

Narratives of Survival and Retribution: The Mahua Dabar Massacre of 1857

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.57067/ir.v3.i2.515>

The current research casts a questioning eye over the 1857 massacre of British officers which immediately followed the village of Mahua Dabar and the consequent complete destruction of that township by British colonialists. Based on the primary source documents of the time, i.e., the traumatic narration of the sergeant Busher, the official papers of the Commissioner William Wynyard, and the military diaries of William Peppé, this work examines the fusion of colonial trauma and the state-sponsored revenge. The exploration of the events that followed the Faizabad mutiny is also narrated with a special focus on how the British government changed its attitude of defensive helplessness into an offensive operation of aggressive cleansing of the surrounding rural setting. This thesis argues that the destruction of Mahua Dabar did not just serve as a case of military necessity but was in fact a symbolic performance of power of the colonizers meant to reestablish Iqbal-i.e. prestige- through the physical eradication of a supposedly rebellious district. Moreover, the ambiguity of the local loyalties is interrogated in furtherance of the future of the agency of the Indian intermediaries who ambivalently participated in the insurgency either by aiding the fugitives or by joining the insurgency. Contrasting between the information power, represented in the British documentary evidence, and the corporeal silence of the destroyed village, the paper provides subtle understanding of counter-insurgency tactics, as well as the politics of shared memory in the Great Uprising in the Basti district.

Keywords: Survival and Retribution, Mahua Dabar Massacre, British government, William Wynyard, Basti.

I. Introduction

A. Historical Context: The 1857 Uprising and the Faizabad-Gorakhpur Corridor

The Indian Uprising of 1857 also known as the First War of Independence must not be imagined as a unitary event but rather as a cluster of massively localized manifestations of dissatisfaction. The conflict took on a theatre-like reputation in the North-Western Provinces (today known as Eastern Uttar Pradesh), which was mainly fought there. In particular, Faizabad, Gorakhpur corridor acted as an important strategic line of the movement of the British army and administrative communication. By June 1857, when the Bengal Native Infantry regiments mutinied in Faizabad, the hold that the colonial administration had on the rural hinterlands started to weaken (Lennox 5). The topography of this route, which was traversed by the Ghaghara river and thick forests, made it the refuge of rebels and the place where escaping British authorities lost their way. The falling of

the government in this country implied that the lives of British men were now completely subject to the arbitrary affections of the local zamindars (landowners) and the apparent thee and thou of the village inhabitants (Wynyard, 15 June 1857).

B. Defining the Subject: The Lost Township of Mahua Dabar

Mahua Dabar was an important township long before it became infamous with an economic energy and intellectual acuity ("The Destruction"). The town, which was situated to the south of Basti, was a major center of the textile industry, with a talented group of weavers, especially. According to the surveys of the first part of the nineteenth century, there was a mixture of populations such as Pathans and Hindus that were involved in an advanced trade system, exporting textiles far beyond the boundaries of the district (The Destruction). Mahua Dabar was also a seat of

learning; it had Hindu Academicians and schools where metaphysics, grammar and law were studied and discussed. It was not an uncultured hamlet, but an advanced city, as it was, and that fact makes its complete loss to sight on the map all the more dramatic. The town was the symbol of the power of information in the indigenous society; a self-sufficient community with its own records, traditions and economic agency.

C. Thesis Statement

When Mahua Dabar was totally destroyed in July 1857, it was not an incidental effect of military skirmishes or even a standard maneuver of warfare. Instead, it was the calculated execution of information power and state punishment. The British colonial state, which was losing its senses due to the so-called butchering of its officers, was attempting to commit an archival violence, in addition to physical violence. By burning the town down and declaring it GairChiragi (uninhabited), the administration was planning to remove the community not only physically but also from the official record of the future, thus making the only remaining true story the British story of victimhood and of subsequent retribution (Wynyard, 4 July 1857)

D. Methodology: Deciphering the Colonial Archive

This study uses a history written above to bring out a history written below. The main methodology will be based on the critical review of the colonial archives of the 19th century, specifically on the archives of the so-called Further Papers that were introduced in

the UK Parliament in 1857 (Further Papers 53). The main sources of these reconstructions are the newspaper articles of the London Daily News and the Morning Chronicle published at the time, which provided the Victorian audience with the official account of the massacre (Narrative of Sergeant Busher). Moreover, the petitions and military journals of William Peppan an indigo planter of this locality turned Deputy Magistrate give a detailed account of the logistics of revenge (Peppe). Interrogating these sources, the study reveals to us the emptiness in which the voices of the indigenous people were suppressed and it assembles the chronology of how a rich city was literally undermined to a footnote of rebel treachery.

