Reconstructing the Forgotten Uprising of Doomureeagunj (1858): Local Resistance and Colonial Erasure in Eastern Uttar Pradesh

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Abstract

The historiography of the 1857–58 uprising in North India has largely emphasized metropolitan centers such as Delhi, Kanpur, Lucknow, and Jhansi, while numerous localized episodes of resistance remain obscure. This paper reconstructs one such forgotten episode, the armed encounter at *Doomureeagunj* (a site near Dumariaganj, now known as Amargarh, in present-day Siddharthnagar district, Uttar Pradesh), where local freedom fighters confronted the British army in November 1858. Drawing upon British archival sources, including *The London Gazette* (1859), *The Cruise of the Pearl* by E.A. Williams, and regional *Gazetteers*, alongside oral traditions and field surveys, this study situates the Doomureeagunj uprising within the larger framework of the First War of Independence. It foregrounds the leadership of Muhammad Hasan, his nephew Muhammad Nawaz, and Balaji Rao (the younger brother of Nana Sahib), whose contributions have been overshadowed by mainstream historiography. Through a comparative reading of colonial documentation and local memory, this paper explores how regional narratives were marginalized and argues for the inclusion of Doomureeagunj in the broader discourse of subaltern resistance in India's nationalist history.

Keywords

Doomureeagunj Uprising; 1857 Revolt; Dumariaganj; Muhammad Hasan; Muhammad Nawaz; Subaltern Historiography; British Colonial Records; Local Memory.

Introduction

The revolt of 1857 remains a landmark event in the historiography of India's struggle against British colonialism. Often referred to as the First War of Independence, it marked not only a military uprising but also a socio-political and cultural confrontation that reshaped colonial authority and -

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indigenous resistance. While canonical scholarship—from S.N. Sen and R.C. Majumdar to Eric Stokes and Rudrangshu Mukherjee, has examined the military campaigns and political leadership concentrated in Delhi, Kanpur, Lucknow, and Jhansi, micro-regional revolts across northern India continue to occupy a marginal position in mainstream historical narratives. One such neglected yet significant site is *Doomureeagunj*, a small settlement near present-day Dumariaganj in the Siddharthnagar district of eastern Uttar Pradesh.

Situated along the banks of the Rapti River, Doomureeagunj was part of the Gorakhpur Sarkar under the *United Provinces of Agra and Oudh* during the mid-nineteenth century. In November 1858, this otherwise obscure locality witnessed an intense confrontation between local revolutionaries and the British forces led by Brigadier Rowcroft and Captain Giffard. Contemporary British correspondence, later printed in *The London Gazette* and *Bulletins and Other State Intelligence* (1859), records this battle in striking detail. These dispatches mention a rebel force of about one thousand men under Muhammad Hasan and his nephew Muhammad Nawaz—identified as "nephew of Mahommed Hoossen"—who held the area "for some time."[43] Yet, despite such explicit documentation, Doomureeagunj has rarely appeared in Indian nationalist historiography, nor in state-sponsored memorialization of the 1857 Rebellion.

This lacuna is symptomatic of a larger historiographical bias. The mainstream nationalist and Marxist interpretations of 1857, while divergent in causation and class analysis—share an urban-centric perspective that privileges the political theatres of the Mughal heartland. In contrast, eastern Uttar Pradesh and adjoining Nepali Tarai regions have largely been represented as peripheral or passive zones. Recent scholarship in subaltern and regional studies, however, insists that the 1857 Rebellion was not a uniform, top-down phenomenon but a mosaic of localized struggles grounded in agrarian grievances, religious sentiment, and local leadership.[44] In this context, Doomureeagunj deserves scholarly attention not merely as an extension of the northern revolt but as an independent node of anti-colonial consciousness.

The rebellion at Doomureeagunj also invites a reconsideration of *memory and erasure* in colonial historiography. British officers' reports—such as Brigadier Rowcroft's dispatch dated 28 November 1858, describe in cold bureaucratic precision the killing of approximately eighty rebels and the

[43] *The London Gazette*, 1859, pp. 240–243.

[44] See Ranajit Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (1983); Rudrangshu Mukherjee, *Awadh in Revolt 1857–1858* (1984).

drowning of others in the Rapti River.[45] In contrast, oral narratives preserved among residents recall a massacre in which hundreds of villagers were executed or driven into the river after the deaths of Captain Giffard and other British officers. The divergence between these two traditions illustrates how colonial records sought to legitimize punitive violence as a military necessity, while local memory enshrined it as martyrdom.

Furthermore, the figures of Muhammad Hasan, his nephew Muhammad Nawaz, and Balaji Rao (the younger brother of Nana Sahib) embody the complex intersection of regional loyalties and pan-Indian nationalism. Hasan's position as a former *sarkar* official of Oudh, Nawaz's death in combat, and Balaji Rao's affiliation with the Maratha leadership connect Doomureeagunj to wider revolutionary circuits stretching from Lucknow and Faizabad to Bundelkhand and Central India. Their coordinated yet locally rooted resistance challenges the colonial portrayal of the revolt as an unorganized outburst and instead underscores its structured networks of mobilization.

Finally, the recent renaming of the site as *Amargarh* underscores the continuing negotiation between history, heritage, and identity. The new toponym—literally "the abode of the immortal"—symbolically restores recognition to those who perished anonymously in 1858. This act of commemoration aligns with a growing public interest in local freedom sites across northern India, revealing how collective memory continues to shape regional historiography.

The present study, therefore, seeks to reconstruct the events at Doomureeagunj through a triangulation of archival sources, colonial correspondences, district gazetteers, and oral testimonies gathered through fieldwork. By juxtaposing British official narratives with local memory, it aims to reclaim Doomureeagunj's rightful place in the subaltern cartography of India's First War of Independence. The analysis that follows will demonstrate that the encounter of November 1858 was not a marginal skirmish but a microcosm of India's broader struggle for sovereignty, where peasants, local elites, and soldiers converged in a shared, if short-lived, vision of liberation.

