



E-ISSN: 2706-9117
P-ISSN: 2706-9109
IJH 2019; 1(1): 89-91
Received: 10-05-2019
Accepted: 28-06-2019

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The revolt of 1857 in Oudh: Role of Daundia Khera

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Abstract

Daundiakhera, also known as Sangrampur lies on the high bank of Morahi River, about 5 kms west of the Unnao Dalmau road and 26 kms south of Purva. The word 'Daundia' means a drum beater and was probably applied to some mendicant who took his abode on the Khera, meaning mounds of the ancient town. It formed the home of the great Bais class of Rajputs. They had their fortified forts in the interior regions of Ganga, Sai and Gomti River. The total population of this pargana amounts to 29,869. The river Ganga flows past the southern boundary and the river Gurdhoi, passing through the villages of Ghatampur and Bhagvant Nagar falls into the Ganges in this pargana. In the field of Daundia khera, two historical battles took place during the Revolt of 1857. In this paper we discuss the first battle only. The first Battle of 1857 took place between the uncontrolled crowd of Daundiakhera and fugitive European officers and soldiers who were fleeing back from the attack of Nanasaheb in Kanpur, in which approximately 12 officers and soldiers were laid to rest. The significance of Daundia khera lies in the fact that the battles fought here have been described vividly in Mowbray Thompson's book, 'The story of Cawnpore', an aspect that has been greatly explored in this paper.

Keywords: Revolt of 1857, Baiswara, British, Nanasaheb, Mowbray Thompson, Mrs. Seppings, Sepoys

Introduction

Daundia Khera also known as Sangrampur, is the headquarter of the Pargana of the same name and lies in Lat 26° 10 N and Long 80° 44 E on the high bank of Morahi river about 5 kms west of the Unnao Dalmau Road and 26 kms South of Purwa. The word Daundia means a drumbeater and was probably applied to some mendicant who took his abode on the Khera meaning mounds of the ancient town. It formed the home of the great Bais Class of Rajputs. Bais Rajputs spread in districts like Raebareli, Lucknow, Barabanki and Unnao under the name of Baiswara region. The people of Baiswara had a great liking for soldierships and this reflects in the fact that there were about 16 thousands soldiers in the service to the Company. They had their fortified forts in interior regions of Ganga, Sai and Gomti River.

The biggest Zamindari of Baiswara was at Daundia Khera with Babu Ram Bux Singh. The population consists chiefly of Bais and Brahman castes. The number of Musalaman is very small; the total population amounts to 29,869. The river Ganga flows past the southern boundary and the river Gurdhoi, passing through the villages of Ghatampur and Bhagwantnagar falls into the Ganges in this Pargana. These rivers, however, do not good to the country but a great deal of damage when they overflow their banks and sweep away all the crops then growing.

Grant General Sir Hope described the fort of Daundia Khera, one of the formidable fort in India. The walls of this fort were very broad and it was covered with such a dense forest that it was impossible to enter in the fort except through the self-made passage. In the field of Daundia Khera two historical battles took place during the revolt of 1857. In this paper we will discuss about the first battle only.

The first terrific battle of 1857, took place between the uncontrolled crowd of Daundia Khera and fugitive European officers and soldiers who were fleeing back from the attack of Nana Saheb in Kanpur in which approximately twelve officers and soldiers were laid to rest. Mowbray Thomson in his book 'the Story of Cawnpore' narrates the event as follows.

"When the morning broke upon us, we saw none of our pursuers and began to indulge the hope that they had given up the chase. We had however only made four miles in the entire night, and our prospects of escape can scarcely be said to have improved. About 8 A.M. we saw some natives bathing and persuaded a native drummer who was with us to go and talk with them, and try to induce them to get us some food.

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The drummer took with him five rupees and procured from one of the bathers a promise to obtain food, and also, if possible, the assistance of some native boatmen. This man left his lotah (a cooking pot), which the natives carry everywhere with them as a guarantee for his fidelity but we saw no more of him, and he informed our messenger that orders had been sent down to Nuzzuff ghar two miles further, to seize us and that Baboo Ram Buksh of Dhounrakera, a powerful Zamindar on the Oude side, had engaged that he would not suffer one of us to escape his territory. Captain Whiting now wrote with his pencil a brief statement of our utter abandonment of all hope, put the scrap of paper into a bottle and cast it into the river. At 2.00 P.M. we stranded of Nuzzuffghur, and they opened on us with musketry. Major Vibert had been shot through one arm on the previous day, nevertheless he got out and while helping to push off the boat was shot through the other arm. Captain Athill Turner had both his legs smashed. Captain Whiting was killed Lieutenant Qum was shot through the arm; Captain Seppings through the arm; and Mrs. Seppings through the thigh. Lieutenant Harrison was shot dead. I took off his rings and gave them to Mrs. Seppings, as I thought the women might perhaps excite some commiseration, and that if any of our party escaped, it would be some of them. Blenman, our bold spy, was shot here in the groin, and implored some of us to terminate his sufferings with a bullet, but it might not be done. At this place they brought out a gun; but while they were pointing it at us the rain came down in such torrents that they were not able to discharge it more than once. At sunset fifty or sixty natives came down the stream in a boat from Cawnpore, thoroughly armed, and deputed to board and destroy us. But they also grounded on a sand bank, and instead of waiting for them to attack us, eighteen or twenty of us charged them, and few of their number escaped to tell the story. Their boat was well supplied with ammunition, and we appropriated it to our own use; there was no food, and death was now staring us in the face from that direction. That night we fell asleep faint and weary; and expecting never to see the morrow; but a hurricane came on in the height and set us free again. Some of us woke in the mid-darkness, and found the boat floating; some fresh hopes buoyed us up again; but daylight returned to reveal the painful fact that we had drifted out of the navigable channel into a siding of the river opposite Surajpur. Our pursuers speedily discovered us, and again opened with musketry on the boat, which was once more settled down deep in a sand bank. A 9.00 A.M. Major Vibart directed me, with Lieutenant Deliforce, Sergeant Grady and eleven Privates of the 54th 32 Regiments, to wade to the shore and drive off the sepoys, while they attempted to ease off the boat again. It was a forlorn enterprise—that consigned to us but it mysteriously contributed, by God's goodness to the escape of four of our number. Maddened by desperation, we charged the crowd of sepoys and drove them back some distance, until we were thoroughly surrounded by a mingled party of natives, armed and unarmed. We cut our way through these, bearing more wounds, but without the loss of a man; and reached the spot at which we had landed, but the boat was gone. Our first thought was that they had got loose again and were further down the stream, and we followed in that direction, but never saw either the boat or our doomed companions any more. Our only hope of safety now was in flight; and with a burning sun overhead, a rugged raving ground, and no covering for the feet, it was no easy task for