II. The Pre-War Landscape: Mahua Dabar as a “Significant Township”

A. Socio-Economic Profile and the Textile Trade

Before it is finally washed off the physical surface, Mahua Dabar is to be comprehended, not as an idyllic enclave of farmers and herders, but as a lively hub of business and craft. According to scholarly surveys, most of them conducted by Francis Buchanan in 1813, the place is defined as a major township and not an agrarian outpost (The Destruction). Their textile industry was advanced and the main force propelling this town was the high population of skilled weavers that were considered the economic engine of this town. The archives of the Gorakhpur district at the start of the nineteenth century testify to the prolific production of cotton wares by Mahua

Dabar and its role as a hub of the bigger trade systems.

The town ethnic structure was also interesting as it comprised of a large Pathan (Muslim) community and Hindu artisan and mercantile communities. This diversity gave rise to strong export-import economy; the settlement did not only create goods to be consumed locally, but also was connected to the larger trades of the North Western Provinces. The existence of a big bazaar (Lennox 5) testifies of a certain extent of urban planning and core economic activity that collides with the colonial discourse of the area as a lawless rural wasteland. The affluent Mahua Dabar could not be any less associated with the trade routes of the Ghaghara River which made them a place of both wealth and strategic value long before the military action of 1857.

B. Intellectual and Cultural Life

Intellectual capital was another character that brought fame to this township. Mahua Dabar was a seat of learning and traditional scholarship unlike the neighboring agrarian societies. The presence of the existence of Hindu Academicians and well-established schools in the township is mentioned in the British archival materials of the early nineteenth century (The Destruction). Such schools were not primitive; they imparted knowledge in advanced areas like Sanskrit grammar, metaphysics and local jurisprudence.

This culture of thought implies the presence of a stable, educated middle ground which placed a premium on the continuity of

culture and dialectical discussion. This simultaneous presence of the Pathan families and Hindu scholars glimpses one of the symbols of cultural life of syncretism that represents the Awadh- Gorakhpur border. This amount of literacy and academicism is necessary to understand the information power as represented in the introduction; the town was a storehouse of local history and social order. When the British finally burned the town down they were not destroying mud huts by burning but destroying centuries of local knowledge and scholarly infrastructure.

C. The Colonial Gaze and Pre-Mutiny Surveillance

Before the start of the rebellion, Mahua Dabar had a fiscal and statistical administrative perception. The township to the East India Company was a source of revenue, a ledger entry, which was characterized by tills and pergunnahs (Wynyard, 2 July 1857). However, it was still marked with tension: the British officials were often careful about the Pathan population of the Basti region, they examined the so-called allegedly disaffected local zamindars even in peacetime (Further Papers 53).

The casual notes of history which were written by Buchanan or the early revenue collectors, unwittingly preserve the image of a town which was alive and self-governing. These documents form the only known record of Mahua Dabar existence, the next policy of Bechiragi, which was to leave no lamps, being so efficient, that, in a hundred and more years, the physical remnant of schools and bazaars fell under the jungles and silt (The Destruction

). Therefore, the rebuilding of the socio-economic life of Mahua Dabar requires an archeological method of approach to the colonial archive and, thus, determining a flourishing civilization in the very documents that were subsequently used to legitimize its destruction.