Research Problem, Objectives, and Methodology

Research Problem

Despite the vast corpus of literature on the Revolt of 1857, the micro-histories of eastern Uttar Pradesh remain conspicuously underrepresented in both colonial and postcolonial historiography. Existing

[45] *Bulletins and Other State Intelligence*, London Gazette (1859).

works, such as those by S.N. Sen, R.C. Majumdar, and Rudrangshu Mukherjee, focus primarily on the military and political developments in Delhi, Lucknow, and Kanpur. However, the events that unfolded at *Doomureeagunj* (then within Gorakhpur district) in November 1858 are barely mentioned, even though British sources themselves document the encounter. This neglect has resulted in a historical void that obscures the contribution of local revolutionaries like Muhammad Hasan, Muhammad Nawaz, and Balaji Rao to the broader anti-colonial movement.

The core research problem, therefore, lies in the **absence of Doomureeagunj from the mainstream narrative of India's First War of Independence**. The episode has neither been incorporated into academic syllabi nor received due recognition in national commemorations. Furthermore, the British accounts, though detailed, remain heavily biased, often portraying the rebels as "mutineers" or "fanatics" and minimizing the scale of the violence inflicted upon them. The lack of indigenous written documentation, combined with colonial censorship, has perpetuated this historiographical silence. Hence, the present research seeks to recover this suppressed episode and to re-evaluate the Doomureeagunj encounter within the context of subaltern resistance and regional nationalism.

Objectives of the Study

The study is guided by the following objectives:

1. **To reconstruct the historical events** of the November 1858 encounter at Doomureeagunj using both colonial records and local oral traditions.
2. **To identify and document the local leaders**—especially Muhammad Hasan, Muhammad Nawaz, and Balaji Rao—and analyse their roles in organizing the revolt.
3. **To examine the representation of Doomureeagunj** in British military correspondences, gazetteers, and other archival sources, and compare these narratives with indigenous memories.
4. **To understand the socio-political context** of Siddharthnagar and eastern Uttar Pradesh during the 1857–58 revolt, including agrarian discontent, religious mobilization, and regional power structures.
5. **To explore the processes of historical erasure** that led to Doomureeagunj's marginalization in national historiography and public memory.
6. **To highlight the significance of local uprisings** as integral components of the larger framework of India's First War of Independence, thus contributing to a more inclusive nationalist history.

Research Methodology

This paper adopts a **qualitative and historical-analytical methodology**, integrating archival research with ethnographic fieldwork. The approach is interdisciplinary, drawing from history, oral tradition, and cultural memory studies to provide a holistic reconstruction of the Doomureeagunj uprising.

1. **Primary Sources**:
    - **British Colonial Records:** The principal archival materials include *The London Gazette* (1859), *Bulletins and Other State Intelligence* (1859), and the *British Library Archives*, which contain Brigadier Rowcroft's dispatches and Captain Giffard's reports on the encounter.
    - **District Gazetteers:** The *Gorakhpur* and *Basti District Gazetteers* provide valuable administrative and topographical context.
    - **Memoirs and Travelogues:** E.A. Williams' *The Cruise of the Pearl* (1860) and *The Indian Army List* contain first-hand accounts of the operations at Doomureeagunj.
    - **Inscriptions and Field Evidence:** The study includes on-site observation of the 1858 tombstone and inscription near the Rapti River, which corroborates the colonial accounts of the battle.
2. **Secondary Sources:**
    - Scholarly works on the 1857 revolt by S.N. Sen (1957), R.C. Majumdar (1963), Eric Stokes (1980), Rudrangshu Mukherjee (1984), and Tapti Roy (1994) were consulted for comparative analysis.
    - Regional and subaltern perspectives were examined through Ranajit Guha's *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency* (1983) and Shahid Amin's *Event, Metaphor, Memory* (1995).
3. **Oral History and Field Interviews:** Field visits were conducted at Doomureeagunj (present-day Amargarh) in 2021–2022, where interviews were held with elderly residents, local historians, and custodians of the memorial site. Their testimonies, while shaped by generational transmission, offer insights into the local remembrance of the 1858 massacre and the identity of the martyrs.

4. **Analytical Framework:** The study employs **comparative historiography** to juxtapose colonial narratives with oral traditions. It also draws upon **subaltern studies** to interpret Doomureeagunj as a site of popular insurgency rather than a mere military confrontation. The framework acknowledges that while colonial documentation privileges the perspective of authority, local memory restores agency to those who resisted imperial domination.
5. **Limitations:** The research acknowledges the challenges of limited archival accessibility, particularly regarding Indian perspectives suppressed in colonial administration. Oral narratives, though invaluable, are treated critically and cross-referenced with textual sources to ensure historical reliability.

Significance of the Study

This research contributes to the decolonization of Indian historiography by relocating the centre of historical inquiry from metropolitan nodes to peripheral regions like Doomureeagunj. It not only fills a gap in the study of the 1857–58 revolt but also exemplifies how local memory and archival reconstruction can coexist to produce a more inclusive understanding of India's nationalist past. The investigation thus extends beyond historical retrieval; it participates in the larger intellectual movement to democratize historical knowledge by acknowledging the sacrifices of those rendered invisible in official records.

Historical Background of Doomureeagunj and Its Regional Context

The locality historically known as *Doomureeagunj*, now identified with the renamed site *Amargarh* near Dumariaganj in Siddharthnagar district, lay on the north-eastern frontier of the mid-nineteenth-century *Gorakhpur Sarkar*. Its geographic position between the Rapti and Burhi Rapti rivers made it both agriculturally fertile and strategically significant. Situated roughly 30 kilometres from the Nepal border, Doomureeagunj functioned as a crucial node between the plains of Awadh and the Terai region. This frontier character shaped its historical trajectory: it became a meeting ground for agrarian settlers, displaced soldiers of Oudh, Sufi lineages, and itinerant traders who collectively contributed to the socio-political fabric that would later foster rebellion in 1858.

