

POPULAR REVOLT OF 1824 IN SOUTH-EAST PUNJAB

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Abstract: It has been discussed earlier that the agrarian system of the company's Government was quite defective, their revenue assessment were high, the modes of collection were serve and at times Barbaric and hardly anything was done in the name of relief work at the time of famines or droughts which unfortunately, occurred quite frequently. In these circumstances it was natural for the peasants to have harboured great resentment against British. But the situation then was, they could not express it openly.¹

Keywords: Revenue, British, Forces, Communities, Resources, Authorities.

Introduction - However in 1824 the situation improved a bit in their favour, when during the first Burmese war the defeat of the British forces near Ramoo where captain Norton, the Commander of the British forces² was killed, created a great panic throughout India. The peasants had heard of their suffering reverses and losses. This was they thought the right occasion to strike and finish the exploiting regime once for all. Accordingly they rose up in open revolt. Many ramours spread throughout the country. The lead was taken by the brave jat peasantry of Rohtak. They were soon followed by other communities inhabiting the district and their numbers and strength swelled a great deal, so much so the British authorities with limited resources at their disposal proved uncompetent check them.

Jaisukh, one of the persons who was sent to Beree by Captain M. Peach Supervisor, Hissar Establishment, to purchase cattle for the Government stated in his deposition that the cause of the wide spread disturbances was the belief that the British authority was going to end in India.³

The cause is this that they reported that the authority of the British Government was to an end in Hindustan. All the English gentlemen were proceeding to Calcutta. There was some truth in this statement as large contingents of the British forces were being sent form the various cantonments of northern India to the Burmese border.⁴

The peasants had also learned the news of the British disaster in Burma. Illahi Buksh, Chuprasi in his deposition before Captain Peach stated "we also learnt that the zamindars of Bakalee village had sent a

¹ Journals of Haryana Studies, Vol. IV, No. 1-2, 1972, KUK, P. 34

² Basu, B.D., Rise of Christian Power in India, Vol. II, Allahabad, 1981, P. 754

³ Home Miscellaneous Series, Vol. 674, British Common Wealth Relations Office, P. 207, Quate by K.L. Sachdeva

⁴ Proceeding of Punjab History Conferences, 6th Session, March, 1971, P. 280

fakir to Calcutta who reported that the English troops were at a distance of seven coss from Calcutta and that Brumese troops had surrounded them at a distance of 12 coss in every direction, now they have dispatched another fakir to bring information.⁵

The second cause of the revolt was that the crops had failed as there were no rains during the year and there were no wells in the area. The price of the corn rose very high. Two courses were left upon to the people either to starve or to indulge in lawless activity. Many persons adopted the second course. C. Elliot, Agent to the Governor General in the Residency of Delhi stated in his letter date 6th October 1824, to George Swinton Secretary to the Political Department that “The lower class are suffering from actual want in consequence of the total failure of the periodical rains on this side of Jamuna and the present high price of grain.”⁶

R. Cavindish Principal Assistant of Gurgaon district⁷ stated that “the all most total failure of autumn crops and despair of any Rubbee crops for their having no wells, combined with the above circumstances have created a degree of refractoriness hitherto, unknown to me.”⁸

Captain H.E. Peach felt that the economic cause was a subsidiary cause and the real cause of the revolts was the belief that the British authority was soon coming to an end in India. He wrote” the prevalent tendency to insurrection does not arise solely from the unfortunate season.”⁹

The third cause of the revolts was the general character of the people. The Mewattis of the Gurgaon District and the Bhattis of the Bhutteana territory (including area of Sirsa District) were well known at that time for their predatory habits. “It was not to be expected that the turbulent tribes of Haryana and the borders of Bhatner and Bikaner the Mewattis and Bhattis, would remain tranquil under the temptation offered by the reduction of the military forces in their neighbourhood and the reported decline of the power of the Government.”¹⁰

The Gujars of this area naturally turbulent and scapegoats. The British were fond of quoting the local proverbs against Gujars,

“Kutta billi do, Ranghar Gujar do,
Yih char na ho, to khule kiware so.”¹¹

Another cause of revolts was that there were semi independent states of Rajasthan and the Cheiftains of Jhajjar, Bahadurgarh, Pataudi, Dujana, Farrukhnagar, Loharu etc. where a person after committing a crime could take shelter and there by escape the clutches of law. R. Cavendish described the Mewattis or Meos “ a most refractory race of men.”¹²

⁵ Home Miscellaneous Series, Vol. 674, British Common Wealth Relation Office, P. 25, Quoted by Sachdeva, K.L.

