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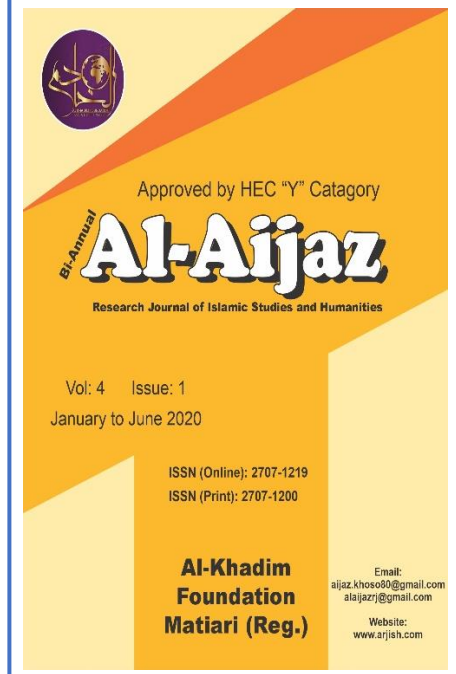
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TOPIC:

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Role of Gogera District in the War of Independence-1857

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Abstract

Different ethnic groups of India challenged the British Raj in the Great War of Independence-1857. A large number of local soldiers from different districts of Punjab province also left the British Army to stand up against the brutality of East India Company. Meanwhile, the people of the Gogera District played their vital role against the colonial forces. Among them, Ahmad Khan Kharal, Murad Fatiana, and their comrades set up a freedom fight at a vast level to challenge the hegemony of the imperialistic Army. Their struggle had such momentum that it nullified the British control over a large area of Punjab, especially the Gogera District. Another development that invited the colonial wrath was that the people of the Gogera District refused to give revenue to the British government. This was an open rebellion that posed a serious challenge to the British Authority. The freedom fighters under the leadership of Ahmad Khan Kharal sacrificed their lives to protect their religious, cultural, and ethnic values. In this article, the resistance and the revolutionary role of the masses of Gogera are evaluated.

Keywords: Gogera, Resistance, British Raj, Colonial India, Rai Ahmad Khan, Independence.

Introduction

The freedom war of 1857 is an epic story of district Gogera in the Multan division in which Ahmad Khan Kharal, Muhammad Kathia, Murad, Bahawal, and other freedom fighters of district Gogera participated. However, a few Muslim landlords along with Hindus and Sikhs were by the side of the imperialist invasion. Almost one-third of the population was with the Mujahideen which included women also.

Theoretical Framework of the Research:

On the occupation of the country in 1849, a district was constituted with its head-quarters at Pakpattan. In 1852 the headquarters shifted to Gogera district of Multan Division. It was situated near the Ravi about 130 miles from Multan and 75 miles from Lahore¹ and upon the old military road from Lahore to Multan about 30 miles to the north of the station of Montgomery. In 1855 twenty villages transferred from Lahore to the Gogera district. On the opening of the railway, Gogera was abandoned as a civil station, and the headquarters of the district transferred to the village of Sahiwal which became the halfway station on the line between Lahore and Multan. This took place in 1864. Subsequently in 1865 by way of compliment to Sir R. Montgomery; the new station received the name of Montgomery.² Now Gogera is a town in district Okara.

On May 13, 1857, Lieutenant N.W Elphinstone assistant Commissioner (Late in-charge district Gogera) at that time was informed through a semi govt letter that the rebelling soldiers of Meerut and Delhi have killed all the British officers. Hence, weapons have been taken back from local soldiers of the Mian Meer cantonment.³ Meanwhile, these pieces of news also reached the residents of Gogera and local soldiers. But before that, they planned

