

Nawab Zabardast Khan Tyagi in Legends and History : An Unsung Hero of Indian Revolution of 1857

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Acharya Chatur Sen, one of the famous Hindi novelist is well known for his historical novels. In his 'Sona Aur Khoon', he describes about the persona of Zabardast Khan, the Nawab of Hapur. The picture of the Nawab Acharya painted was not a similar one to what he actually was. Nawab was neither a Ruhela nor a Pathan but a Tyagi convert. He was a Bhadsyan Tyagi of Gautam 'gotra'. His uncle was Chaudhary Roop Ram Tyagi of 'Taga Sarai' muhalla of Hapur. They owned Hapur and nearby areas. His role in Indian Revolution of 1857 was great. He was resisting the East India Company forces not only at Hapur but also beyond

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that. Towards Gulaothi, Kithor and Garhmukteshwar, he was active. Ultimately assisting Walidad Khan, the Nawab of Malagarh; he was identified by the British during the 'Datiyana' episode. He along with his only son and all of his real brothers and other supporters was killed. The inhabitants of Hapur have a tradition to organize one month "Shaheed Mela" since 1975 to commemorate its great martyrs of 1857.

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While making deep efforts for compilation of regional history around Meerut and Delhi¹, one of the famous Hindi writer and novelist Acharya Chatur Sen² in his very famous work '*Sona Aur Khoon*'³ has focused his pen upon the much infamous (?) personality of a forgotten hero of Indian Revolution of 1857. He, thus, describes his persona⁴ :

"Nawab Zabardast Khan was a tall, well built strong person who had large estates around Hapur and towards other nearby stations like that of Gulaothi. He was fond of dancing girls but was very cruel in nature. He was infamous for both due to his cruelty and also due to his anti-Hindu sentiments."

On the other hand, the authors of this article, when investigated, found Acharya Chatur Sen's comments untrue and even unhistorical to some extent. Nawab Zabardast Khan belonged to the Tyagi family of 'Taga Sarai' and 'Qila Kohna' of Hapur.⁵ Chaudhary Roop Ram Tyagi was his uncle with whom he had a number of land disputes. Originally this family belonged to the Tyagis of Gautam *gotra*⁶ who are said to have 360 villages of their clan and are called the '*Bhadsyans*'.⁷

It is said that Chaudhary Zabardast Khan was styled, 'Nawab' by the Mughal Emperor Bhadur Shah whose youngest son from Queen Zeenat Mahal was married to Chaudhary Zabardast Khan's intimate friend Nawab Walidad Khan's sister's daughter.⁸

When the Revolution of 1857 outbreak at Meerut on 10th May, 1857; Nawab Walidad Khan was present at Delhi. He returned on May 26, 1857 to the Fort of Malagarh with the Sanad of the Governorship of Aligarh and Bulandshahar regions from the Emperor⁹.

Being situated at the very peculiar strategic geographical position, the town of Hapur became of military importance for both

the Indians and the British. It stood on the crossing of both the highways from Meerut Cantt. to Agra Cantt. and from Delhi to Rohilkhand.

Nawab Walidad Khan handed the responsibility over to his most trusted friend Chaudhary Zabardast Khan to hold his control on Hapur and nearby area upto Gulaothi.¹⁰

Finally, the Indian side was defeated by the East India Company's forces and Zabardast Khan alongwith his all the real brothers was executed.¹¹ He was shot dead¹² and his brothers were hanged till death at the spot where present *tehsil* of Hapur stands.¹³ Thus, a forgotten hero of 1857 in legends and history is covered in this paper.

The '*Sona Aur Khoon*' is one of the most famous novels of Acharya Chatur sen. It has been compiled in ten volumes in about 5 thousand pages. Mentioning about two of his friends, he writes¹⁴:

"Upnyas ke es pratham bhag ki tayyari mein do mitron ne mujhe bahaut sahayta di. Ek Niwari ke Kunwar Surander Pal Singh Tyagi, dusre Kavivar Hansraj Rahbar. Shri Taygi ek bhavuk aur vivechak tarun hein. Naya hi mera unse parichay hua hei... Unhone Meerut, Muzaffarnagar, Garhmukteshwar aur Hapur ke bahut-se tathya mujhe diye, jin par mein apni kalphna ki tulika chala saka"...