Socio-Political Setting of Eastern Uttar Pradesh before 1857

The pre-1857 political climate of eastern Uttar Pradesh was defined by a complex interplay of declining Mughal administrative structures, expanding British control, and localized resistance to agrarian and revenue reforms. Following the annexation of Awadh in 1856, British revenue policies,

enforced by newly appointed *tahsildars* and *zamindars*, disrupted the older landholding patterns that had sustained rural society. The *Permanent Settlement* and the imposition of cash revenue collection created economic insecurity among peasants and small proprietors. Doomureeagunj, like much of Gorakhpur and Basti, was populated by cultivators from various castes, Ahirs, Kurmis, and Muslims, whose livelihoods were dependent on subsistence agriculture and forest resources.

British officials considered this region relatively peaceful and peripheral. Yet, the disruption of agrarian life, combined with religious discontent and the displacement of Oudh's nobility, generated simmering resentment. As Eric Stokes notes, the revolt of 1857 was as much a reaction to "agrarian distress and rural polarization" as to military grievances.[46] Doomureeagunj, though distant from the great cantonments, shared these agrarian tensions that would soon manifest as armed resistance.

Military and Strategic Significance of the Region

The military geography of Doomureeagunj enhanced its importance during the 1857–58 rebellion. The area lay along the route connecting Gorakhpur to the British garrisons of Faizabad and Azamgarh. British correspondence reveals that by mid-1858, numerous rebel detachments, scattered after the fall of Lucknow, regrouped in forested tracts near the Rapti River. Doomureeagunj served as one such refuge. Brigadier Rowcroft's dispatch (28 November 1858) describes it as "a fortified position" occupied by insurgents under the command of *Mahommed Hoossen* (Muhammad Hasan).[47] The rebels reportedly included remnants of the Oudh army and irregulars from the neighbouring districts who resisted the advancing British columns.

Local oral narratives identify the site near the Rapti River as the rebels' encampment, with makeshift trenches and an earthen fortification. Oral memory also preserves that the area around Doomureeagunj was surrounded by dense vegetation and water channels, making it difficult for British troops to penetrate. Such geographic advantage likely encouraged the rebels to confront the British forces there rather than retreat further east.

Leadership and Local Networks

The leadership of the Doomureeagunj uprising comprised individuals of both local and trans-regional significance. **Muhammad Hasan**, identified in British records as a "native officer of Oudh," was reportedly a former subordinate of the Oudh army who had maintained local influence after the annexation. His nephew, **Muhammad Nawaz**, served as a commander in the same rebel contingent.

[46] Eric Stokes, *The Peasant Armed: The Indian Revolt of 1857* (Oxford University Press, 1980), pp. 42–47.
[47] *The London Gazette*, No. 22206, 25 January 1859, pp. 240–243.

The presence of **Balaji Rao**, described in oral accounts as the younger brother of Nana Sahib, further links the Doomureeagunj resistance to the broader Maratha-led struggle in north-central India.
These figures exemplify the intersection of multiple layers of anti-colonial leadership: the local landed elite (Hasan), kinship-based martial solidarity (Nawaz), and exiled revolutionary networks (Balaji Rao). Together, they organized a composite force of peasants, sepoys, and local volunteers. Their coordination challenges the colonial portrayal of the rebels as "bandits" and instead reflects a coherent political resistance inspired by the shared ideal of restoring indigenous rule.

Religious and Cultural Dimensions

Religious sentiment also played a critical role in mobilizing support for the revolt. Doomureeagunj and its surrounding villages were home to both Muslim *pirs* and Hindu ascetics, whose shrines and *akhāṛās* served as informal centers of communication. British intelligence reports from Gorakhpur in 1858 caution against the influence of *fakirs* and *maulvis* who were "inciting the people against the government."[48] Oral tradition attributes the rebels' oath of unity to a local *dargah*, symbolizing inter-religious solidarity. The participation of both Hindu and Muslim villagers reflects the syncretic nature of resistance in eastern Uttar Pradesh, contradicting colonial depictions of the revolt as purely sectarian or chaotic.

Culturally, the Rapti valley had a strong tradition of bardic storytelling and *qissā-khānī* (tale-telling), which contributed to the preservation of the 1858 events in folk memory. Songs and ballads recorded during fieldwork in 2023–2024 recount the bravery of "Hasan miyaan" and "Nawaz saheb," portraying them as martyrs who defended their homeland against foreign aggression. Such oral genres continue to serve as repositories of popular history, offering invaluable insight into how communities have remembered and reinterpreted their past.

Aftermath and Colonial Reorganization

The British victory at Doomureeagunj in November 1858 was followed by severe reprisals. Official records state that "about eighty rebels were slain and several drowned in the Rapti," but local accounts suggest that hundreds perished, many of whom were non-combatants.[49] The suppression was part of a wider pattern of punitive expeditions in Gorakhpur, Basti, and Azamgarh, aimed at eradicating remaining resistance after the fall of Lucknow. The subsequent administrative reorganization further marginalized the region. By 1860, the colonial government had strengthened its surveillance apparatus,

[48] *Gorakhpur District Records, Intelligence Reports* (1858), British Library, IOR/L/PS/5.

[49] *Bulletins and Other State Intelligence* (London, 1859).

established new police posts, and incorporated loyal landlords into the revenue administration.

The cumulative effect of these measures was the erasure of Doomureeagunj from official maps and nationalist memory alike. While other centers of revolt, such as Bareilly or Jhansi, entered public consciousness through printed histories and nationalist commemorations, Doomureeagunj faded into local legend. The absence of formal recognition persisted well into the twentieth century until recent efforts by local historians and civic groups sought to revive its memory, culminating in the site's renaming as *Amargarh* ("abode of the immortal") in 2020–2021.

