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INDIAN REBELLION OF 1857 - SHAH MAL

Shah Mal (also known as Shah Mal Singh) (1857) was a rebel at the time of the Indian Rebellion of 1857, based out of the village of Bijrol, Uttar Pradesh. 209 He led the Jats of Baraut in rebellion against the East India Company.

The story of Shah Mal, branded an "upstart" by the British, who "from nothing became a rebel of some importance", has been subsumed into the familiar narrative of 1857 - that it was a mutiny of sepoys which spread to former rulers of northern India. His is one of the many forgotten accounts of peasants and commoners, who were an essential part of the rebellion, which a group of dedicated historians from Meerut are trying to revive.



REBEL OF 1857

Shah Mal lived in a large village in pargana Barout in Uttar Pradesh. He belonged to a clan of Jat cultivators whose kinship ties extended over chaurasee des (eighty-four villages). The lands in the region were irrigated and fertile, with rich dark loam soil. Many of the villagers were prosperous and saw the British land revenue system as oppressive: the revenue demand was high and its collection inflexible. Consequently cultivators were losing land to outsiders, to traders and moneylenders who were coming into the area. Shah Mal mobilised the headmen and cultivators of chaurasee des, moving at night from village to village, urging people to rebel against the British. As in many other places, the revolt against the British turned into a general rebellion against all signs of oppression and injustice



REBEL OF 1857

Cultivators left their fields and plundered the houses of moneylenders and traders. Displaced proprietors took possession of the lands they had lost. Shah Mal's men attacked government buildings, destroyed the bridge over the river, and dug up metalled roads – partly to prevent government forces from coming into the area, and partly because bridges and roads were seen as symbols of British rule. They sent supplies to the sepoys who had mutinied in Delhi and stopped all official communication between British headquarters and Meerut. Locally acknowledged as the Raja, Shah Mal took over the bungalow of an English officer, turned it into a “hall of justice”, settling disputes and dispensing judgments. He also set up an amazingly effective network of intelligence. For a period the people of the area felt that firangi raj was over, and their raj had come. Shah Mal was killed in battle in July 1857



SHAH MUL OF BIJRAUL AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A MARTYR'S MEMORIAL

One of the greatest battles in the history of the War of Independence 1857 was fought in the region of Baraut and Baghpat to the west of Meerut. We call it one of the greatest battles not because of its scale, or its impact on the events of 1857. We call it great because here we see a direct confrontation between an army of peasants, mostly farmers, and the army of the East India Company which had all the three arms of the cavalry, infantry and artillery within it. This Company army was not just comprised of Indian irregulars led by British officers, as was the situation in many of the retaliatory military operations undertaken in the Indian countryside during 1857 by the British authorities. Here infantry soldiers of a crown regiment were sent in, supported by British artillery guns, to fight an army of simple peasants.



SHAH MULL OF BIJRAUL AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A MARTYR'S MEMORIAL

These farmers of Baraut, with limited means of warfare at their disposal, created an army of about 3500 men, mostly infantry, but also having a small cavalry segment, Shah Mal leading them on horseback. They must have possessed primitive muskets and weapons like swords and spears. Shah Mull belonged to village Bijroul near the town of Baraut (Dist. Baghpat in north-western Uttar Pradesh, bordering Haryana state). He was a prosperous farmer of the area and held considerable standing in the region. He started operating and organising the farmers of his area against British rule just after the Meerut outbreak, but his activities started taking concrete shape around the last week of May 1857.



SHAH MULL OF BIJRAUL AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A MARTYR'S MEMORIAL

This small peasant army had become strong enough to force the Company authorities to mount an attack on it with a group of regular soldiers. This reflects on the character of these peasant fighters and the social organisation that they belonged to. They were mostly Jats, but the other social groups of this region like the Gurjars, Rajputs, Tyagis etc, both Hindu and Muslim, were also liberally represented. There is no count of how many village folk died fighting in these battles. These simple farmers paid dearly for their audacity to stand up against the greatest power in the world of that time. After the fall of Delhi retaliatory strikes were undertaken on those of Bijraul who participated in the Uprising. The house of Shah Mull was burnt and 26 of the leaders were hanged from a tree close to the village. In 2007, a memorial was established at the site of hanging and yearly programs are held here since then. The memorial carries a short history of the events linked to the village.

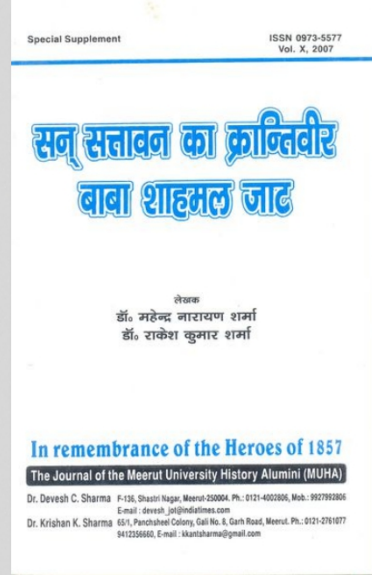


SHAH MUL OF BIJRAUL AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A MARTYR'S MEMORIAL





BOOK ON SHAH MAL



Krantiveer Baba Shahmal Jat of Sun Sattavan



SOME GLIMPSE OF SHAH MAL

1857 के जन विद्रोह में शहीद प्रमुख जाट नेताओं का विवरण

| शहीद जाट नेता | गौत्र | गांव / जिले का नाम |
|--------------------------------------|---------|--------------------|
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| • चौ. सुरजाराम नम्बरदार | खत्री | कूण्डली, सोनीपत |
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| • चौ. शाहमल सिंह | लौनिया | बिबरोल, यू.पी. |
| • चौ. मोहर सिंह | | शामन्ती, यू.पी. |
| • चौ. महताब सिंह व चौ. मंगलसिंह | | अलीगढ़, यू.पी. |
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| • चौ. धर्मा जाट | | रामनगर |
| • चौ. होरम सिंह | | कैलसा, अमरोहा |
| • चौ. देवी सिंह | | लपौरा, मथुरा |
| • चौ. देवकरण सिंह | | करबुण्डा, सदाबन्द |
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○ प्रसिद्ध लेखक, साहित्यकार,
स्वतंत्र एवं समीक्षक पत्रकार

Jats in 1857 Independence Movement, Shahmal Jatt is Tomar Gotra



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