



## **THE GREAT INDIAN REBELLION WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE PROVINCE OF AVADH AND ITS LESSER-KNOWN HEROES**

**DR. SHOBHA MISRA**

---

The first effort by Indians to liberate themselves from the foreign yoke was in 1857 when the Indian soldiers struck their first assault on the British supremacy. The echo of this pre-planned armed rebellion could be heard twenty-one days before it was to start i.e., 10<sup>th</sup> May 1857. The rebellion is marked with sporadic instances but resulted in great monetary and human loss to the British Government. The Indian had challenged the greatest and the most powerful empire of the world, characterized with the belief that – “The sun never sets on the British empire.” And the challenge was not an easy one.

The land situated between Himalayas and Ganges, popularly known as Avadh, the rebellions fire was ablaze. In Lucknow, the Hindustani soldiers outnumbered their European counterparts. When the flame started from the army, the revolutionaries started collecting at Muftiganj. To escape their wrath British women and children took shelter at the residency.

The night of May 30<sup>th</sup>, witnessed a massive outrage in Lucknow. In many areas of the city there were blood encounters between the British and the revolutionaries. Begum Hazrat Mahal and Maulvi Ahmad-Ull-Shah were leading the rebellion. Many people were fighting against the British without fear and it was only after a long struggle that the British could re-establish their control over the city with the efforts of General Havelock and Major Outram. Underneath, we try to highlight the brave efforts of a few leaders.

### MAULVI AHMAD ULLAH SHAH

Maulvi was basically a resident of South India and belonged to an affluent family. He was a Sunni Maulvi who used to roam around Delhi, Meerut, Patna, Calcutta and integrate people to fight against the British Government. A practicing Muslim, he was regarded as the epitome of Ganga-Jamuni culture and both Hindus and Muslims respected him. He was referred to as a man of great abilities of undaunting courage of stern determination and



by far, the best soldier among the rebels (THOMAS SEATAN). The likes of Nana Sahib and Khan Bahadur Khan fought by his side.

Dr. G.B. Malleson in his work, History of Indian Meeting states that "It is beyond doubt that behind the conspiracy of 1857 revolt, Maulvi's brain and efforts were significant. Distribution of Bread during the campaigns, the chapter movement, was actually his brain child. On charges of instigating the revolt and was awarded death sentence for conspiring against the British rule. The punishment was later reduced to life imprisonment.

When the revolt erupted on 10<sup>th</sup> May 1857, the rebels of Azamgarh, Benaras and Jaunpur reached Patna on 7<sup>th</sup> June. They captured the city and the government treasury and freed the Maulvi and other prisoners. The Maulvi named Raja Man Singh as ruler of Patna and then moved to Avadh.

Here, in Avadh, he led the army of rebels with Barkat Ali, who was made the chief of the rebel army. Together they fought the British army led by Henry Lawrence was badly injured in the Battle of Chinhat and later died in the RESIDENCY.

Maulvi led an attack on the Beligarad and the Machchi Bhawan too. After Lucknow was captured by the rebels and BIRJIS QADAR, 40-year-old son of Wajid Ali Shah and Begum Hazrat Mahal was made the Nawab Maulvi left the palace to avoid palace politics and established his camp with one Ghamandi Singh and 1000 soldiers of Subedar Umrao Singh at Badshah Bagh beyond river Gomti.

On 6<sup>th</sup> March 1858, the British once again attacked Lucknow under Sir Collin Campbell. They captured Lucknow and the rebels had to leave Lucknow by 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> March through a road leading to Faizabad. The last of rebel men (about 1200 soldiers) and Maulvi were driven out on 21<sup>st</sup> March and Lucknow was declared clear.

Maulvi now shifted his base to Shahjahanpur where press of Nana Sahib and Khan Bahadur Khan joined him.

When on 2<sup>nd</sup> May Collin Campbell departed from Shahjahanpur to Bareilly, Maulvi attacked Shahjahanpur. A fierce battle was fought on 15<sup>th</sup> May 1858 between the rebels and the British under Brigadier Jones. The control came into the hands of Maulvi. Collin returned to Shahjahanpur on 20<sup>th</sup> May and attacked on all sides. The battle continued all night and Nana and Maulvi had to escape. Collin himself followed Maulvi but could not catch him.



Maulvi then went POWAYAN, 18 miles North of Shahjahanpur. The British new declared a reward of 50,000 silver pieces on his head. Meanwhile Maulvi was making efforts to convince Raja Jaggannath Singh, the King of Powayan against the British. But when Maulvi reached his palace gates on an elephant, the King fired a cannon shot and his brother Kunwar Baldev Singh beheaded the Maulvi and presented his head to the British and was rewarded the announced 50,000 silver pieces. Maulvi's head was hanged at the Kotwali the next day.

The to-be constructed Mosque in Ayodhya as per the verdict of the Supreme Court of India, will be named after Maulvi Ahmad Ullah Shah because of his contribution to the Indian Independence movement.

#### RANA BENI MADHAV

Rana Beni Madhav Baksh Singh belonged to the Bais clan of Rajputs and was the ruler of the Shankarpur estate of Raebareli and played a vital role in declaring Birjis Qadr, the Nawab of Avadh and the battle of Beligarad. The new Nawab declared him the administration of Jaunpur and Azamgarh and he (Rana Beni Madhav) was asked to capture these two from the British. Rana was supported by the landlords and the peasants while he fought the British with an army of 2500 men and 28 cannons in the rebellion of 1857.