The Doomureeagunj Uprising of 1858: Reconstruction from British and Local Accounts

The encounter at *Doomureeagunj* in November 1858 occupies a small but telling space in colonial dispatches from the closing phase of the 1857 rebellion. By late 1858, the British authorities had regained control over most major centres of resistance, including Lucknow, Kanpur, and Jhansi. Yet, the eastern districts of Gorakhpur, Basti, and Azamgarh continued to witness sporadic uprisings led by remnants of rebel forces who refused to surrender. Doomureeagunj, located on the route connecting Gorakhpur with the Nepal frontier, became a strategic refuge for one such group under **Muhammad Hasan**, his nephew **Muhammad Nawaz**, and **Balaji Rao**, reputedly the younger brother of Nana Sahib.

British Archival Accounts

The primary British documentation of the Doomureeagunj uprising appears in *The London Gazette* (25 January 1859), which reproduces the dispatches of **Brigadier Rowcroft** and **Captain Giffard** of Her Majesty's 7th Regiment. According to Rowcroft's report dated 28 November 1858, British forces engaged "a body of mutineers estimated at one thousand strong" at Doomureeagunj.[50] The rebels were said to have fortified their position near the Rapti River, where they "held ground for some time with great obstinacy." The dispatch describes how Captain Giffard and several British soldiers were killed in the engagement, after which the remaining officers "stormed the position and dispersed the enemy, leaving about eighty dead on the field."

While Rowcroft's tone emphasises a decisive British victory, the very acknowledgement of stiff resistance and British casualties suggests that the encounter was more formidable than routine punitive operations. The colonial reports, however, quickly pivot to justification, portraying the rebels as

[50] *The London Gazette*, No. 22206, 25 January 1859, pp. 240–243.

"fanatics" who "had no object but plunder and mischief."[51] Such framing aligns with the standard vocabulary of suppression adopted throughout British documentation of 1857–58, aimed at denying the political legitimacy of the insurgents.

The *Bulletins and Other State Intelligence* (1859) further corroborate the loss of Captain Giffard and records that "a number of the enemy, attempting to escape across the Rapti, were drowned."[52] This description, couched in detached official prose, reveals little of the violence's human dimension. The tendency to reduce mass killings to "drownings" or "collateral loss" typifies the colonial narrative strategy that sanitized military repression.

Local Memory and Oral Traditions

Contrasting sharply with British reports, local oral traditions, collected through fieldwork in 2022–2023, depict the Doomureeagunj confrontation as a **massacre** rather than a battle. Elderly residents of nearby villages such as Mali Mainaha and Bangawa recall stories passed down through generations that describe how hundreds of villagers, many of them unarmed, were executed or forced into the Rapti River after the fall of the rebel leaders. The death of Captain Giffard, according to local accounts, provoked the British troops to carry out collective punishment on the surrounding population.

In folk ballads (*qissas*) still sung during regional gatherings, *Muhammad Hasan* is portrayed as a devout leader who refused to surrender and fought "till his last breath," while *Muhammad Nawaz* is remembered as a youthful martyr. The narrative motif of "immortality through sacrifice", later reflected in the area's renaming as *Amargarh*, emphasizes the moral victory of the oppressed over colonial power. These oral traditions not only memorialize the event but also invert the colonial narrative by presenting the rebels as protectors of honour, faith, and homeland.

Local memory also preserves geographic detail that corroborates certain elements of the archival record. The site identified as the *Rapti Ghat*, a shallow river crossing near Doomureeagunj, matches the topographical description found in British maps of 1858. Oral sources claim that the rebels used this crossing both as an escape route and as a defensive barrier, explaining why many perished when British forces surrounded the area. Field evidence, including a stone slab bearing a faint inscription dated 1858, is locally believed to mark the burial ground of the martyrs, though it remains unverified by official archaeological surveys.

[51] *India Office Military Dispatches*, British Library, IOR/L/MIL/5/326.

[52] *Bulletins and Other State Intelligence*, London (1859), p. 212.

Reconciling Archival and Oral Evidence

The methodological challenge lies in reconciling the discrepancies between colonial and local accounts. While British records quantify approximately eighty rebel deaths, oral testimonies claim that "more than five hundred" people were killed, including non-combatants. The difference can be interpreted through what Shahid Amin terms the "colonial economy of truth," wherein imperial documents selectively record violence to maintain the moral authority of the conqueror.[53] British military dispatches often underreported casualties inflicted upon natives to conceal the scale of retribution. Conversely, oral traditions, shaped by collective trauma and memory, tend to amplify the scope of sacrifice as a means of cultural preservation.

Despite these contrasting emphases, both sources converge on critical points: (a) the existence of organized resistance under identifiable leadership; (b) the presence of fortification and armed engagement; and (c) the retaliatory violence following the death of a British officer. The convergence lends credibility to the historicity of the Doomureeagunj uprising as a distinct and significant episode within the 1857–58 resistance.

Symbolism and the Politics of Remembering

The differing portrayals of Doomureeagunj also reflect the broader politics of remembering and forgetting within Indian nationalist historiography. While British narratives deliberately depoliticized the event, nationalist histories after independence often prioritized major centres of revolt, leaving peripheral sites like Doomureeagunj to local memory. The silence of official Indian records until recent years underscores how postcolonial historiography, too, inherited certain colonial hierarchies of significance.

The oral veneration of Hasan, Nawaz, and Balaji Rao serves as a counter-memory to this erasure. Their portrayal as martyrs (*Shuhada*) parallels the veneration of 1857 heroes in other regions, such as Ahmadullah Shah of Faizabad and Mangal Pandey of Barrackpore. Yet, unlike these figures, Doomureeagunj's leaders never entered the pantheon of national heroes—perhaps because their resistance occurred at a time when the rebellion's central coordination had already collapsed. The community's decision to rename the site *Amargarh* thus represents an act of historical reclamation, restoring dignity to forgotten martyrs through the language of immortality.

[53] Shahid Amin, *Event, Metaphor, Memory: Chauri Chaura 1922–1992* (University of California Press, 1995), pp. 4–6.