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lieutenant N.W Elphinstone very cleverly took back ammunition from the local soldiers. At that time treasury was also in the custody of the local army. That was removed from there and a subedar and 24 soldiers of police battalion of Captain Transon were appointed on treasury and people of baba Sumporun Singh and Khem Singh were appointed at the jail.⁴ In the beginning, the circumstances of Delhi and Meerut kept reaching here through letters, and the people were motivated for war. It is stated that Ahmad Khan Kharal formed some troops of local people and sent them to Delhi.⁵ Later on, awareness of current affairs to the people of here was not possible due to the ban on mail. In the meanwhile, a person from the Kharal Dhero-ka family whose name was Shamand⁶ or Shamoon⁷ came out from Sirsa jail, he told the affairs of Rohtak, Hassar, Meerut, Delhi, and other cities to the local people and at the same time mentally prepared them for war. His talks were just fuel to the fire. But the war started from the village of Baili Lakhoka.⁸ These people refused to give revenue to the revenue collecting officials and made them flee from there. After this incident the govt. imprisoned the men, women, and children of the Joyia tribe and tortured them. When this piece of news reached the gallant and self-respectful people of Ravi, they became emotional. Rai Ahmad Khan Kharal met lieutenant N.W. Elphinstone Deputy Commissioner. Extra assistant commissioner Gogera Mr. Berkley was also present in this meeting. Ahmad Khan Kharal said that no revenue is outstanding against them. So, they will give no revenue. If you do not release them, the sympathies of people with the freedom fighter will increase. Rai Ahmad Khan Kharal's this threat proved effective. They released all the arrested people of the Joyia tribe on the very same day for fear of rebel.⁹ The released people of Joyia tribe told Ahmad Khan Kharal that there were present many more innocent political prisoners in the jail. Their crime is this that they have passions of rebel¹⁰ Dilawar Fatiana uncle of Murad & Bahawal Fatiana was also present in these prisoners¹¹ Rai Ahmad Khan Kharal held a meeting with prisoners of the jail through jail daroghah Hashmat Ali¹² or Nizam Din¹³. Rai Ahmad Khan Kharal gave them sugar, tobacco, and other eatables and planned to break the jail. When Barkley visited the prisoners, he came to know about the arrival of Ahmad Khan after seeing sugar, tobacco, and other eatables. Barkley readily terminated jail daroghah from service. The daroghah said that Ahmad Khan was his guardian and he could not betray him. According to a local report, Ahmad Khan with the help of daroghah jail made more than 200 prisoners flee from jail.¹⁴ Daroghah explained that Ahmad Khan was his religious father, that he had known him for many years, and that he had protected his family during former insurrections.¹⁵ This event had got more significance.¹⁶ On the 08th July 1857 the Govt. Officials along with police again reached Pakpattan tehsil at the village of Lakhoka on the Sutlej to collect a balance of revenue. Lambardar turned out them from the village and refused to give them revenue. After that Lambardar crossed the river and reached Bahawalpur.¹⁷ After gathering the mujahideen, they took boats in their possession and began to plan to invade Pakpattan.¹⁸ As per the native report, a large number of peasants were killed in an attack by police and military that day. The remaining were made prisoners. The cruelty of the British on the Joyia tribe spread fear throughout the Gogera district. This step of the British added fuel to the fire.¹⁹ On the 26th of July a most daring attempt was made by prisoners on the Gogera jail to affect their escape during this night several of them succeeded in getting over the outer wall and about 20 fled into the jungle.²⁰ During the midnight of 26th and 27th July prominent people