⁶ Proceeding of Punjab History Conference, 6th Session, March, 1971, P. 280

⁷ At that time called Zillah Rewari

⁸ Home Miscellaneous, Vol. 674, P. 289

⁹ Ibid., P. 251

¹⁰ James, Mill and Wilson, History of British India, Vol. III, 1805 to 1833, London, 1824, P. 116

¹¹ Ibbetson, Denzil, Karnal, Settlement Report of 1872-80, P. 84

¹² Home Miscellaneous, Ibid., P. 285

We may mention some of the incidents which happened during this period. Some of the cases of disturbances were as follows-

Pergunah Dadree, the ilaqa of Bahadur Jung Khan, the first act of violence was committed in Mouzah Chang.¹³

Thakur Dowlut Singh wrote in his letter to captain Graham some of the details of this case. He wrote "Megh Singh Rajput my servant was escorting fifty of my bullocks to the fair of Beree for sale. On the road forty persons of the caste Kunjurs armed with matchlocks came from Mauzah Chang in the Dadree ilaka, drove away cattle and shot Megh Singh. "The Thanedar of Mehim, on hearing of this occurrence come to Mouzah Chang and recovered and bullocks and drove them to his thanah at Mehim and sent the body of Megh Singh to the Principal Assistant at Rohtak. I therefore request that you will write to that gentleman to apprehend and punish the murderers."¹⁴

Attack on Government a big cattle fair used to be held at Beree in Rohtak district. Captain M.L. Peach wrote to Charles Elliot, Agent to the Governor General the first report of the case.¹⁵ "I had sent Agents to purchase bullocks for the public service at the fair of Beree in the Rohtak Parganah. These man, it seems have been attacked, one of them severely wounded and the other placed in confinement.

The Bullocks also have been carried off. But the expression used by the marauders appeared deserving of attention particularly as I understand that similar reports are current in the provinces, as well as in the Bhattee territory.

Ganga Singh submitted the following petition on 28th September 1824, which gives some details¹⁶ of the raid. Ganga Singh wrote "agreeably to your orders were repaired to Beree accompanied by six sepoy, Ganga Bishan, Chaudhary and Nur Allee Chaprasi and Six bullock drivers where we purchased seventy two and were on our return to Hisar. Sixty two bullocks had been sent to Mouzah Kukrana which is about five coss distant from Beree to graze in charge of Parehat chuprasi and four sepoy and with ten bullocks just purchased. I was proceeding thither Mouzah Sundana which is about four coss distant Beree. One hundred and fifty men armed with matchlocks and swords attacked and wounded me with swords and spears and carried away the bullocks and my property. The zamindars of Kubulpur in pergunah Beree, have confined Ganga Bishan Chaudhary, Nur Allee chaprasi and two sepoy with their carriage. The Zemindars Lukrana have also detained the sixty two bullocks which were sent there to graze. Also 500 bullocks belonging to five hundred persons inhabitants of Hisar, who accompanied me have also been plundered".¹⁷ He further added that "the inhabitants of that village came armed with swords spears and guns and plundered, the bullocks belonging to the government and those belonging to the merchants and severely wounded the Jemadar. This incident took place on 27th September, 1824.