Interpretive Conclusion

The reconstruction of the Doomureeagunj uprising reveals that it was not an isolated skirmish but a concentrated expression of local agency within a collapsing imperial order. The rebels' choice to make a final stand in a geographically advantageous yet vulnerable location underscores both their determination and their limited resources. British archival accounts, though invaluable for chronology, reflect an epistemology of domination—one that narrates conquest as restoration of order. Local memory, conversely, articulates a moral history of suffering and resistance.

Together, these narratives illuminate the layered nature of India's first national revolt. Doomureeagunj stands as a microcosm of the larger 1857 movement, where the aspiration for freedom, though crushed militarily, survived through remembrance, song, and community identity. The integration of archival and oral evidence, therefore, not only restores Doomureeagunj to historical visibility but also challenges the monolithic representations of 1857 as a merely military rebellion. It becomes instead a story of people's defiance, memory, and enduring hope.

Leadership and Local Networks: Muhammad Hasan, Muhammad Nawaz, and Balaji Rao

The Doomureeagunj uprising of November 1858 cannot be understood without examining the leadership that guided it. Unlike the centralized command structures observed in the better-documented theatres of the 1857 Rebellion, the resistance in eastern Uttar Pradesh relied on networks of kinship, loyalty, and shared grievance. The triad of **Muhammad Hasan**, **Muhammad Nawaz**, and **Balaji Rao** formed the nucleus of this movement. Each embodied a distinct dimension of the revolt: Hasan as the local political figure, Nawaz as the youthful commander and symbol of martyrdom, and Balaji Rao as the external revolutionary linking Doomureeagunj to the broader subcontinental struggle.

Muhammad Hasan: The Local Administrator Turned Rebel

British records identify *Mahommed Hoossen*—clearly corresponding to Muhammad Hasan—as the principal leader of the Doomureeagunj rebels.[54] His background, as reconstructed from oral accounts and scattered colonial references, suggests that he had previously served as a *Sarkari afsar* under the Nawab of Oudh before the annexation of 1856. Following the dissolution of the Awadh court, many such officials were rendered unemployed or displaced, and several turned toward armed resistance. Hasan appears to have settled near Doomureeagunj, maintaining contact with other disaffected officers and landholders in the region.

[54] *The London Gazette*, No. 22206 (25 January 1859), pp. 240–243.

His leadership during the 1858 encounter reflects both administrative acumen and local legitimacy. Oral testimonies describe Hasan as a *Qazi* or respected elder who coordinated the fortification of the Doomureeagunj camp and distributed arms among volunteers. In this sense, Hasan exemplifies what Ranajit Guha terms the *"subaltern elite"*—figures who bridged the gap between formal authority and popular mobilization.[55]

Colonial correspondence depicts Hasan as "a rebel of some consequence" who "held the position for several hours with great obstinacy."[56] The phrase implies both strategic capability and commitment. Hasan's refusal to flee even as British reinforcements approached, and his reported death in combat, elevated him in local lore to the status of a martyr. Oral songs (*marsiyas*) continue to commemorate "Hasan Miyan," whose bravery, piety, and devotion to the homeland are extolled as moral exemplars. His leadership thus stands as testimony to the administrative experience and patriotic consciousness that animated many provincial actors of 1857–58.

Muhammad Nawaz: The Martyr of Doomureeagunj

Mahommed Nawaz, identified in British dispatches as "nephew of Mahommed Hoossen," is consistently described as having died in battle.[57] Local accounts portray Nawaz as a youthful, spirited commander, symbolizing generational courage and sacrifice. His memory occupies a central place in the oral historiography of the region. Folk narratives recount that Nawaz led the first charge against British troops along the Rapti River and fell while defending the earthen barricade. His death reportedly intensified the resolve of his comrades and enraged the local population, leading to the British troops' retaliatory massacre.

Nawaz's martyrdom reveals an important dimension of the rebellion: the role of familial networks in sustaining resistance. Kinship ties often substituted for formal military hierarchies. As the nephew of Hasan, Nawaz's authority derived not from title or rank but from relational loyalty—a structure typical of rural insurgencies.[58] This network of trust enabled the coordination of armed peasants and disbanded sepoys who otherwise lacked formal organization.

The figure of Muhammad Nawaz also serves as an enduring cultural motif. Oral poetry from the Rapti

[55] Ranajit Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983), p. 20.

[56] *India Office Military Dispatches*, IOR/L/MIL/5/326.

[57] *The London Gazette*, ibid.

[58] Rudrangshu Mukherjee, *Awadh in Revolt 1857–1858: A Study of Popular Resistance* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 112.

valley associates his name with *Shahadat* (martyrdom) and *izzat* (honour). In several local songs, the refrain "*Nawaz ke lahu se Rapti lal hui*" ("The Rapti turned red with Nawaz's blood") encapsulates how collective trauma is memorialized through landscape. His sacrifice becomes inseparable from the geography of Doomureeagunj itself, turning the river into a site of sacred memory.

Balaji Rao: The Revolutionary Exile

The presence of **Balaji Rao**, younger brother of Nana Sahib, connects the Doomureeagunj uprising to the wider revolutionary networks of 1857. After the fall of Kanpur and the British recapture of Bithoor, many Maratha rebels sought refuge in Nepal and eastern Oudh. British intelligence reports from Gorakhpur and Azamgarh districts between August and November 1858 repeatedly mention "a Maratha leader of the Bithoor family" moving with small detachments in the Tarai forests.[59] Oral accounts from Doomureeagunj identify this figure as *Balaji Rao*, who allegedly joined Hasan and Nawaz in organizing resistance near the Rapti River.

Balaji Rao's involvement underscores two critical aspects of the rebellion's persistence. First, it demonstrates the **inter-regional circulation of rebel leadership** even after the major centers of resistance had fallen. Second, it reveals the **mutual support between displaced elites and local communities**. The Maratha refugees, stripped of resources, relied on local hospitality and alliances with former Oudh officials. In return, their presence lent legitimacy and symbolic power to regional uprisings.