among the political prisoners, Nathoo Proka, Thoba Rajoka, Sardar Bhojoana, and Chawa Wattoo started to take out prisoners by breaking the jail.²¹ While making a woman jump over the wall, her child started crying. The jail guards came to know and they opened fire. At that time all the prisoners had gathered out of the jail into the courtyard. They started a fight with jail guards. Rai Ahmed Khan and his companions were hiding at some distance. They also reached there for their assistance and attacked the British soldiers from outside. Several prisoners took away ammunition from the British. In this fight, 145 prisoners were killed and their dead bodies were thrown into the old well named Bagar Ki Dal, near the jail.²² More than 100 British soldiers including a deputy superintendent named Manchord were also killed. He was killed with the bullet fired by Ahmed Khan Kharal. According to the government record, 40²³ or 51²⁴ prisoners were killed and wounded. Mr. Barkley and Captain Richard controlled the situation. When this news reached Sir John Lawrence, chief commissioner Punjab, he readily took action and appointed major Marsden deputy commissioner Gogera in place of lieutenant Elphinstone.²⁵ Chawa Wattoo took refuge in the house of a Sikh but Sardara Bhojoana informed the British.²⁶ Chawa on the assurance of Bahlak Wattoo appeared before Barkley but he was hanged to death.²⁷ He expressed his wish to meet his mother and his friend Surab Gogera at that moment. Heera was to pull the string of hanging. Chawa Wattoo said to Heera, do not come near me, I shall execute myself. When this news reached Rai Ahmed Khan Kharal, he spent the whole night in restlessness.²⁸ He remained worried after the death of Chawa son of Hidayat.²⁹ Natho Proka and Thoba Rajoka were awarded lash punishment.³⁰ Due to the death sentence to Chawa Wattoo and throwing the dead bodies into the wells, anger arose and people stood up against the British.³¹ Ahmed Khan Kharal was arrested on the charge of a rebel in jail. But the charge could not be proved. Nobody got ready to give witness against him. Moreover, the British government was afraid of the rebel. The British government released him soon after for the fear of his capacity and influence. Hence Ahmad Khan Kharal was released with the restriction not to leave the sadder station without special permission.³² According to a native report, Ahmad Khan could not be arrested.³³ According to another local report, when Ahmad Khan received the news of the murder of the prisoners, he appeared before the Deputy Commissioner Gogera to avoid further holocaust of the innocent prisoners.³⁴ The month of August passed without any occurrence of importance.³⁵ Mujahideen secretly started preparations for war. Jhumra was Mujahideen's center but several mujahideen's meetings were held at Pindi Sheikh Mussa, Muhammad Pur, Chichawatni, Murad Kay Kathia, Jalhi, Garh Fateh Shah, and Baili Lakhoka.³⁶ With the efforts of Ahmed Khan, Bharwanas from Jhang and several families of Gogera like Kharals, Wattoos, Kathiay, Fatianay, Murdanay, Tarhanay, Bhojoanay, Kamyamay, Dhuddi, Bhadro, Vehniwal, Gugerey, Basheray, Qureshis, Chishty, Junjoay, Joyas, Bughelay, Lak, Noul, Prukay, and Rajokas got ready to fight and die.³⁷ Nadir Shah Qureshi, Walidad Murdana, and Murad Fatiana played important role in building unity by finishing enmity among the tribes of Ahmed Khan. When the British came to know through their reporters that brave Mujahideen were confidentially preparing for a big invasion they felt horrified and sent a message to all the chiefs on September 17, 1857, to reach the residence of Sarfraz Khan Kharal and negotiate with Govt. The British wanted to give temptation to this caravan of the freedom to win their favors. But leaders of Mujahideen had understood their plan. So they made gathering at the residence

of Sarfraz Khan very soon, one day before on 16th of September, in this gathering all the chiefs gave oath on Quran that they would not refrain from any sacrifice for homeland, nation, religion, civilization, and culture.³⁸ On the next day they set out towards their territories, after making a plan of regular attack but Sarfraz Khan and Machia Langrial leaked out their oath and intimidated the British Govt. upon which the British army immediately came into action. The British sent a horse riders troop for the protection of Kamalia. They sent two messengers to inform the commissioner of Multan and tehsildar of Harappa about the latest situation. These messengers were killed by the Murdana family near Muhammad Pur and official letters were burnt.³⁹

Karl Marx in his essay 'Rebellion in India' writes that means of communications between Lahore and Multan were suspended for 8 days. It points towards the uprising of Gogera.⁴⁰ According to Elphinstone Deputy Commissioner of district Gogera that all the local reports agreed that the whole country as far as Tulamba, in the Multan district, was in open insurrection.⁴¹ Cave Brown also confirmed by saying that the petty rising of a few villagers grew into the insurrection of a district, the whole country around was in arms.⁴² All the Mujahideen were gathering at prescribed places. It was told that whole the district turned into a battlefield.⁴³ It seemed as if the inhabitants of here had no other task except fighting.⁴⁴ The British also made their utmost effort. Rather they sent a messenger to Harappa. The whole government record and prisoners were brought to the tehsil building so that defense may be made in the best possible manner. A troop in the leadership of E.A.C Barkley set out to arrest Ahmad Khan may be arrested after the crossing river before reaching Jhumra. But Ahmed Khan succeeded in crossing the river and warned Berkley that he had renounced his allegiance to the British government and considered himself a subject of the king of Delhi from whom he had received orders to raise the whole country.⁴⁵

On 20th September Mujahideen started advancing towards Gogera. The same day Berkley came back to Gogera on the call of deputy commissioner lieutenant Chichester.⁴⁶ Colonel Paton along with his force and cannons reached there from Lahore on the very same day. When Mujahideen reached near Gogera the British opened the mouths of their cannons. Mujahideen had only sticks and axes. When the British army started heavy firing, they started getting back and hide in the forest of Fatah Pur. Elphinstone officiating deputy commissioner admitted that our enemy was retreating at the rate of about six miles an hour, and our pace was only about three miles an hour.⁴⁷ For the last few days, Mujahideen kept gathering at a barren land called Nooray Ki Dal⁴⁸ near Chak No. 20 Gashkorian began to take place. On 21st September Ahmed Khan also reached there. But the employees of Dhara Singh reported about Mujahidin thus the Mujahideen were attacked. Captain Black along with a horse riders' troop was geared up for attack and Lieutenant Chichester was also with him. He had ammunition while Mujahideen had traditional weapons such as sticks and knives, etc. It is pertinent to state that Mujahideen remained successful in doing their defense.

