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The Rise And Consolidation Of Afghans In Awadh

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Abstract-

In this paper I examined the rise of the Rohilla Afghans and their conflict with the Nawab of Awadh. In the eighteenth century with the weakening of Mughal power they established themselves as an independent power. This paper also focuses the causes of their rise territorial expansion their economic interest political ambitions and the role of the British east India Company. It will also analyze the causes of the first and second rohilla wars which known as the Rohilla war. After this war their power weakened and influence in Awadh to an end.

Key Words- Rohilla, Nawab, Awadh, Afghans

Introduction-

Rohillas the word 'Roh' means mountain or parvati region Afghans came to India from the mountainous region of Afghanistan. They came from the Roh region so called Rohillas. They migrated and settled in the Rohillhand region of India. In the eighteenth century with the weakening of Mughal power they established themselves as an independent power.

In the beginning of the eighteenth century Afghans had become numerous in katehr. By the middle of the eighteenth century many grants of land were given from time to time especially in the northern districts now known as Bijnor and Muradabad. Bishop Heber pointed out that the climate of Rohilkhand and soil are very good and commodities are considered better. As the Rohillas were rebellious they were very faithful to each other.¹ The Rohillas were immigrant Afghan horse traders and soldiers serving the Mughals and played a crucial role in the struggle for power that took place in North India. They established large settlements in the area now known after them as Rohilkhand.² In Moradabad and Chandausi, an Afghan upstart Ali Mohamad khan fought cleverly and valiantly and brought the entire Rohilkhand area under his command and even extended influence into kumaun region. Ali Mohammad, rose rapidly to power, and became the founder of the short lived rule of the Afghans in Rohilkhand. Thus Afghans spread all over the country, where they had taken so deep root, that they had become the zamindars of that tract, and had to their own Afghan stubbornness added all the perverseness all the refractory behavior inherent to the character of a zamindar.³

The invasion of India by Nadir Shah in 1739 strengthened the power of Ali Mohammad by weakening that of the Emperor, and large numbers of Afghan soldiers took service with him. He improved his position and guarded himself against future danger by attaching his interests to that his uncle, Rahmat Khan, to become the most important of all the Afghan chiefs in Rohilkhand. Rahmat Khan had joined Ali Mohammad and received from him a large grant of land. Ali Muhammad Khan collected many Afghans and rendered services to the Bara Saiyids. In return he was rewarded with the title of nawab with a grant of a large part of Rohilkhand⁴ In 1740 the greater part of the country now called Rohilkhand was in Ali Mohammad's possession, and he was recognized by the emperor as its governor. For five years his authority was almost undisputed, but in 1745 he quarreled with Safdar Jung the subedar of Awadh. The retainers of Ali Mohammad had seized some property belonging to Safdar Jung's servants, and redress for the injury was refused. Safdar Jung, furious at the insults he had received, and jealous of the growing power of his neighbor, went to Delhi and induced the emperor to order Ali Mohammad to make instant restitution of the property that had been seized and to deliver up the Rohillas who had been guilty of the outrage. Ali Mohammad refused in positive terms to obey the imperial mandate. The emperor, Mohammad Shah, was easily persuaded to punish this offence, and to endeavor to expel Ali Mohammad and his Afghan followers from Rohilkhand. Ultimately the forces of the Mughal emperor were obliged to take the field. With the help of Safdar Jung and others, a considerable force was collected, and accompanied by the emperor in person the force crossed the Ganges and defeated Ali Mohammad Khan whose forts and property were confiscated. Ali Mohammad was deserted by his troops; he made his

¹M. A.Laird, Bishop Heber in Northern India Selections from Heber's Journal, Cambridge University press, London, 1971, p.199

² Iqbal Hussain, The Ruhela chieftaincies, Delhi, 1994, p.1

³ Mir Gholam Hussein khan, The Siyar-ul- Mutakherin, vol. 3, Low price publications, Delhi, 1926, p.265

⁴ C.U. Aitchison, A collection of treaties, Engagements and Sanads Relating to India and Neighbouring Countries, vol 2. Calcutta, 1930, p.1

submission, and was taken to Delhi, where he received honourable treatment. To keep him away from Rohilkhand, he was sent as faujdar of Sirhind in Panjab. His adherents were still so strong and turbulent that it was necessary to conciliate him, and his son was finally entrusted with the government of Sirhind between the Jumna and the Sutlej.