III. The Catalyst: The Ambush at Mahua Dabar (June 10, 1857)

A. The Flight from Faizabad and the Pursuit

The circumstances which culminated in the defeat of Mahua Dabar can be dated back to the fall of the British control in Faizabad cantonment, on 8 June 1857. There was a tense negotiation, unlike the more violently charged disturbances of Meerut or Cawnpore, in the first mutiny at Faizabad; the mutineers of the 22nd Regiment Bengal Native Infantry allowed their officers to be rowed away in four boats down the Ghaghara River. However, this had a short-lived perceived mercy. The 17th Native Infantry mutineers intercepted the boats as they were heading east to Gorakhpur, near Begumgunj (Lennox 5).

The expedition quickly degenerated into a frantic battle to live. Colonel Goldney and one of his contingents were captured, and others, such as Major Mill and Lieutenant Currie, being armed with the boats, had to make their way inland, where, by drowning in the swollen monsoon rivers, they were defeated (Further Papers 54). Seven officers and a few sergeants succeeded in getting to the Tehsildar of Captaingunge, where they were at first treated well, and given 50 rupees to carry on their journey. It was here under the three

Burkundages (constables) that the group was turned off to the township of Mahua Dabar.

B. The Ambush: Lured by “Sherbet”

The immediate eyewitness account of the resultant tragedy goes back to Sergeant Busher who is the only European survivor of the Mahua Dabar massacre. This story of his was in the Morning Chronicle, and describes a wagered fraud. As we turned towards the village, one of the constables, who assumed the role of a host, bade the panting officers to dismount, and recline and have a glass of sherbet. The constable then went to work at equipping the accommodations, which manoeuvre Busher, later, realized, was calculated to attract the attention of the armed villagers (Busher).

On coming to the outskirts of the town the party saw with horror that the whole village was equipped with swords and matchlocks. This conflict was magnified when the officers tried to pass a shallow nullah at the outskirts of the settlement. At this unprotected stage, the villagers rushed on the party. The last to cross, Lieutenant Lindesay was the first to be cut to pieces (Busher). The disorganized situation of the stream, aggravated by physical fatigue of the officers and inadequate weaponry, made successful resistance impossible.

C. The “Butchery” and the Fate of the Officers

The resulting violence was reported in colonial records as a ruthless massacre that was done without the most minimal provocation (Lennox 5). Ensign Ritchie and Sergeant Edwards were systematically hunted

and Lieutenants English, Cautley, Thomas, and Ritchie were hunted down. The description of the death of the Lieutenant Cautley is extremely graphic by Busher; having covered 300 yards, Cautley fell in exhaustion and was overwhelmed by the mob, who literally butchered him in front of everyone (Busher). When the word butchery was used in British accounts it was a calculated language, it was designed to place the Indian fighters not as soldiers or political rebels, but as sub-human criminals. This framing of the narrative was absolutely critical to the information power of the British state; by highlighting the dreadful nature of the killings, namely that tulwars (curved swords) were used to cut the head off or simply cut bodies in two, the administration was bearing a moral imperative about the ruthless vengeance that would come as a result (Rizvi 392).

D. Busher's Captivity and the Role of Baboo Bully Singh

After the massacre Sergeant Busher fled into a nearby Brahmin village, and was brought to relative hiding in an old woman's straw hut, until he was thus disclosed to the men of Baboo Bully Singh, a village zamindar. His description of captivity points at the disjointedness of local control. Busher was carried about with the village to village as prize, the tumultuous people often asking Bully Singh to allow them to cut off his head. The performative aspect of the rebellion is brought out by the cold commentary of Bully Singh, who merely says, Not yet, take him to the next village (Busher, 1857).

Nevertheless, the story also has internal divisions in the Indian leadership. Busher captures a heated exchange between Bully Singh and his brother who told him that the acts of this day were likely to boomerang back on himself- an ominous reference to the British collective punishment policy (Busher, 1857). In the end, having ten days under the stocks, Busher was delivered into the keeping of William Peppy, who came in with an elephant and a band of sowars. This capture to survivor made the British have the much needed information that would help them adequately in targeting Mahua Dabar to destroy it completely.

E. The Aftermath: Framing the Case for Retribution

The accounts provided by Busher and Colonel Lennox (who had escaped separately) were rapidly disseminated through the "Home Department" and the London press. These texts ignored any potential local grievances—such as the heavy revenue demands or the displacement of weavers—focusing entirely on the "cruel" and "inhuman" nature of the Mahomedan population of Mahua Dabar (Wingfield, 5 July 1858).

The "butchery" served as the primary evidence in the British trial of the township. As Magistrate W.S. Paterson noted in his abridged journal, the "inhuman murder" of the six officers required a response that transcended mere arrests. It required the physical removal of the site of the crime from the earth (Paterson, 2 July 1857). Thus, the ambush at the nullah became the legal and

moral cornerstone upon which the scorched-earth campaign of July 1857 was built.

IV. The Retributive Response: William Peppé's Scorched-Earth Campaign

A. The Deputization of the Planter: William Peppé as Paramilitary Magistrate

The British response to the massacre at Mahua Dabar illustrates a pivotal shift in colonial governance during the 1857 Uprising: the formal deputization of European civilians into paramilitary roles. William Peppé, an indigo planter and grantee of government forest lands in Birdpore, was not a career military officer. However, on June 15, 1857, Commissioner William Wynyard invested Peppé with the powers of a Magistrate (Wynyard, 15 June 1857). This appointment was strategic; planters like Peppé possessed intimate knowledge of the local geography and commanded private levies of men—resources the embattled regular army lacked.

Peppé was placed in command of a detachment of the 12th Irregular Cavalry and tasked with “putting down disorder” in the Basti district. His transition from an agriculturalist to a “Deputy Magistrate” empowered to “cut up” plunderers and take no prisoners signifies the suspension of civil law in favor of a state of exception (Rizvi 392). Peppé's subsequent actions were not merely those of a soldier, but of a judicial officer executing a sentence of total erasure upon a community.

B. The “Utter Destruction” Mandate: Wynyard's Orders

The announcement of the colonial punitive policy by Commissioner Wynyard on 15 June 1857 is a vivid example of that. Wynyard comes out categorically and instructs Peppy to go to Mahua Dabar and to burn and destroy that village to utter destruction where no single stone of that village should be left on the other (Wynyard, 15 June 1857). The atmosphere of the mandate is extremely vengeful, the use of biblical paradigms to project the destruction as a righteous indemnity against the inhuman slaughter of the British officers.

Besides the physical destruction, what Wynyard is telling him to do is beyond mere destruction. He orders the village territory to become part of the Government and orders the Tehseeldar to take custody of all the cattle and crops (Wynyard, 15 June 1857). This is an agenda of full economic and social liquidation. By controlling the means of production the looms and fields that supported the major township, the colonial government is certain that even in the event that the people managed to emerge out of the conflagration, they would have no way of restoring their society.

C. The Execution of Retribution (July 3, 1857)

The levelling of Mahua Dabar was an organized, multi-day operation. Although Peppé initially expressed hesitation due to the size of the village and the potential for resistance, he was reinforced with additional sowars and local levies (Further Papers 55). On July 3, 1857, Peppé marched on the township. His journal records that the destruction was “progressing satisfactorily,” though the sheer

scale of the town meant it took several days to level every structure to the ground (Peppé).

The process was systematic: houses were set ablaze, and the masonry was dismantled. To further punish the community, Peppé utilized “Khuticks and Bhurs”—marginalized rural laborers—to carry out the labor of demolition and plundering, a tactic designed to sow deep-seated communal and caste divisions within the local population (Wynyard, 29 June 1857). By the time the operation was complete, a town that had for centuries been a hub of textile trade and academic pursuit was reduced to a charred, silent field.

D. The Policy of “Bechiragi”: Erasure from the Record

The most enduring element of Peppé’s campaign was the legal designation of the site as Gair Chiragi (or Bechiragi), literally meaning “without lamps.” In the revenue records of British India, this term indicated a deserted village where no light was lit at night. This was not merely a description of the current state of the village, but a permanent legal prohibition against resettlement (“The Destruction”).

This act of “information power” was successful for over 150 years. The calculated removal of Mahua Dabar off revenue maps and the physical topography was an effective way of removing the settlement out of the collective memory of the district. The village was later burned to the ground, its property restored, a laconic sentence which, as Commissioner C. Wingfield, wrote later, was the last monument to a once-prosperous civilisation (Wingfield). It was not until over a

century later that local historians and archeologists succeeded in breaking this colonial silence and the physical evidence of the township was found beneath the silt of the Basti plains.