Some traitors like Khem Singh Bedi of Rawalpindi,⁴⁹ Dhara Singh Nakai of Gogera⁵⁰, Jeway Khan Arain of village Akbar,⁵¹ Sardar Shah, and Sumporun Singh were forefront in this fight.⁵² Several soldiers of Captain Black died in that attack. Captain Michel came with fresh force and war broke out. Mujahideen fought with great courage. Twenty drum beaters kept encouraging the Mujahideen by beating drums. All the drum beaters martyred or wounded

except Dillo son of Chughatta, who had been beating a drum bravely. Rai Ahmad Khan, his son Mamand, Sarang Khan, Jhanda Inayat ka Wattoo, Raham, Bahlak, Eidal Fatiana, Nawab son of Sati, Nabi Bakhsh, and Jahana son of Bega fought so courageously that the land still feels proud of them.⁵³ Wagah son of Rehan and Qadoo Bar also fought bravely. When Ahmed Khan was offering ASR prayer, Captain Black respected it and decided to wait for him to complete the prayer. Dhara Singh was afraid of Ahmad Khan and he asked Captain Black to kill Ahmad Khan during prayer. Captain Black allowed him and Dhara Singh to ultimately shot Ahmad Khan.⁵⁴ According to the Punjab chiefs, Dhara Singh claims to have shot Ahmed Khan with his hand.⁵⁵ According to another local report, Rai Ahmed Khan was identified to the British soldiers by Dhara Singh and Khem Singh during ASR prayer. Then a soldier of the British army named Gulab Rai Bedi fired Ahmad Khan who got injured. Despite the serious injury, he got up and was about to get on his horse, the same soldier fired again and thus Ahmad Khan was martyred.⁵⁶ According to Cave Brown Ahmad Khan and his followers fought stoutly and captain Black and Chichester were surrounded more than once during the melee.⁵⁷ According to Elphinstone officiating deputy commissioner of Gogera district, Ahmed Khan had been the chief instigator of the movement; his reputation for success in former insurrections was considerable and his influence over the tribes on the Ravi unbounded⁵⁸.

Berkley advanced without hesitation into the jungles near Koray Shah on the morning of 22nd September.⁵⁹ He moved towards the jungle where the warriors attacked his army. War continued till evening. While fighting Berkley entered the bank of the river where his horse got entangled in the mud. In the meanwhile, Bahlak Wattoo controlled the bridle of his horse.⁶⁰ According to all native reports, the first fatal blow was struck by Murad Fatiana who speared him from behind.⁶¹ Berkley could not keep his balance and fell to the ground. As soon as he fell, Sooja Bhadroo killed him with the strikes of sticks.⁶² In this battle, the British had to suffer a great loss. Walidad Murdana cut the heads of several soldiers and threw them into the river. This victory gave the impulse to the Gogera independence fighters.⁶³ Fatiana and Murdana threw the dead body of Berkley into the river; putting his head on the spear and beating drums reached Jalhi late in the evening.⁶⁴ When the British government came to know about the demise of Berkley, the reporters told the warriors are round about 1,25,000⁶⁵ and they are determined to set territory from Syed Wala to Talambah free.

On September 25, Warriors came out of Harappa and encircled Major Chamberlain coming from Multan near Chichawatni. He took refuge in a Saraye to save his life. It seemed as it had become difficult to safeguard their lives. This difficult situation was described by Cave Brown as the whole country around was in arms.⁶⁶ In this fight women also participated moving along the tops of the houses with their skirts stretched out, to cover the matchlock men, as they crept about from point to point.⁶⁷ Colonel Paton's force marching on to Chichawatni relieved Major Chamberlain and the latter being joined by the Lahore light Horse, and by other troops from Multan, Jhang, and Gurdas Pur took the field against insurgents.⁶⁸

Some letters which were written to the government of India, foreign department reveal that the imperialist administration also knew the magnitude of the great resistance put upfront by the local freedom fighters. The letters repeatedly admit that the fight was not over and it

remained continuous.⁶⁹ The wording of the letter shows the miscalculation on the Government's behalf as they clearly said 'the insurrection is not dangerous nor even formidable but very troublesome'.⁷⁰ Joyias and villagers of Jumlara and Sahokay who, under the leadership of Joyia Chief Luqman murdered an English Officer, Lt. Neville travelling on the Sutlej have been traced out and arrested.⁷¹ A slight demonstration made by the Begke Kharals at Maharamwala was put down by the approach of a detachment from Lahore under commissioner Mr. Roberts.⁷²