A fierce battle was fought between Rana and the British at saloon in Raebareli in which the rebels killed Major Gail. The British got so annoyed that four officers (Lord Clyde, Hope Grant, Evelege and Alfred) chased him but he managed to escape successfully and it was only after he left Avadh that the rebellion subsided in the southern part of Avadh.

The most important feature of his style of attack was that he used gorilla technique to annoy the British. He used to vanish after attack.

#### KHAN BAHADUR KHAN ROHILLA

He was the grandson of Hafiz Rahmat Khan, the Nawab of Rohilkhand. He was born in 1857. Before the outbreak of the rebellion, he was in the service of the British. He was Sadr-i-Aala in Bareilly when the rebellion broke in Bareilly city. When the city was captured by the British Rana Beni Madhav escaped to Nepal but was of unfortunate captured by the



Nepalese and handed over to the British. He was arrested for revolting against the Government while remaining in the Government service. The British held a mock trial and finally hanged him in the Kotwali on 24<sup>th</sup> February 1860.

### NANA DHONDHU PANT

Nana Saheb Peshwa II who led the rebellion in Kanpur was born as Dhondhu Pant. He was Peshwa Baji Rao II's adopted son. Dhondhu Pant believed that was entitled for the pension given by the East India Company but the underlying contractual issues did not permit that, that is why he joined the rebellion.

Three platoons were stationed in Kanpur (53<sup>rd</sup>, 56<sup>th</sup> and second light cavalry regiment) and the army were under the command of HUE MESSEY HEALER. Nana was shrewd enough to win the confidence of the collector of Kanpur, Charles Hillersdon. The British believed that in case of rebellion Nana would support them with his 1500 soldiers. When the rebellion reached Kanpur on 6<sup>th</sup> June 1857, the British contingent took refuge at an entrenchment in the Northern part of the town. In the chaotic condition Nana's men entered the British Magazine. The British of the 53<sup>rd</sup> infantry thought that he is there to help them but Nana was participating as a rebel and as a vassal of Bahadur Shah Zafar. He took control of the treasury and marched towards the Grand Trunk Road. He aimed to restore Maratha Confederacy under the Peshwa tradition and decided to capture Kanpur. So, he allured the soldiers marching towards Delhi, promised them double salary in return of helping Nana to control Kanpur.

Nana then messaged General Wheeler that he will attack the next morning. He did attack and despite fighting bravely the British lost. With this success the number of Nana's soldier raised to 15,000. Nana now offered that the British would be granted a safe passage to Allahabad if they surrender. Wheeler took the offer and Nana arranged for boats. And when the British were boarding the boats, Nana's army attacked and most of the men were killed. Women and children were held captive at Bibighar under the care of a nautch girl (Tawayaf) Hussain Khanam. Nana decided to use them as baits to bargain with the British. General Havelock was sent to recapture Kanpur. Nana, Tantya Tope and Maulana Azim Ullah Shah



decided to shoot all captives and throw them in the well. When the British reached on 16<sup>th</sup> July Nana blew the magazine and retreated to Bithoor and escaped from there.

#### BABU KUNWAR SINGH OF JAGDISHPUR

A brave soldier, who took up arms against the British at the ripe age of 80 and with failing health. He was assisted by his brother Babu Amar Singh and his commander-in-chief Hare Krishna Singh. An expert in guerrilla warfare, Kunwar Singh's tactics left the Britishers puzzled and it was he who led the rebellion in Bihar. On 25<sup>th</sup> July 1857, when the Indian soldiers revolted at Danapur, Kunwar Singh assumed command of the rebels and occupied Arrah. But on 3<sup>rd</sup> August 1857 Major Vincent Eyre recaptured the town. Kunwar Singh's forces were destroyed at Jagdishpur and he had to cross river Ganga to avoid arrest. While he was crossing the river, Brigadier Douglas ordered his men to shoot the fleeing boats. One bullet shattered Singh's left arm. Realizing that his arm was left of no use in future and in order to avoid the spread of infection in the body Kunwar himself cut his arm from the elbow and offered it to Maa Ganga.

December 1857, he reached Lucknow. He planned to move to Jagdishpur via Azamgarh and Ghazipur. So, in March 1857 he occupied Azamgarh. However, he had to leave the place as Douglas continued to chase him. Hence, Singh retreated to Arrah, Bihar. On April 23<sup>rd</sup>, he was victorious over British army led by Captain Le Grand near Jagdishpur but that he died in his village on 26<sup>th</sup> April 1858 before the British army could lay hands on him.

There were several unsung heroes who contributed in the rebellion and without whom even the leaders would have achieved nothing. The common Avadhians (people of Avadh) readily extended a helping hand to the rebels providing them with food, water, and shelter. History records that it was only after this armed rebellion that the British for the first time felt insecure so much so that the government was forced to dissolve the East India Company and directly assumed power in India.



## **REFERENCES**

1. Sonal Gupta – “Battle of Chinhat: A willful Amnesia.”
2. 1857: The first challenge: The Rising Newspaper: Tribune
3. Thomas Seaton – “The conspirators, Indian Mutiny of 185”
4. History of Indian Mutiny 1857-1858 – George Bruce Malleson (1858)
5. Madhulika Dash – “Food Story: How India’s flat bread – roti – was born”
6. The Times of India – 25<sup>th</sup> January, 2021
7. Rudranshu Mukherji – “Vidrih mein Avadh: Lokpriya Pratishodha Ka Ek Adhdhyan: