

Saiyids of Baraha: A Glorious Chapter in the history of Meerut Division



Tarun Pratap Yadav
Asstt. Prof.
Amity University, Noida
U.P., India

Abstract

Baraha Saiyids attained glory in 14th and 15th century A.D during the rule of Delhi Sultanat (Saiyid Dynasty). Their services were also rendered by great Mughals, who made them, the vanguard of the army. By serving in the forefront they acquired great fame and glory and are considered among the most prominent houses that have ever ruled in Meerut Division. During the time of Later Mughals, two brothers of Saiyids, named, Hussain Ali and Hasan Ali, played the role of kingmakers, and acquired great name for them as they exercised considerable influence in court politics. In the war of succession between Dara Shikoh and Aurangzeb, they sided with the former, despite his defeat. After coming to power Aurangzeb did not disband the army of Saiyids, as he was much convinced of their utility in war.

As the central power weakened after the death of Aurangzeb, it gave the power to Saiyids, to maintain law and order in the area. In this way their rule became legalized and legitimized. In all the confusions that followed during the time of Later Mughals, Saiyids provide peace and stability in this area by controlling the hooliganism of various local ruling houses.

Keywords: Baraha Saiyids, Delhi Sutanat, Mughal Dynasty, Hussain Ali, Hasan Ali, Dara Shikoh, Aurangzeb.

Introduction

The history of Baraha Saiyids was so intimately connected with Muzaffarnagar district of Meerut Division, that a brief notice of their families and the influence they exercise is necessary to complete the local history of this portion of Ganga-Yamuna Doab. Towards the latter half of 14th century, the Saiyids generally seem to have attained to considerable power and may possibly have induced the Punjabi Saiyids to move their assistance. However, this may be at the beginning of 15th century we found the throne at Delhi occupied by a Saiyid dynasty and numerous offspring of Ali and Fatima crowding to the court for places and pensions and they were not disappointed in their quest, for these Saiyid emperors were munificent patrons of their co-religionists. In 1414 A.D, Sultan Khizr Khan conferred the fief of Saharanpur on Saiyid Salim1, the chief of Saiyid, and though, the Saiyid settlements in Muzaffarnagar can be traced back to the middle of 14th century, we may safely assume that their progress and extension were influenced, in no small degree, by the existence of a Saiyid dynasty at Delhi and of Saiyid governor in Saharanpur shikk.

The Saiyids of Barah themselves do not give a chronologically accurate account of their origin and history. According to their family chronicles, they were descent from one Saiyid Abul Farah of Wasit near Baghdad, who, owing to the troubles caused by Hulagu's invasion of Baghdad migrated to India with his twelve sons in the time of Nasir-ud-din Mahmud, son of Altamsh, who reigned from 1246 to 1265 A.D. Abul Farah was said to have remained in India until the time of Sikander Lodhi, when, hearing the death of Halagu, he returned to Persia, leaving, by the Emperor's command, four of his sons, who eventually became the heads of the four great branches of the Saiyid family in the Meerut Division.

The first, Saiyid Daud, settled in Tihanpur and his branch of the family take their name from the parent village.
Pedigrees* of Baraha Saiyids



*Pedigrees are far from being complete and their accuracy cannot be guaranteed.

Saiyid Abul Fazl settled in Chhatbanaur and his descendents are generally known as Chhatrauri Saiyid. Third Saiyid Abul Fazal, occupied Kundli, when his branch of the family obtained the name of Kundliwals. Lastly, Saiyid Najm-ud-daula Hussain settled in Jagner; his descendents were Jagneri or Jagari Saiyids. The family tradition make the Saiyids continue in the service of Shahab-ud-din Ghori; the oldest inscription relating to their family that at the tomb of Ibn Salar Chhatrauri, the Salar Auliya, at Sambalhera. It bears the date 777H or 1375 A.D and he was said to have been eighth in descent from Abul Farah. The parent villages of these families are now entirely, insignificant places, with the exception of Chhatbanaur a large town with several thousand Saiyid inhabitants.

Shortly after the settlement on Punjab, the family divided into two branches, one of which settled at Bilgram in Hardoi district, whence a colony went to Marahara in Etah, and the other took up their aboard in Ganga-Yamuna Doad. Both of these families claimed to be connected with the Saiyids of Khairabad

at Fatehpur Haswa, but as early in the reign of Akbar their claim to be true Saiyids, were not generally admitted.

The derivation of the word Baraha is very uncertain. It has been suggested that it was derived from the word Bahir, "outside" because the Saiyids preferred to live outside the city of Delhi. This seems farfetched as the derivation from 'Abrar', "the pure Saiyids". Other derivations are all connected with the number twelve. According to one view they were so called from the fact of their being Shias and followers of twelve Imans. A very probable derivation was that they originally settled in twelve villages on the analogy of the Baraha Basti of Pathans in Bulandshahr.