¹³ Home Miscellaneous, Vol. 674, P. 198

¹⁴ Home Miscellaneous, Ibid., P. 227

¹⁵ Ibid., P. 206

¹⁶ Ibid., P. 224

¹⁷ Ibid., P. 248

Jaisukh stated that when they had reached the distance of about three coss from Beree between the village of Sundana, Kubulpur and Ratowlee the Zamindars of Sundana first attacked bullocks (about ten in numbers) which were under charge of Gunga Singh, wounded him with a sword in the head and with a spear in neck and beat him with clubs severely, so that he fell senseless on the ground, then they carried off the bullocks.¹⁸

The annual Mela or fair for the purchase and sale of cattle chiefly bullocks¹⁹ was held at the town of Beree on the 9th Kowar corresponding with the first October, where a large concourse of the people used to assemble and many thousand head of cattle were collected. On the 24 September 1824, the inhabitants of Beree, attacked the merchants who had gathered there. Peera stated in his disposition “the circumstances of the plunder of Mela Beree are these.

This is the 5th day since a merchant having a purse containing 500 Rupees was viewing the Mela. When he arrived on one side of it, the zamindars of Beree reached the place and plundered him, when a cry of plunder was raised throughout to the Mela, and the people observing that the zamindars themselves were engaged in the plunder, they were dispersed but to what ever village they fled for protection that village plundered them. At this time the Police Officer with the body of men arrived at the scene, apprehended some of the marauders, and succeeded in recovering some cattle which he delivered to the owners by which some tranquility was restored in the Mela. Two days later the Mela dispersed the circumstances above related occurred.²⁰

Attack on Colonel Skinner’s men (11 October 1824). This attack took place near Bhiwani, with great difficulty and with the lucky arrival of another body of troops, these men of Skinner’s army could save themselves. Munwar Khan the Thanedar of Dadri submitted the following reports of this incident. He wrote “at noon today Thakur Singh and Usmat Khan, sowars of Colonel Skinner’s, corps, came to me and reported that they with twenty of Skinner’s horse escorted three hundred camels laden with chunna (gram) from Hansi and last night put up at Qusbah Bhiwani. The policedar advised them not to encamp on the outside. In the morning policedar added fourteen of the Nawab’s sowars to their escort, and when they reached the borders of Bhiwani, about eight hundred robbers inhabitants of Tukrana and Kalours and Baoowas, appeared, but only fired from a distance, near the Mouzah Bankul in purganah Dadree these robbers approached and began the attack which lasted for two Gurhees, and in which one horse was killed and two horses and three camels and a sowar named Jakhu Khan were wounded and a sowar of the Nawab named Gulam Haider and the two horses were also wounded and a Jat of the village, where they had come to the aid of sowars was killed. At this time a party of the Nawab’s horses who were marching from Jhajjar to Hansi fortunately camped up, and about three hundred people of the Mauzeh Manroo in pergunah Dadree came to

¹⁸ Ibid., P. 202

¹⁹ Ibid., P. 230

²⁰ Ibid., P. 204

our aid, when the robbers retired carrying with them three or four of their dead and six or seven wounded.” The robbers succeeded in carrying 15 Maunds of chunna or grams in spite of such a bitter opposition.²¹

Surajmal, a leader of robbers from Bikaner, appeared in the vicinity of Hissar. There were apprehension of an attack on the Gurhee of Behel. There for an attempt had been made to secure some military protection. On the 8th October 1824, thirty Bhairatch horse were sent to Behel. Thus twenty nine men were stationed at Gurhee at Behel. On the 4th day after the arrival of Bhairatch horse, the place was attacked. The Daffadar of the party in charge of these soldiers made the following statement.

He said “on the 4th day after the arrival of Bharaitch horse, the place was attacked i.e. at daybreak on the morning of the 25th instant. Surajmal, a Cheiftian and wild plunderer from Bikaner, shortly appeared with 600 horsemen and about four hundred matchlocks, demanding the garrison to deliver up the Gurhee, and as we declined an attack was made upon us which was twice repelled; they succeeded however at length in scaling the walls and at the third attack, after we had sustained a loss of three sowars, one syce killed and five sowar desperately wounded. We evacuated the place and escaped in to the town. Suraj took possession of the place and seized all horses amounting to twenty nine, together with fourteen bullocks and other property. One Gosain was killed and another inhabitant of the town was wounded.