our half feminized party to make head; but a rabble of riots and sepoys at our heels soon put all the deliberation upon the course to be pursued at it did ourselves, to flight. For about three miles we retreated, when I saw a temple in the distance, and gave orders to make for that. To render us less conspicuous as marks for the Iruns, we had separated to the distance of about twenty paces apart; from time to time loading and firing as we best could upon the multitude in our rear. As he was entering the temple. Sergeant Grady was shot through the head. I instantly set four of the men crunching down in the doorway with bayonets fixed, and their muskets so placed as to form a cheval-de-frise in the narrow entrance. The mob came on the helter-skelter insuch maddening haste that some of them fell or were pushed on to the bayonets, and their transfixed bodies made the barrier impassible to the rest, upon whom we, from behind our novel fence, poured shot upon into the crowd. The situation was the more favorable to us, in consequence of the temple having been built upon a base of brickwork three feet from the ground, and approached by steps on the one side. The brother of Baboo Ram Buksh who was leading the mob, was slain here; and his bereaved relation was pleased to send word to the Nana that the English were thoroughly invincible. Foiled in their attempts to enter our asylum, they next began to dig at its foundation; but the walls had been well laid, and were not so easily to be moved as they expected. They now fetched faggots, and from the circular construction of the building they were able to place them right in front of the doorway with impunity, there being no window or loophole in the place through which we could attack them, nor any means of so doing without exposing ourselves to the whole mob at the entrance. In the centre of the temple there was an Alta for the presentation of gifts to the presiding deity; his shrine, however, had not lately been enriched, or it had more recently been visited by his ministering priests, for there were no gifts upon it. There was, however, in a deep hole in the centre of the stone which constituted the alter, a hallow with a pint or two of water in it, which, although long since putrid, we bailed out with our hands, and sucked down with great avidity. When the pile of faggots had reached the top of the doorway or nearly so, they set them on fire, expecting to suffocate us; but a strong breeze kindly sent the great body of the smoke away from the interior of the temple. Fearing that suffocating sultry atmosphere would be soon insupportable, I proposed to the men to sell their lives as early as possible; but we stood until the wood had sunk down into a pile of embers, and we began to hope that we might brave out their torture till height (apparently the only friend left us) would let us get out for food and attempted escape. But their next expedient compelled an evacuation; for the brought bags of gunpowder, and threw them upon the red-hot ashes. Delay would have been certain suffocation so out we rushed. The burning wood terribly marred our bare feet, but it was no time to think of trifles. Jumping the parapet, we were in the thick of the rabble in an instant; we fired a volley, and ran amuck with the bayonet. Seven of our number succeeded in reaching the bank of the river, and we first threw in our guns and then ourselves. The weight of ammunition we had in the pouches carried us under the water; while we were thus submerged, we escape the first volley that they fired. We slipped off the belts, rose again, and swam and by the time they had loaded a second time, there were only heads for them to aim at. I turned round, and saw the banks of the

river thronged with the black multitude, yelling, howling and firing at us; while others of their party rifled the bodies of the six poor fellows we had left behind. Presently two more were shot in the head; and one private, Ryan, almost sinking from exhaustion, swam into a sandbank and was knocked on the head by two or three ruffians waiting to receive him. These villains had first promised Lieutenant Deleafosse and private Murphy that if they would come to the shore they should be protected, and have food given to them. They were so much inclined to yield that they made towards the bank, but suddenly and wisely altered their determination. Infuriated with disappointment, one of them threw his club at Deleafosse; but in the height of his energy lost his balance and fell into deep water; the other aimed at Murphy, and struck him on the heel. For two or three hours, we continued swimming; after changing our position, and the current helping our progress. At length our pursuers gave up the chase; so war on horseback was the last we saw of them".

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