Writing about his another friend Hansaj Rahbar, he mentions¹⁵ :

"Mein badnasib Urdu padh nahi sakta, Shri Rahbar ghanton mere paas baithkar 57 se sambandhit sandarbha Urdu se chhant-chhantkar late aur sunate tatha note karate hein. Sach puchhiye to en dono mitron ki punji par hi pratham bhag ka sara karobar chala hei."

Published in December 1957, a full century after the outbreak of Indian Revolution of 1857; the 4th '*Khand*' of the first *Bhag* discusses about Nawab Zabardast Khan of Hapur and his *aashna* Gulabjan, Gulaothi, Lala Mutsaddilal and others.¹⁶

Describing the persona of Nawab Zabardast Khan, what Acharya Chatur sen writes is worth-mentioning¹⁷:

"Nawab Zabardast Khan was a fitrati Zalim. This was the Nawab of Hapur who belonged to the family of the Ruhela Pathan, dark in colour having the spots of pox on his whole face. In his fort there was kept a natni (dancing girl) named Gulab Jan whom he had given the village of Gulaothi."

About Nawab's cruelty and anti-Hindu sentiments, he further writes¹⁸:

“Hinduon ka kattar virodhi pakshpati Musalman tha. Aaye din fasadi Mulla aur Ulema uske yahan jamate karte aur uske karinde-ghumaste Hindu riyaya par manmane atyachar karte, jinki kahin koi sunwayi na hoti thi. Company Bahadur ki sarkar kewal apni malghuzari lene me chak-chauband thi... Company Bahadur ki sarkar ke pass na etne barqandaz the, na thanedar, na tehsildar, ki vah mulq me aman qaayam karme ki sirdardi uthaye...

Ek natni Gulab Jan enki aashna thi. Natni rakhna us zamane me raisi shaan to tha hi. Nawab ne use Gulaothi gaon de diya tha, jahan pura Tanda bas gaya tha... par Nawab ne jab gaon natni ke naam likhkar use vahan ka zemindar bana diya to gaon ke sabhi niwasi uski rayyat ho gaye. Gaon me Thakur bhi the, Brahmin bhi the, Jat bhi the. Ve natni ko zemindar manne me apni hatak semajhte the... vah bhi Nawab ki bhanti sakht-dil aur badmizaz thi... Nawab ne apne yahan uske liye ek aarasta kotha de rakha tha, jahan vah badi shaan se rahti thi. Do mahariyan khidmatgar Nawab ne use de rakhi thin.”

Undoubtedly, the characters and the stories concerned are of much historic value, even then Acharya was not right in taking Nawab Zabardast Khan as a Ruhela Pathan.¹⁹ He was neither a Ruhela nor a Pathan but a Tyagi convert. His descendants still are big landlords who own lands and proprietary rights still in several villages. One of the his direct descendants is Chaudhary Marghoob Tyagi²⁰ whose *Phufa ji* Chaudhary Amnwar Ahmad Tyagi has been elected M.P. in 1980 from Hapur-Ghaziabad Lok Sabha seat.

By conducting a dense field work, the authors of this paper have uncovered the facts about Nawab Chaudhary Zabardast Khan and Ulfat Khan and their other family members named Amzad Khan, Sarmast Khan and Dulhe Khan.

It is much interesting that the first author conducted field work on Chaudhary Zabardast Khan when Dr. Mudit Kumar had been doing research leading to Ph.D. under former's supervision. Both the master and the disciple published their work in the form of the book entitled '1857 Ka Viplava' in 2007 during the 150th Anniversary Celebrations of the Indian Revolution of 1857. It mentions²¹:

“The town of Hapur, a tehsil headquarters of the district of Ghaziabad is situated on the National Highway number 24

leading to Calcutta from Delhi. Its inhabitants played important role in the Uprising of 1857. The main revolutionaries were Chaudhary Zabardast Khan and Chaudhary Ulfat Khan.