V. The Dynamics of Local Loyalty and Resistance: A Fragmented Frontier

A. The Geopolitics of Basti and Gorakhpur

To understand the Mahua Dabar devastation, it is necessary to go outside of the village premises and take into account the complex structure of geopolitical texture in which the Basti and Gorakhpur districts were covered in 1857. It can be characterized as a patchwork of semi-autonomous estates, in which Rajas and Zamindars led a quagmire of an existence between the declining power of the Nawab of Awadh and the advancing apparatus of bureaucracy of the East India Company. In such rural talookas, such information power as the British had was distinctly neutralized; the local power was maintained by word of mouth, kinship ties and the physical presence of forts and bazaars.

By the time the revolt broke out, such local elites had to play a high stakes game. To others, and above all to the Raja of Nagar and to the Raja of Amorha, the revolt was an opportunity to restore ancestral estates lost to British revenue settlements. Pragmatism ruled the calculus to others. According to British archival sources, the topography of the so-called confused stories were often characterized by the fact that the line dividing a rebel and a loyalist was often blurred due to the survival needs (Paterson, 2 July 1857).

B. Figures of Resistance: The Pathan Community and Jaffer Ali

British naming of the village of Mahua Dabar as a rebel village was largely based on the behavior of the Muslim people in this village especially the Pathans. The Pathans in the Basti area, colonialists considered a martial race, their past connection with the military life of the Rohilkhand and Awadh making them innately suspicious. In the British accounts, the main villain in the massacre was a man called Jaffer Ali.

The report of Sergeant Busher has Jaffer Ali as the one who fired a shot at Lieutenant Ritchie and has bragged of it afterward to Baboo Bully Singh. The fact that Ali threatened to burn [Busher] alive, and that the Sergeant had such an auspicious fate as the kismut of the storm, help to stress the possibility of the war being intensely personalized (Busher). In British eyes Jaffer Ali was the very symbol of the villainy of the rising, but in the local milieu his exploits must have represented a larger community opposition to the economic displacement of the Mahua Dabar weavers caused by the British trade policy.

C. The Ambiguity of Loyalty: Baboo Bully Singh

Baboo Bully Singh is one of the most complicated characters in the narration of Mahua Dabar. On the one hand, there was a local zamindar, Bully Singh, who occupied an intermediate position and baffled British administrators. On the one hand, his men seized Sergeant Busher and were carrying him through the villages as the prisoner, which was

an undoubted violation of his authority (Busher). Conversely, Bully Singh finally rescued Busher against Jaffer Ali and finally handed him to William Peppé.

It was not unusual that this oscillation was characteristic of the landed elite. The fact that the admonition by the brother of Bully Singh that his behavior would then come back to haunt him, served to prove how anxious the British were of retaliating (Busher). The British reaction to Bully Singh was also quite instructive: although it was offered a reward to his head initially, it was subsequently withdrawn allowing him to help rescue British survivors (Wynyard, 23 June 1857). These expedient concessions were a kind of information power which was used to turn local chiefs into spies and accomplices, even when they had previously been involved in the first phases of the revolt.

D. The Shadow Ruler: Mahomed Hussun

With the official administration retiring to Gorakhpur, they had left a vacuum of power which was filled by Mahomed Hussun who presented himself as the head of the district as a representative of the rebel administration based in Lucknow. His contribution in the Mahua-Dabar scandal is itself comic. Although the British later executed or deported numerous of his associates, Commissioner Wingfield recognized that Mahomed Hussun had given refuge to Colonel Lennox and his family, which must have saved them destruction (Wingfield).

The observation that the very person who proclaimed his sovereignty on the district,

secured the high-ranking British fugitives, can serve to describe the divided loyalty that was typical of 1857. It insinuates that the butchery at Mahua Dabar was not a planned order of the rebel leadership, but a localized outburst of violence by the “Mahomedan population” of a given township- an event that even the rebel “Governor” Mahomed -Hussun wanted to have nothing to do with (Wingfield).

E. Punishing the Elite: The Fate of Nagar and Bakhira

While Mahua Dabar was physically leveled, the British also sought to dismantle the political structures that supported the rebellion. The Raja of Nagar, whose reinforcements had forced William Peppé to retreat during his initial attempt on the village, saw his entire estate confiscated. The British recovered the murdered officers' property from the Raja's fort, providing the legal “evidence” needed for his ruin (Peppé).

Similarly, the Raja of Bakhira was executed, and his lands were distributed to “loyalists”—including European planters like Peppé and Indian officials like the Tehseeldar of Captaingunge who had assisted the British fugitives (Nevill 162). This redistribution of land was the ultimate exercise of “information power.” By rewriting the land records, the British ensured that the “retribution” for Mahua Dabar would be felt for generations, as the old elites were replaced by a new class of landholders beholden to the colonial state.

F. The “Loyal” Sepoy: Teg Ali Khan

Amid the hubbub of the evil-doers and traitors, the British story told of Teg Ali Khan,

who served as a sepoy with the 22nd Regiment, and was a man of utter loyalty to his officers. The Certificate of Character issued by Colonel Lennox to Teg Ali Khan describes him as a man of faith, loyalty, and truth, in which he fled the country with the officers (Further Papers 53). The fact that the account of Teg Ali Khan was raised served two purposes, first, it provided the information needed to outline good and bad subjects; second, it strengthened the British belief that the mutiny was an infidelity to a generally good relationship between a master and slave. By compensating the so-called discerning sepoy and destroying the so-called disloyal village, the British administration had implemented a discriminatory historiographic practice that favoured personal submission to the complaints of the community.

G. Conclusion: The Silence of the Silt

The political relations of loyalty and resistance at Basti district show that the razing of Mahua Dabar was one of a large scale, systematic effort towards the restoration of a proper sense of deference to Government (Wynyard, undated). The township was caught up in a crossfire of a conflict between an awakening national awareness and a desperate colonial nation. Due to the fact that the power of information was concentrated in the hands of the victors, the subtle team spirit of the villagers the financial need of the weavers or the political ambitions of the Pathans, was buried under a pile of rubble. Over one hundred years of cartographic history had seen the only cartographic representation available to them which was the British where Mahua

Dabar was presented as a blank. It is not until the re-examination of these fragmented records and the current archaeological excavations that the voice of the town has actually emerged out of the dampened silt of the plains.

VI. Historical Memory and the “Misinformation of Power”

A. Documentation as Weaponry: The Framing of “Provocation”

In the colonial archive, information was never neutral; it was a tool of pacification. The British records regarding Mahua Dabar—specifically the dispatches of Commissioner Wynyard and the published accounts in the London Daily News—consistently framed the ambush as an act of violence committed “without the slightest provocation” (Lennox 5). This specific phrasing was essential to the “misinformation of power.” By stripping the event of its socio-political context, the British administration transformed a localized insurrection into a cosmic struggle between “civilization” and “barbarism.”

This framing justified the shift from police action to total war. In the mid-19th century, the “Laws of War” were increasingly discussed in Europe, but the British applied a different standard to the Indian subcontinent. By characterizing the villagers not as combatants, but as “murderers” and “villains” who breached the sacred hospitality of “sherbet,” the state could bypass judicial norms (Busher). The written record served as a legal shield for the scorched-earth policy: if the provocation was “nil,” the retribution could be “infinite.” Documentation, in this

sense, acted as weaponry, providing the intellectual ammunition necessary to level a township and confiscate its lands under the guise of moral necessity (Further Papers 55).

B. Archaeology of Silence: The 150-Year Disappearance

What the British punitive campaign had the most effectual effect on was not the conflagration of July 1857, but the following phenomenon which the scholar has characterized as the Archaeology of Silence. During an explicit duration of one hundred and fifty years, Mahua Dabar was virtually removed out of the writing and map-making tradition of the official geography of colonial India. The village was not successfully included in successive issues of maps and district gazetteers, under the Bechiragi policy, it continued to appear in occasional footnote notices which recognised its destruction (Nevill 162). The physical location was repossessed by the irresistible forces of nature monsoon silt; invading jungle vegetation and the collective memory of the settlement was destroyed by the traumatic translocation of people.

This gap was broken in the early twenty first century by a scholarly project by the local people with the help of a group of citizens which resulted in a new dig in 2010 under the supervision of local historians and the descendants of the area. It was a history of the ground up, unearthed stuff of the material artefacts that colonial archives had begun to hide: remnants of duricrusted brick buildings, traces of textiles that testified to an elaborate weft industry, and other infrastructures of the

urbanization. The site was rediscovered to create a rupture counter-narrative to the British claim of information power; showing literally the existence of a real civilization that had been systematically destruction by decree (The Destruction).

C. The Legacy of “Bechiragi”: Psychological and Physical Erasure

Bechiragi policy which is the order to leave none of the lamps is a permanent scar on the regional psyche and this continues to this day. Besides the actual destruction of buildings, this policy was designed to induce a lasting psychological effect that can be explained herein as being un-homed. By proclaiming the land unfriendly and giving the title of it to loyalist planters like William Peppé, the colonial government made sure that the descendants of Mahua Dabar would face a lifetime of diaspora, without their history, inhaling the mills, and socio-economic status (Peppé). The long-term effect of this obliteration was that the local history became an orphan. Over many decades, people of the Basti district lived on an invisible map of the secret graves and forgotten bazaars without monuments to mark the place of resistance of their ancestors. Bechiragi represents the echo of the absolutism of colonial domination: it was not only a military triumph, but a military mission to kill memory. Current attempts to put a monument there represent a formal re-lighting of the lamps which symbolically turns the British decree back and recaptures the information power that was decayed in the smoke in 1857.

VII. Conclusion

A. Summary of Findings: The Anatomy of Erasure

Destruction of Mahua Dabar is therefore a microcosm of the complete warfare that the British colonial state had fought in the 1857 uprising. This paper has proven that the village was not merely a collateral damage of incidental cross fire but a major focus of a multi-level annihilation campaign. The history of the events, namely the attack on the Faizabad officers at the nullah and the next appointment of William Peppé as a paramilitary magistrate sheds light on the process of colonial statecraft during the state of existential crisis. The British administration turned localized anti-colonial violence into a scapegoat of a final geographical and socio-cultural extermination by granting civilian planters the power to declare scorched-earth policies. The order to abandon not a stone to another was actually fulfilled and thus destroyed a fine textile and intellectual centre (Wynyard, 15 June 1857).

B. Final Reflection: The Dialectic of Power and Information

The issue of information power held by the British is the main argument of this investigation: it was the real author of the 150-year lost Mahua Dabar. The documents of the archives, provided by Sergeant Busher and Commissioner Wynyard were not only intended to record a massacre, but they were also intended to establish an empty space of conscience and law that justifies collective punishment. By framing the Indian reaction as happening with no provocation at all, the

colonial state declared the monopoly on determining history, which deprived both Pathan and Hindu people of their socio-economic grievances and political agency (Lennox 5). This misinformation of power was so powerful, that it was able to cover a flourishing township with a mountain of administrative silence. The Gair Chiragi, or colonial pen, in the nineteenth century had been just as drying as the fire which it attempted to eternize.

C. Re-insertion into History: Re-lighting the Lamps

For over a century and a half, the only surviving evidence of Mahua Dabar's existence resided in the very archives that condemned it. However, history is rarely successfully erased forever. The citizen-led archaeological efforts of 2010, which unearthed the brick foundations and artifacts of the lost town, represent a profound reclamation of narrative ("The Destruction"). This physical rediscovery challenges the supremacy of the colonial written record, offering a tangible counter-narrative to the British myth of an unprovoked, barbaric wasteland. By re-inserting Mahua Dabar into the broader historiography of the 1857 Indian Uprising, modern scholarship and local memory are finally reversing the decree of Bechiragi. The township is no longer defined solely by its destruction or by the "casual notes" of its conquerors; it stands reclaimed as a site of early anti-colonial resistance and a testament to the enduring resilience of historical memory against the power of state erasure.

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