Though British records make no direct reference to Balaji Rao's death, oral testimony insists that he perished alongside Hasan and Nawaz. His participation blurred the distinction between the "national" and the "local." The convergence of a Maratha noble, an Oudh administrator, and rural volunteers at Doomureeagunj encapsulates the heterogeneous composition of the 1857–58 revolt, an alliance of disparate actors united by a common cause of anti-colonial defiance.

Networks of Mobilization and Communication

The Doomureeagunj uprising also highlights the decentralized nature of rebel communication in late 1858. Unlike the telegraphic and postal systems monopolized by the colonial state, the rebels relied on informal circuits: traveling mendicants, local traders, and religious emissaries. Reports from the *Gorakhpur District Records* refer to "messengers of the mutineers" operating between Basti, Faizabad,

[59] *Gorakhpur District Intelligence Reports*, November 1858, British Library, IOR/L/PS/5.

and the Tarai.[60] Hasan's ability to assemble nearly one thousand men in a short period indicates a high degree of coordination, possibly facilitated through these networks.

Religious institutions played a dual role, as centers of spiritual authority and as nodes of political communication. The *dargahs* at Doomureeagunj and nearby Dumariaganj reportedly served as safe houses and meeting sites for rebel leaders. Oral accounts mention that Hasan took an oath at a local *mazar* before the battle, invoking divine witness for the defence of justice and faith. This fusion of sacred and political idioms, common in 1857 across North India, rendered the rebellion not only a military act but a moral crusade against oppression.

Colonial Perception of the Leadership

British officers viewed the Doomureeagunj leaders through the lens of rebellion and criminality. Rowcroft's dispatch characterizes Hasan and his followers as "fanatics" and "plunderers," a rhetorical strategy intended to delegitimize their political motive.[61] Yet, the elaborate attention given to Hasan's leadership and the acknowledgment of disciplined resistance contradict the image of mere banditry. British anxiety over the involvement of Balaji Rao further suggests that the uprising was recognized as politically significant. Intelligence correspondence from Gorakhpur to Calcutta repeatedly warned of "Maratha influence spreading eastward," indicating the British fear of renewed coordination among rebel remnants.[62]

This colonial misrepresentation forms part of what Partha Chatterjee has termed the "denial of the political" in colonial discourse—an effort to portray native resistance as irrational or criminal rather than ideological.[63] The British refusal to acknowledge the political character of Hasan and his associates thus reflects not ignorance but deliberate erasure, designed to preserve the narrative of imperial moral superiority.

Historical Legacy

The leadership of Muhammad Hasan, Muhammad Nawaz, and Balaji Rao represents a composite pattern of resistance in late-1850s North India—where administrative experience, kinship loyalty, and displaced nobility converged to produce localized yet deeply meaningful revolts. The rediscovery of these figures through oral memory and archival fragments challenges the homogenized view of the

[60] Ibid.
[61] *The London Gazette*, No. 22206.
[62] *Foreign Political Department Correspondence*, November 1858, National Archives of India.
[63] Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 14.

1857–58 rebellion as confined to a few celebrated heroes.

By foregrounding Doomureeagunj's leaders, this study contributes to the ongoing re-mapping of India's freedom struggle. Their sacrifice, though unrecorded in official nationalist historiography, resonates with the moral and emotional tenor of the First War of Independence. The renaming of Doomureeagunj as *Amargarh* serves as a living testimony to their enduring presence in regional consciousness, transforming personal martyrdom into collective heritage.

Violence, Memory, and Erasure: Colonial Narrative versus Local Remembrance

The aftermath of the Doomureeagunj uprising exemplifies the profound asymmetry between colonial documentation and indigenous memory. The British suppression of the revolt in late November 1858 was not merely a military episode; it was also a **discursive act of erasure**—a deliberate attempt to transform an anti-colonial rebellion into an episode of "mutiny" and to recast the slain rebels as lawless insurgents. Yet, within the local cultural imagination, the same event endures as a sacred story of martyrdom and moral triumph. This section examines how **violence was narrated, remembered, and silenced**, tracing the divergent trajectories of colonial archives and oral remembrance in shaping Doomureeagunj's historical legacy.

The Colonial Script of Violence

British military reports describe the Doomureeagunj encounter in terse, bureaucratic language. Brigadier Rowcroft's official dispatch, reproduced in *The London Gazette* on 25 January 1859, narrates the event as "a successful engagement resulting in the dispersal of insurgents and the restoration of tranquillity in the district."[64] The rebels, estimated at about one thousand, were "defeated with eighty killed on the field and many drowned in the Rapti River." The report concludes with commendations to officers and notes that "order was immediately re-established." This carefully constructed narrative embodies what historian Nicholas Dirks calls the **"colonial rationalization of violence"**, a rhetorical strategy that masks coercion beneath the language of law and order.[65]

By emphasizing British casualties (notably the death of Captain Giffard) while minimizing rebel losses, the dispatch converts a massacre into an act of legitimate retribution. Colonial chroniclers such as E.A. Williams, writing in *The Cruise of the Pearl* (1860), further amplified this discourse by depicting the rebels as "savage fanatics lurking in the jungles," thus dehumanizing the victims and

[64] *The London Gazette*, No. 22206 (25 January 1859), pp. 240–243.

[65] Nicholas Dirks, *The Scandal of Empire: India and the Creation of Imperial Britain* (Harvard University Press, 2006), p. 91.

transforming violence into moral spectacle.[66] The colonial archive thereby performed dual functions: it justified imperial authority through narratives of pacification and simultaneously denied political meaning to the rebels' resistance.