Alongwith their supporters during the Revolution [of 1857] against the British, Chaudhary Zabardast Khan and Chaudhary Ulfat Khan were hanged till death from the historic pipal tree. The citizens of Hapur still commemorate their martyrdom. Every year a fair has been being observed at Hapur since 1975 to commemorate the martyrs of 1857. No where in whole of the country such type of fair is celebrated.”

In his book, Richhpal Singh Tyagi, the famous Freedom Fighter writes about Chaudhary Zabardast Khan and his role in 1857 in and around Hapur. S.A.A. Rizvi mentions the disconnection of the Telegraph line between Hapur and Bulandshahr during the events of 1857.²²

Nawab Chaudhary Zabardast Khan was a man active enough at the age of forty. He had great influence. He had mobilized his men. He and Walidad Khan had an understanding according to which Gulaothi was to be taken by Walidad and then it was to be governed jointly by both of them. From Hapur to Garh-Ganga the country was to be looked after by Nawab Zabardast Khan.

About Hapur and Walidad Khan’s men, it is recorded in a contemporary source²³:

“In the Hauppur [old spelling of Hapur current in 1857] *Tehseelee*, the neighbourhood of Wulleedad Khan’s men kept up a good deal of disaffection...”

Mr. F. Williams, Commissioner of 1st Division Meerut in his Letter no. 406 of 15th November, 1858 to the Secretary to Government, North Western Provinces, Allahabad thus writes²⁴:

“Wulleedad Khan about this time, began to advance in the direction of Hauppur, emboldened by the hope of at last getting some mutineers from Delhi. He had pushed the pickets up to Gulaootee, and the Jat village of Burthona was threatened. It was determined to drive these rebels back. Accordingly, on the 27th of July, a detachment of the strength noted in the margin, started for Hauppur.”

It is quite worthy to have a look upon the strength as follows²⁵:

2 Horse Artillery Guns

2 Mountain Train Guns

2 Carbineers

30 Mounted Volunteers

50 His Majesty's 60th Rifles

20 Musicians

15 Seikh Foot.

In fact, on 28th August; 1857, Walidad Khan had posted 400 sowars and 600 of his infantry²⁶ with about 6000 Gujars²⁷ and Rajputs²⁸ at Gulaothi. Nawab Zabardast Khan with his men was supposed there on the Hapur side of Gulaothi.²⁹

The leadership qualities inherited by Zabardast Khan were experienced by his followers time to time. There was collected the revenue of an amount of 14,000 rupees at Dاتیانا³⁰. This village has an ancient Hindu temple and from it evolves the Neem Nadi.³¹ During the eventful year of 1857, it had a fine market and the impression of its richness can be taken from the fact that there were seven shops of goldsmiths in that village.³² intelligence of this amount was received by Nawab Zabardast Khan and he had made the plan to take it away. The name of Zabardast Khan was not an open to public. This leader was executing his plans with top secret. Secretly participating was more safer and long lasting and so Nawab Zabardast Khan was active.³³

On the other hand, the intelligence of the same reached the British officers at Meerut. At once Mr. Wilson was given order to march to Dاتیانا. This historical fact has been mentioned as follows³⁴:

“When at Dhutteeah, about 5 miles south of Kethor, on the Gurmookteeser road, thus employed, he received intelligence that a party of Wulleedad Khan's men were coming to attack him, and plunder the money he had realized, about 14,000. Immediately on receipt of this intelligence, Mr. Wilson, who was out at Pureetchutgurh with his 8th Irregular men, was requested to push over to save the treasure, and a troop of Carbiners was sent off from Meerut with the Joint Magistrate to join Mr. Wilson's party at Kethor. Both parties joined and proceeded to Dhutteeah, and found the treasure all right: the Malagurh men had come, but owing apparently to some

misunderstanding between the Goojurs and Wulleedad Khan, the Groojurs for once took the side of Government and assisted the *Tehseeldar's* men to resist the attack, and defended the Government money, which was brought safely in by Mr. Wilson the next day."