In 1748 Mahommed Shah, the Emperor of Delhi died. The death of Qamruddin Khan, the *wazir*, and then Muhammad Shah (1748) changed the power structure at the imperial court. His son Ahmad Shah succeeded him and appointed Safdar Jang to the post of *wazir*. Safdar Jang, the leader of the Irani group and an arch enemy of the Ruhelas, thus became the *wazir* of the new emperor, Ahmad Shah.⁵ Safdar Jang also retained his viceroyalty of Awadh.⁶ Intizam ud Daula hatched a plot against the *wazir* Safdar Jang in November 1748. But Safdar Jang was lucky to survive the plot and seeing this decided to retire towards Awadh. This proved opportune for Intizam ud Daula who in league with Javed Khan persuaded the emperor to write a letter to Nasir Jang (the second son of Nizam ul Mulk) asking him to present himself in the north.⁷ In Rohilkhand, the involvement of Safdar Jang came about in a very circuitous manner. The emperor Ahmed Shah, threatend on all sides by his refractory chiefs, was without power in his own capital. The Rohillas, in open rebellion, had only established for themselves a sort of independence.⁸ Safdar Jang, the subahdar of Awadh, who had become *vizier* of the empire, after the death of Ali Mohammad got a good opportunity for promoting his own interests, and he saw the increasing power of the Rohillas on the borders of his own territories. Safdar Jang thought the opportunity favourable for his own aggrandizement, seized Farukhabad and the territories of his Afghan ally, but Ahmad Khan, the son of Kaim Jang, succeeded in collecting his adherents, and defeated the troops of the *vizier*.⁹

However, Safdar Jang took an active part in these battles in Rohilkhand and made his presence felt in the corridors of power in the Mughal court.¹⁰ Ali Muhammad Khan's indiscriminate occupation of *jagirs* in Kateher after his return from Sirhind in 1748 annoyed Safdar Jang's Turani allies at the imperial court. In the changed conditions, both the Irani and Turani nobles who had been deprived of their *jagir* in Kaither, were anxious to check the Ruhelas.¹¹

⁵ C. U. Aitchison, *A collection of treaties, Engagements and Sanads Relating to India and Neighbouring Countries*, vol 2. Calcutta, 1930, p.61

⁶ Henry Lawrence, *The Kingdom of Awadh*, London, 1845, p.84.

⁷ A. L. Srivastava, *The first two Nawabs of Awadh*, Agra, 1933, pp.127-129

⁸ G.R. Gleig, *Memoirs of the life of the Warren Hasting*, vol. 1 London, 1841, p.32

⁹ Sir John Strachey, *Hastings and The Rohilla War*, Oxford The Clarendon Press,1892, p.17

¹⁰ Surendra Mohan, *Awadh under the Nawabs Politics, Culture and Communal Relations 1722-1856*, Manohar Publisher, New Delhi, 1997, p.52

¹¹ Ghulam Hussein Khan, *Siyar-ul-Mutakherin*, Vol.1, Delhi, 1926, p.873

Conclusion:

The rise of the rohillas brought an important change in the political history of northern India. Through their military strength and leadership, the rohilla established a powerful rule in the rohilkhand region. However, continuous conflict with the Nawab of Awadh and the British East India Company gradually weakened their power and influence. As a result of the Awadh conflict, the political position of the rohillas declined significantly while British interference in northern India increased rapidly. This conflict played a major role in strengthening British dominance over Indian politics and marked an important turning point in the expansion of British control in India.

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