This process of textual sanitization extended to administrative policy. Post-1858 reports in the *Gorakhpur District Gazetteer* (1877) describe the region as "a tract once disturbed by predatory insurgents, now reclaimed to peace."[67] The language of reclamation not only erases the agency of the rebels but also redefines their homeland as property recovered by the empire. The *gazetteer's* cartographic silence—where Doomureeagunj disappears from later editions, marks a deeper epistemic violence: the erasure of a place from official geography, and thus from history itself.

Local Memory and the Grammar of Martyrdom

In contrast, the people of Doomureeagunj and nearby villages preserved the event through oral traditions that invert the colonial narrative. Field interviews conducted in 2021–2022 recorded multiple accounts of mass killings, ritual lamentation, and intergenerational storytelling. Elderly residents speak of "the river turning red," of "eighty not dead, but hundreds," and of "Hasan Miyan's oath to defend his land." These recollections persist not as precise chronicles but as **moral histories**, affirming justice, faith, and sacrifice in the face of tyranny.

Local ballads and elegiac songs (*marsiyas*) serve as mnemonic devices that transmit both the event and its ethical significance. One popular verse begins:

"Rapti ke kinare Hasan gira, Nawaz ne jaan di,
Angrez jite talwaron se, par dil se haare wahi."
("Hasan fell by the Rapti's side, Nawaz gave his life;
The British won by swords, but lost in heart.")

Such compositions exemplify what Jan Assmann calls **"cultural memory"**—collective remembrance institutionalized through ritual and performance.[68] The songs, recited at local fairs and commemorative gatherings, reconstitute the past as a living moral framework, transforming Doomureeagunj into a **martyrological landscape**.

[66] E.A. Williams, *The Cruise of the Pearl: Round the World* (London, 1860), pp. 212–214.

[67] *Gorakhpur District Gazetteer* (Allahabad: Government Press, 1877), p. 56.

[68] Jan Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization* (Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 37.

The physical site itself reinforces this memory. A weathered tombstone near the Rapti, believed locally to mark the burial of the martyrs, functions as a vernacular memorial. Residents maintain the area through community effort, and annual prayers (*fātiha*) are offered on the anniversary of the battle. Though lacking formal recognition by the Archaeological Survey of India, this grassroots commemoration represents an act of **counter-memory**—a conscious refusal to let colonial amnesia prevail.

Between Silence and Recovery

The coexistence of these two memory systems—colonial and vernacular—illustrates the contested nature of historical truth. For nearly a century, Doomureeagunj survived only in oral circulation, absent from textbooks, archives, or nationalist iconography. This silence reflects what Gayatri Spivak identifies as the **"epistemic violence"** of colonial discourse—the structural exclusion of subaltern voices from the production of knowledge.[69] In this context, the recent revival of interest in Doomureeagunj marks not merely historical recovery but also political reclamation.

The renaming of the site as **Amargarh** ("the abode of the immortal") in 2020–2021 must be read as a symbolic act of restitution. It acknowledges the sacrifice of those whose names never entered formal historiography. The name embodies a local philosophy of immortality through resistance, echoing the poetic refrain that "martyrs never die." By inscribing memory into geography, the community reasserts ownership over its past—a process comparable to the reclamation of other suppressed revolt sites such as *Chauri Chaura* or *Nana Rao Peshwa Park* in Kanpur.

Moreover, this act of renaming aligns with broader postcolonial trends of **decolonizing public memory**. In revisiting Doomureeagunj, local historians and educators are not merely commemorating the dead; they are also challenging the frameworks of history-writing that privilege metropolitan events over peripheral struggles. The move from "Doomureeagunj" (a colonial spelling imposed by British cartographers) to "Amargarh" (a vernacular expression of immortality) symbolizes a shift from imperial nomenclature to indigenous meaning.

Historiographical Implications

The study of Doomureeagunj's memory politics contributes to the larger historiographical debate about how the 1857 revolt is remembered in India. While nationalist historiography of the early

[69] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Nelson & Grossberg (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), pp. 271–313.

twentieth century (e.g., V.D. Savarkar's *The Indian War of Independence*) sought to reclaim 1857 as a unified struggle, it inadvertently replicated colonial hierarchies by emphasizing the better-known centers of conflict. Peripheral uprisings like Doomureeagunj remained invisible not because they lacked heroism, but because they lacked textual authority. The predominance of print culture in modern historiography marginalized oral traditions, which were deemed anecdotal or "unreliable."

By juxtaposing colonial archives and local memory, this study advocates a **pluralist historiography**—one that accommodates both documentary and oral sources as complementary rather than contradictory. The Doomureeagunj case demonstrates that local remembrance, far from being mythic, often preserves moral truths and spatial details absent in official records. The task of the historian, therefore, is not to privilege one over the other but to **reconcile multiplicities of truth** through critical interpretation.

Conclusion: Remembering as Resistance

In the end, the memory of Doomureeagunj functions as an act of resistance in itself. The villagers' songs, rituals, and the very name *Amargarh* keep alive a counter-history that defies erasure. They assert that even if the empire succeeded militarily, it failed to extinguish the moral imagination of the people. The tension between colonial silence and vernacular remembrance encapsulates a broader truth about India's freedom struggle: that history is not merely written—it is also sung, told, and lived.

Thus, the story of Doomureeagunj stands not only as a footnote to the 1857 Rebellion but as a powerful example of how ordinary communities preserve extraordinary courage. Their remembrance reclaims the humanity of those whom the colonial archive tried to reduce to statistics of rebellion, reaffirming that **to remember is to resist**.

Historiographical Significance and Conclusion

Revisiting the Historiography of 1857

The uprising at *Doomureeagunj* in November 1858 compels a critical rethinking of the historiography of the 1857–58 Rebellion. For over a century, the study of India's First War of Independence has been framed by the dichotomy between **colonial narratives** of "mutiny and disorder" and **nationalist narratives** of "unity and sacrifice." Yet both paradigms have largely neglected the micro-regional dimensions of the revolt—those localized struggles that did not fit neatly into the grand narrative of a coordinated national movement. Doomureeagunj, long dismissed as a minor skirmish, reveals how historical significance cannot be measured solely by scale or success, but by **the depth of political**

consciousness and the persistence of memory.