According to the tradition, the four clans came to the district in about the same time. The Kundliwals were said to have settled in Majhera; the Chhatrauris in or near Sambalhera; the Jagneris in Biduali; and Tihanpuri branch in Dhasri and Kumhera. Throughout the reign of Akbar and his immediate successors the Baraha Saiyids took part in almost every important campaign; their usual place was in the fore front of the army and they distinguished themselves by their courage and bravery. In 41st year Saiyid Jalal fought in Deccan. In the war with Khusrav on Saif Khan, the son of Saiyid Mahmud did excellent service, having received no less than seventeen wounds, and Saiyid Jamaluddin was mortally wounded. The Kundliwals acquisitions in this district were not however of a permanent nature and so complete was their downfall that not a title of their ancient possessions now remains to their descendents. The Chhatrauris rose to prominence during the struggle between Muhammad Shah and Tihanpuris, for they sided with the emperor, and in return for their service Nasrat Yar Khan, Shahmat Khan, Rukh-ud-Daulah and many others received substantial rewards.

The Tihanpuris acquired property rights in Jansath during the reign of Farukh Siyar, after they were detached from Jauli and formed into a separate *takka* known as Jansath, from the principal towns. From this family came the celebrated Nawab Abdullah Khan, so well known in Ajmer under the name of Saiyid Miayan. Towards the close of the reign of Aurangzeb, the Tihanpuris branch attained considerable influence and were entrusted with important commands. Hasan Ali and Hussain Ali, the grandsons of Abdullah Khan were in the employment of Azim-us-shan, who was afterwards known as Bahadur Shah and for their gallant behaviour at the battle of Agra in 1707 A.D which gave the throne to the father of their patron, the former received the government of Allahabad and latter that of Patna. The emperor Jahangir says of them that:

The personel courage of the Saiyid of Baraha but nothing else was the best proof that they were Saiyids.

In 1709 A.D we find Saiyid Ahmed, Saiyid Khan, Saiyid Hussain Khan and Saiyid Ghairat Khan all from Barha, fighting boldly for the emperor against the Hindu princesses on the banks of Narbada, who had taken the opportunity to revolt. During the next few years the Barha Saiyid established themselves in Punjab, along the Indus and in Gujarat, until the time

came when by their aid the Jansath family became the masters of Hindustan. The year 1712 found the Saiyid governors distrustful of the power of their enemies at the Delhi court, and they at length resolved to raise Prince Farukh Siyar to the throne . In this design they were successful and in his ministers enjoyed the highest dignities that the emperor could confer, they did not, however, attain their object without much hard fighting and in the battles of Sarai Alam Chand (Allahabad) and Agra, which then took place, many of their relatives and clansmen lost their lives.

Saiyid Hasan Ali Khan, henceforth known as Saiyid Abdullah, was appointed *wazir* of the empire with the title of Qutb-ul-Mulk and Saiyid Hussain Ali became commander in chief with the title of Amir-ul-Mamalik. There subsequent carriers belongs rather to general History and has no special reference to Meerut division. Saiyid Hussain Ali was assassinated in 1721 A.D and his brother was poisoned three years after. Kamaruddin, the wazir at Mughal court, seized this opportunity and defeated Tihanpuris(Saiyid Saif-ud-din) at Bhainsi on the Khautali road. After that many Saiyids migrated to Lucknow, Bareilly, Aonla, Nagina and Purniah in Bengal. For some time, Chhatauris reaped the reward of their desertion but with the building of the fort of Shukartal, near their principal town of Morna, troubles came upon them also. The Pathans too, in every way sought to undermine the influence of the remnants of Saiyid aristocracy and with the aid of Gujar chief of Behsuma on the south and Landhaura on the north, effectively prevented any coalition of the Saiyids amongst themselves. These chiefs and even the Jat and Rajput communities made common cause against the old State grantees. Pur Chhappar on the north and Bhukarheri on the east fell into the hands of Landhaura chief while Bhuma, Khatauli and Jansath were occupied by the Lord of Behsuma and where the Gujars did not claim any supremacy, the village communities themselves declared their independence or became vassals of the Pathans chiefs to the south-west, a Rajput leader received a cluster of villages and many of these had formerly belong to Saiyids.

The Kundliwals are at present distributed amongst the villages of Majhera, Hashimpur, Tisang, Balipura and Tandra. Besides these there are Kundliwals at Maimam in the Meerut district and across Chandpur and Jahnabad in Bijnor. As a clan they have become almost extinct since 1760, when the few, who did not perish by famine and the sword of Marathas, migrated to Oudh. There is another tomb of this family at Majhera containing the remains of Miran Saiyid Hussain, who died in 1592 A.D.

The reasons for the fall of Saiyid were many. The ancestor of the Nawab of Karnal received three parganas in *Jagir*, including Muzaffarnagar and the estates formally held by the descendents of Saiyid Khan Jahan and no matter who lost or won, the Saiyids seems to have always been on the losing side. Whatever limited rights they preserved were held by them as the vassals of whatever power might, for the time being, be strongest, whether Imperial, Afghan, Marathas or eventually the British. There was little change amongst the village communities who all

through retained their old position intact and in those cases, too, where the Saiyids settlements had approached the status of a village brotherhood their possession was acknowledged. The famine of 1783 A.D was severely felt in the Meerut division and for the next twenty years, in common with the other districts of the upper Doab, Muzaffarnagar became the prey of marauding bodies of Sikhs and Rohillas. This state of things continues for the first two years of British rule when troops could ill be spared even for the protection of Muzaffarnagar and the security of the revenue. Mr. Guthrie, the Collector, was often to take refuge in the small mud fort of Fazl Garh, "with no other force then a few Najibs" and it was not until the beginning of 1805 that Colonel Burn was able to clear the district, of marauders.

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