The inhabitants of Behel sought the help of a Jaipur noble. On the arrival of Girdhar Singh with a force, Suraj was compelled to withdraw. The inhabitants were thus rescued. After the capture of Gurhee they sent for assistance to a chieftain of the Jaipur country by name Girdhree Singh Thakur, who with his followers was at a distance of four or five coss from Behel, and brother to the former possessor Khan Singh, who was dispossessed by the British Government twelve year ago. This individual arrived shortly after Surjan at about 8 O’ clock in the morning, and during the day intercepted a reinforcement of men with powder, ball and provisions that were coming to Surjans aid and after contending with him during the day, the letter abandoned the Gurhee”.

The zamindars of Dhejut had put a stop to the transit of all persons and property. They seized and confined such as came nearer to them. On other side to such a pitch had the spirit of revolt reached that the zamindars of Nuhana had actually refused to give food to the Amin who had been sent there to measure and arbitrate their lands. The roads were infested with brigands and daily reports of acts of violence were received by the British authorities.²²

The traders compelled to change routes - Bishan Singh the Mutsudi stationed at village Kooral also reported one revolt. He wrote that on 9th September 1824, twenty five bullocks, laden with sugar were proceeding to west from Bhiwani and halted at Mouzah Kooral. At night they learned that the Zemindar of purganah Loharu and Dadree had combined to plunder the Booparies (merchants) who might travel that road. Therefore they were obliged to change their route and proceed by Esurwal and Muhal.²³

²¹ Ibid., P. 281

²² Ibid., P. 212

²³ Ibid., P. 226

Reports had become prevalent that there were proposals to make an attack upon the town and valuable public property at Hisar. Therefore much alarm was prevailing among the Banias and other inhabitants of the city. Ilahi Buksh stated that after seeing the defeat of English at Beree and the return of the British officers to Delhi, they were thinking of murdering the sowars and wished to take their horses away. They thought that if the British troops were defeated at Beree, they would go to Hisar, when half the party would take the town and other half would drive away the company's cattle from the great farm of Hisar.²⁴ There were feelings of dissatisfaction among the inhabitants of Gargaon District also. With some difficulty revolts were quelled in Nuh and Purgunah Hat.²⁵

Soon the authorities realized the seriousness of the situation. The military forces were marched from the various cantonments to the interior. The Begum of Samru was asked to send her troops which were stationed at Gurgaon towards Rohtak Beree.²⁶ Two squadrons of the Forth Light Cavalry under the command of a Field Officer and a company of the 18th from Delhi and of the 24th Native Infantry from Hansi were directed to proceed with the least possible delay to Beree²⁷. The rulers of the native states were also requested to send their forces. Two additional regiments of Irregular Horse were immediately raised for service in the Delhi territory and the Gorkha Local Battalions were augmented. The increase²⁸ of military strength of the judicious arrangements of the chief civil authorities succeeded in restoring order.

Shifting of the cattle fair from Beree to Rohtak and Hisar on account of these revolts the authorities ordered that the cattle fair should be held at Rohtak instead of Beree. Later on it was shifted to Hisar.²⁹

The bold peasants of the Haryana finished off all the vestiges of the *feringhee* rule from their land.³⁰

The peasants have not actual position in Indian history. We can say about peasant's pain–

तुम हमारा जिक्र इतिहास में नहीं पाओगे,
क्यों कि हम ने अपने को इतिहास के विरु(दे दिया है,
छूटी हुई जगह दिखे जहां तहां,
या दबी हुई चीख का अहसास हो,
समझना हम वहीं मौजूद थे।

²⁴ Ibid., P. 252

²⁵ Ibid., P. 288

²⁶ Ibid., P. 267

²⁷ Ibid., P. 234

²⁸ Singh, Ayodhya, Bharat Ka Mukti Sangram, Chain of Revolts, Calcutta, 1973, PP. 166-67

²⁹ Sudder Board of Revenue, N.W.P. Proceedings, 8th Oct. 1852, No. 47, P. 25

³⁰ Journals of Haryana Studies, Vol. IV, No. 1-2, 1972, P. 34

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