British archival documentation, while indispensable, presents a sanitized version of events shaped by the imperial logic of order. The official reports of Brigadier Rowcroft and the entries in *The London Gazette* (1859) framed the encounter as a "punitive expedition," thus depoliticizing rebellion and legitimizing retribution.[70] This colonial discourse, as Ranajit Guha argues, denied the insurgents the status of political subjects, rendering their resistance as "a disturbance, not a discourse."[71] The Doomureeagunj episode, recovered through oral tradition and local historiography, restores precisely that lost discourse, one that articulates freedom not as a centralized ideology but as a lived experience of defiance.

In this sense, the historiographical significance of Doomureeagunj lies not merely in adding a forgotten event to the record but in **reshaping the methodological frame** through which 1857 is understood. By bridging archival and oral histories, the study moves beyond textual authority toward what Shahid Amin terms "the event in its afterlife"—the ways in which memory continues to reinterpret history.[72] The case of Doomureeagunj demonstrates that local remembrance is not an alternative to history but an essential component of it.

The Subaltern and Regional Perspective

From the perspective of **subaltern historiography**, Doomureeagunj represents a classic case of insurgent consciousness arising from the intersection of local grievances and larger anti-colonial ideals. The leadership of Muhammad Hasan and Muhammad Nawaz reflects the role of small-town elites and dispossessed officials who mediated between rural peasants and national networks of resistance. Their alliance with Balaji Rao, a displaced Maratha revolutionary, underscores the trans-regional circulation of rebellion. Such cross-regional solidarities challenge the notion that the 1857 uprising was fragmented or "spontaneous." Instead, they reveal an undercurrent of **shared political idioms**, justice, honour, and sovereignty—that transcended linguistic and regional boundaries.

This local-global synthesis situates Doomureeagunj within what historian Tapati Roy calls the "many mutinies" of 1857, each rooted in distinct local conditions yet united by a common rejection of colonial subjugation.[73] The Rapti River, which witnessed the drowning of countless rebels, thus

[70] *The London Gazette*, No. 22206 (25 January 1859), pp. 240–243.

[71] Ranajit Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983), p. 21.

[72] Shahid Amin, *Event, Metaphor, Memory: Chauri Chaura 1922–1992* (University of California Press, 1995), pp. 5–7.

[73] Tapati Roy, *The Politics of a Popular Uprising: Bundelkhand in 1857* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 4.

becomes a metaphor for submerged histories, currents of resistance that flow beneath the surface of canonical narratives.

Moreover, the subaltern focus highlights the **agency of oral communities** in preserving history. While colonial and nationalist archives often silence peasant and village voices, oral traditions in Doomureeagunj have sustained the memory of resistance for over 160 years. In doing so, they enact what Alessandro Portelli describes as the "democratization of history"—the process by which ordinary people claim the right to narrate their past.[74]

Decolonizing the Archive

The rediscovery of Doomureeagunj also participates in the broader intellectual project of **decolonizing historical knowledge**. The colonial archive, though rich in data, is a product of asymmetrical power relations. Its descriptions of "mutineers" and "fanatics" reflect a worldview in which European sovereignty was normative and native rebellion pathological. Postcolonial scholarship now recognizes that historical recovery must involve not merely the use of colonial sources but their **critical re-reading**, to expose the silences, biases, and omissions that structure them.

In this study, juxtaposing British documents with oral accounts exposes these very gaps. The bureaucratic language of the *Gazette* reports contrasts sharply with the emotive cadence of local songs that sanctify Hasan and Nawaz as martyrs. Where the archive records "eighty killed," the community remembers "hundreds martyred." The truth lies not in choosing between them but in understanding the power relations that make one version "official" and the other "subaltern." The act of reclaiming Doomureeagunj from archival obscurity is, therefore, an act of epistemic justice—a step toward re-cantering historical agency in the voices of the colonized.

The Politics of Memory and Renaming

The renaming of Doomureeagunj as *Amargarh* (2020–2021) marks a contemporary moment of **public history-making**. It signifies the re-inscription of local sacrifice into the symbolic geography of India's freedom struggle. This gesture parallels similar commemorative practices across India, such as the recognition of *Chauri Chaura* or *Shaheed Smarak* sites, where collective memory corrects historical neglect.

In transforming Doomureeagunj into Amargarh, literally, "the abode of the immortal", the community

[74] Alessandro Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History* (SUNY Press, 1991), p. 26.

has turned mourning into meaning. The name itself functions as historical argument: it insists that those who died for freedom achieved a form of immortality denied to them by colonial and nationalist archives alike. Such acts of memorialization remind us that history does not end with documentation; it continues to evolve through cultural performance, heritage activism, and everyday remembrance.

Conclusion

The Doomureeagunj uprising of 1858, though absent from mainstream accounts of the First War of Independence, stands as a powerful emblem of localized resistance and enduring memory. Its recovery enriches the historiography of 1857 by shifting attention from imperial centers to peripheral landscapes, where peasants, clerics, and exiled nobles joined hands in defiance of empire.

This study has demonstrated that the history of Doomureeagunj exists in two parallel yet intersecting forms: the **archival** and the **oral**. The former records conquest, the latter commemorates sacrifice. The interplay between them reveals that historical truth is not singular but plural, negotiated across generations of telling and retelling. By foregrounding this interplay, the paper contributes to an evolving model of *regional historiography* that recognizes memory as a legitimate source of knowledge.

In conclusion, to remember Doomureeagunj, or *Amargarh*, as it is now called—is to restore dignity to those whose stories were silenced by empire. It is to affirm that the making of Indian history does not reside solely in capitals or archives but in villages, songs, and sacred rivers where freedom was first imagined and defended. The martyrs of Doomureeagunj, forgotten by empire but immortalized by their people, remind us that **the true archive of freedom lies in memory itself**.

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