watching the movements of Nawab's men and their misdoings to several Hindu villages on the way from Najibabad to Bijnor, the Chaudharies were alarmed. In Point no. "13 Sending of the Treasure to Najibabad, the Treasurer under Guard, and Chaudhri Nain Singh's Resistance to the Nawab", Sir Sayyid describes<sup>31</sup>:

"Ahmad Allah Khan began at this time to take out the balance of the official treasure from its hiding place in the well; he sent a part of the treasure to Najibabad. Now Mahmud Khan began to harry and oppose each of the landlords. He sent Sawai Singh Jat with a large detachment to the house of Jamiat Singh Brahman, *Rais* of Bijnor, to search for a lady called Panna Patthar. He also called Chaudhari Jodh Singh, *Rais* of Bijnor, who held on deposit the effects of Lamaistre, to come to him...."

From the start of these events, Chaudhary Nain Singh and Chaudhary Jodh Singh, *Raises* of Bijnor, determined to oppose the Nawab. They gathered men from the villages; thousands of villagers gathered in Bijnor.

Taking into notice the large number gathered under the leadership of the Chaudharies Nain Singh and Jodh Singh, Nawab Mahmud Khan and his nephew Ahmad Allah Khan took a diplomatic 'U' turn to keep the Chaudharies silent or supportive to the Nawab's cause until their full preparation would not kept secret.

Both of the uncle and nephew took a 'U' turn. It is thus recorded<sup>32</sup>:

"The Nawab wanted to pacify the Chaudharies. They both came to the Nawab's residence one evening to discuss the settlement, but this meeting did not take place. After their departure from the residence, the two Chaudharies came to the *tehsil* to tell Sayyid Turab Ali and myself [Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan] that they proposed to fight the Nawab and unseat him."

In the meantime, the arrival of a Kunjpura Pathan named Munir Khan *Jehadi* occurred at Bijnor. He, along with his 400 *jehadis*, suddenly had come there.

Bijnor was at a high risk as far as Nawab's position is concerned. And so Nawab's top officials left no stone unturned to bring the Chaudharies to honourable terms so that the local strength could unparallely be increased.



Under the subtitle “Arrival of Munir Khan *Jehadi* : Talks between Nawab and the Chaudharies”, what Sir Sayyid writes is worth mentioning<sup>33</sup> :

“This emergency had not arisen when one Munir Khan, a resident of Kunjpura, suddenly came to Bijnor from Nagina; he came as a *jehadi* [a religious warrior] leading a party of 400 men. Upon receiving word of the trouble, Ahmad Allah Khan, who had gone to Najibabad, came to Bijnor. Ahmad Yar Khan *alias* Kallan Khan, Commander-in-Chief, and Nadir Shah Khan *Risaldars* on leave from Multan Regiment which had come to Bijnor, intervened and brought peace between the Chaudharies and the Nawab.”

Giving few detail, he further writes<sup>34</sup> :

“On 23<sup>rd</sup> June, 1857 Ahmad Allah Khan and the two Chaudharies came to the *Cutcherry* [Court] for a long discussion. Afterwards peace prevailed. The two Chaudharies swore by Ganges water that they would obey the Nawab, Ahmad Allah Khan put a seal on the *Qur’an* that he would not mistreat the Chaudharies.”

The drama was not ended here but it was played more than that. Now both the Nawab and his nephew took oath on the *Qur’an* before the Chaudharies to bring them to their trust<sup>35</sup> :

“For their [Nawab’s as well as his nephew’s] part, Mahmud Khan and Ahmad Allah Khan put a seal on the *Qur’an* at the Residence [of the Nawab], which they then handed over. Thus there was peace between the two sides.”

This episode occurred on 23<sup>rd</sup> June, 1857.

Taking the ground thus strengthened, the Nawab and his nephew and their supporters like Mareh Khan of Sherkot started the *Jehad* through the beginning ‘undeclared’ but as they gained the ground with strength of men, arms and ammunition and ration supplies, they did not hesitate killing the Hindus, looting their property and female stock and ultimately the *Jehad* was declared by the aforesaid Ahmadaulla Khan on 22<sup>nd</sup> August, 1857. Nawab Mahmud Khan also followed the same path and he himself had declared *Jehad* against the Hindus 2 days later *i.e.*, on 24 August, 1857.

No doubt a number of battles were fought at Sherkot, Bijnor and Haldaur followed by several skirmishes and conflicts. At Sherkot and Haldaur, the Chaudharies were of Rajput origin but those of Tajpur, Bijnor, Nagina, Nihtaur and Ratangarh and Seohara were non-Rajputs. The Chaudharies of Tajpur, Nihtaur, Ratangarh, Seohara and few more were Tyagis, the Ayachak Brahmans having only higher *gotras* of Brahmans. That of Kanth was a Bisnoi and those of of Bijnor were Jats.

So, it seems unhistorical to term it “Anglo-Rajput return to Bijnor.”<sup>36</sup> In the light of historical evidences, due to the *Jehad* operations against the general Hindus, the Hindu chieftains found no other way to save their co-religious brethren of all castes but to give armed resistance to the Nawab and his *Jehad* party. The first and foremost Hindu chieftain was Chaudhary Pratap Singh of Tajpur who belonged to the Tyagi Brahman stock of the Karyap *gotra*, The two Chaudharies of Bijnor : Chaudhary Nain Singh and Chaudhary Jodh Singh belonged to the Jat community. Chaudhary of Kanth being Bisnoi was again a non- Rajput chieftain. In the light of the above facts the proper term may be advised as “Anglo-*Jehad* Victim Return to Bijnor” instead of “Anglo-Rajput Return to Bijnor.”

## Notes and References

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  6. *Ibid.*; H. R. Nevill, *op.cit.*, 180-82
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  8. *Ibid.*, 185.
  9. Sir Sayyid Ahmed Khan, *op. cit.*, Chapter V, Point no. 19.
  10. *Ibid.*
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  13. *Ibid.*, Point no. 21.
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  16. *Ibid.*
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