About Walidad Khan and the Fort of Malagarh, Edwin T. Atkinson writes³⁵:

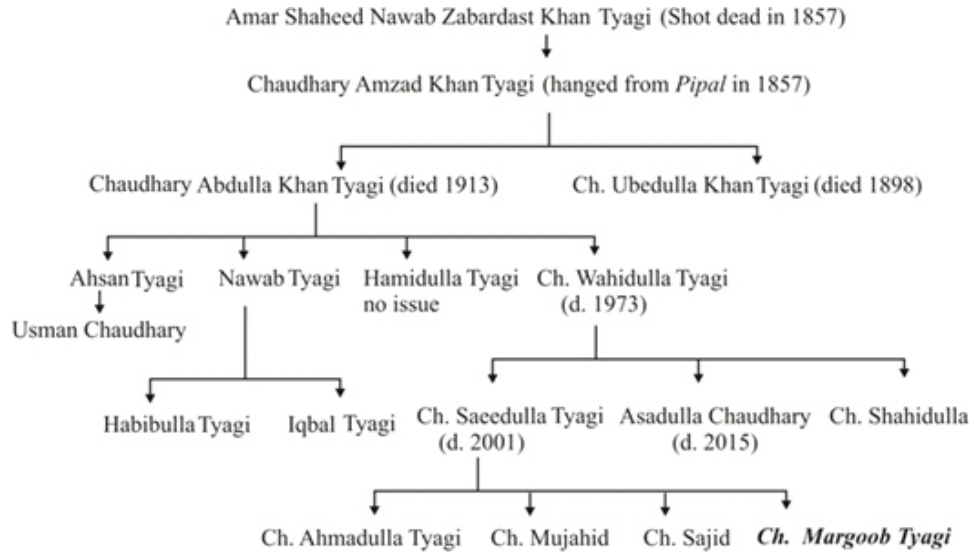
"The village though small is a large grain depot, and has a market on Sundays, Malagarh was formerly known as Rathora, and belonged to the Gorwa or Gaurwa Rajputs. A short time before the Marhatta ascendancy, Haqdad Khan, a Khatak Pathan had purchased the rights of the Amil, of Barana, from Rajputs and built a mud fort and a ganj or market here. He changed the name to Malagarh... Bahadur Khan, the son of Haqdad Khan, now made pretensions to the proprietary right in the town, and received from the British the lease of this and 35 other villagers at a fixed revenue of Rs. 5,000 per annum. Bahadur Khan died in 1824, and the lease lapsed. An allowance of Rs. 1,000 a year was made to Walidad Khan, son of Bahadur Khan then a minor, whilst the villages were settled with the original proprietors. Walidad Khan continued in receipt of this allowance up to 1857 A.D. His sister's daughter had married Mirza Jawan Bakht, son of the King of Delhi, in 1852, and on this account, at the outbreak in 1857, he was appointed subahdar of Baran and Koil by the rebel king."

He further writes³⁶:

"On the fall of Delhi, Walidad's forces were defeated by Colonel Greathed's column at Bulandshahr, or, and his fort was taken and razed to the ground. It was in operations rendered necessary for the purpose of blowing up the fort that the hero of the Dehli Kashmir gate, Lieutenant Charles Duncan Home, R.E., lost his life."

The village of Datiyana is situated towards Kithor. The latter is still a seat of Tyagi Muslims. It means the influence of Walidad Khan going on continuously increasing due to Nawab Zabardast Khan factor during Indian Revolution of 1857.

The genealogical table as made available by Chaudhary Margoob Tyagi is as follows³⁷:



Nawab Zabardast Khan, after failing the “hanged till death drum head court martial”, was shot dead in forehead³⁸ (while drinking water) by Wilson at Hapur. All of his family members, brothers and sons and a number of supporters met the same fate being hanged till death and after from the *Pipal* tree where now telephone exchange building’s adjoining wall of the Hapur *tehsil* stands on Hapur-Bulandshahr road³⁹ Every year the citizens commemorate these martyrs by holding a one month ‘Shahed Mela’ which is inaugurated on the 10th day of May every year since 1975.⁴⁰

Notes and References

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*Born on 26th August, 1891 at the village of Chandokh near Bulandshahr in Uttar Pradesh, Acharya Chatur Sen, after receiving his primary education at Sikandrabad, took admission in the Sanskrit College, Jaipur. From there he received the degree of the ‘Ayurvedacharya’ and ‘Shastri’. After further studies in Ayurveda, he was appointed Professor of Ayurveda in the D.A.V. College, Lahore in 1917. He died on 2nd February, 1960 at Delhi at the age of 68 years.