Now all the warriors started gathering with Fatiana in Jalhi. Britishers also gathered their forces in Jalhi. It seemed as if the mouth of the cannons of all the Punjab was towards Jalhi and the freedom fighters were joking at them by competing with them with sticks and local weapons. In this crucial attack, the British destroyed Jalhi. But the British could not find anything except their drum beaters who provided an opportunity to the Mujahideen to get out from there by beating drums. The British officers caught the drum beaters and shot them with cannons.

On the 4th of November, the insurrection was at an end and the force employed in its suppression broke up.⁷³ Mamand Kathia had already been arrested. Nathoo and Rajab Kathia were arrested on 7th November⁷⁴. On November 12, other leaders of the freedom also gave arrest. They included Nader Shah Qureshi, Wali Dad Murdana, Mokha Vehniwal, and Majhi Basher. On January 11, Bahawal Fatiana was also arrested. Several people were hanged to death. Many people were made prisoners and some were exiled. Properties of various people were taken into their control. Hundreds of cattle belonging to these insurgents were seized and soled. The British government charged 5½ Lakhs of rupees as fines from revolted tribes⁷⁵ and several people were given black water punishment.

The impact of this freedom fight in the region was unexampled and gigantic⁷⁶. The purpose of the leaders of the Gogera movement can be assessed from the letters written by these leaders. For instance, Bahawal Fatiana Salabat Tarhana and Sarung Vehniwal wrote a letter to Major Mir Barkat Ali of the first irregular cavalry requesting him to leave the British army and help them against the British.⁷⁷ Some leaders of the Gogera movement named Mahamand, Nathoo, Murad, Ameer, and Laal Kathias and Bahawal Fatiana and Salabat Tarhana Zamindars of Zillah Gogera wrote a letter to the Nawab of Bahawalpur in which they wrote to fear the day of judgment and lend his support to the freedom fighters in the name of Islam but he refused the support.⁷⁸

There is no example of this war in the entire history. These people kept fighting against the British even when the rebellion had been overcome across India.⁷⁹ The shaking impact of the resistance can be sensed from the correspondence letter which was written in thanks from Sir John Lawrence the Chief Commissioner Punjab to the Government of Bombay and he remembered this as an unexampled danger and difficulty.⁸⁰ The British Government took it as sheer embarrassment like a defeat and assigned a judicial probe and Mr. R. Montgomery was appointed as Judicial Commissioner who is of the view that this Gogera uprising and its penetration also seriously affected almost all the districts of Multan Division.⁸¹ Despite the fall of Delhi on 20th September 1857 and the martyrdom of Ahmad Khan on 21st September 1857, the Mujahideen kept their fight going almost until March 1858 thus making the Gogera resistance unique in the whole of Indian history.⁸²

Ahmed and Murad never returned after this but their names have remained echoing in the

folk songs and Punjabi Dholas on the horizons of this land. Material victory in the war of independence was almost impossible because the imperialists were ruling the vast land with a tyrannical system. Ahmed Khan Kharal, Muhammad Khan Kathia, Murad, and Bahawal Fatiana who were leaders in the armed struggle against the British in this area, were all well to do and influential. They had no personal grudge with the British administration rather they could have got several types of benefits by manipulating the British in their favor but they preferred liberty to slavery. They altered their lives and never accepted alien rule over Muslims. They did not let the British take rest in their area until they had vigor in the corpus.

Conclusion

Ahmed and Murad never returned after this but their names have remained echoing in the folk songs and Punjabi Dholas on the horizons of this land. Material victory in the war of independence was almost impossible because the imperialists were ruling the vast land with a tyrannical system. This freedom struggle and the momentum it gave to the masses resulted in the making of Pakistan after 90 years. The blood of Gogera martyrs drew boundaries for a future homeland. The success of the Pakistan movement is vested deep in the Gogera freedom fight. Ahmed Khan Kharal, Muhammad Kathia, Murad, and Bahawal Fatiana who were leaders in the armed struggle against the British in this area, were all well to do and influential. They had no personal grudge with the British administration rather they could have got several types of benefits by manipulating the British in their favor but the people of district Gogera preferred liberty to slavery. They altered their lives and never accepted alien rule over Muslims. They did not let the British take rest in their area until they had vigor in the corpus.

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