2. *Ibid.*, v.
3. *Ibid.*, p. vi.
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 189-90.
5. *Interviews*, 15-09-2023, Shri Navratan Singh Tyagi, Rly Road, Hapur and 20 other persons.

6. *Ibid.*, Chaudhary Margoob Tyagi and 30 other Muslim Tyagi male and female members of Bhandra Pati muhalla of Hapur who are direct descendants of Nawab Zabardast Khan.
7. Shri Sikand Tyagi, District Judge, Haridwar, Uttarakhand, Shri Neeraj Tyagi s/o Late Shri Mahendra Singh Tyagi, gs/o Chaudhary Karan Singh Tyagi, direct descendants of Ch. Roop Ram Tyagi from his daughter, Taga Sarai, Hapur, Uttar Pradesh; Kunwar Ajayvansh Narayan Singh Tyagi, direct descendant of Asaua Riyasat family; Shri Mukul Tyagi Advocate, Shri Avanesht Tyagi, Shri Faseeh Chaudhary, Dushyant Kumar Tyagi, Adesh Tyagi, Dada Farukh Ahmad Tyagi, Shri Gajendra Tyagi and 3 dozens other Hindu and Muslim Tyagi male and female members of Bhadsyans of Gautam gotra.
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William Dalrymple in his 'The Last Mughal' mistakenly tells Nawab Walidad Khan as father of the bride. He mentions : "The exceptionally lavish wedding she [Queen Zeenat Mahal] had planned was intended by her to raise the profile of the Prince, and also to consolidate her own place in the dynasty : Jewan Bakht's bride, the Nawab Shah Zamani Begum, who was more than ten years old at the time of the wedding, was Zeenat's niece and her father Walidad Khan of Malagarh, an important ally of the Queen."
9. Edwin T. Atkinson, *Statistical, Descriptive and Historical Account of the North-Western Provinces of India*, Vol. III Meerut Division, Part II, Allahabad : North-Western Provinces Government Press, 1876, 91.
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12. *Ibid.*, 87.
13. *Ibid.*
14. Acharya Chatur Sen, *op. cit.*, vi.
15. *Ibid.*
16. *Ibid.*, 189-95.
17. *Ibid.*
18. *Ibid.*
19. Interviews, mentioned above.
20. *Ibid.*
21. Vighnesh Kumar, and Mudit Kumar, *op. cit.*

22. Richhpal Singh Tyagi, *Hapur ka Swatantrata Sangharsha ka Itihas* (in Hindi), Hapur, 1976, 7; S.A.A. Rizvi, *Freedom Struggle in Uttar Pradesh*, Volume 5, 1960, 40.
23. Narrative of Events attending the outbreak of Disturbances and the Restoration of Authority in the District of Meerut in 1857-58, para. 295.
24. *Ibid.*, para. 299; Vighnesh Kumar, 1857 IN 1857: Original Mutiny Narratives, Volume I, Meerut, Hastinapur Research Institute, Meerut, 2013, 69.
25. *Ibid.*
26. *Ibid.*
27. *Ibid.*
28. *Ibid.*
29. *Interview*, 01-11-2023, Shri Navratan Singh Tyagi (77 years) late Shri Shiv Nath Singh Tyagi, 'Mantri ji', original resident of Datiyana, presently r/o 694, Free Ganj Road, Hapur, U.P.
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31. *Ibid.*
32. *Ibid.*
33. *Ibid.*, Vighnesh Kumar, *op. cit.*
34. Edwin T. Atkinson, *op. cit.*, 167-68.
35. *Revenue Board's Record*, August 8, 1825, No. 1; September 12, Nos. 3, 4; April 20, 1826, No. 4.
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