

## REVOLT OF 1857 IN AWADH WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE OF LUCKNOW

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The heat of the revolt of 1857 which started in May 1857 was also felt by Awadh province. Awadh was annexed by East Indian Company on the pretext of misgovernance and the last Nawab Wajid Ali Shah was deposed to Calcutta in 1856. This action was resented by the rulers of Awadh and also the people of the province. Since Nawab was exiled to Calcutta the revolt was led by Begum Hazrat Mahal to protect the rights of her son Birjis Qadr. Lucknow became one of the important centres of revolt apart from Kanpur, Jhansi, Bareilly, Benaras, Allahabad, Faizabad and many more districts of the province. The revolt in Lucknow started on May 30, 1857 and lasted for around a year before the British army again took over the control of Lucknow.

The revolt of 1857, which we also call the first war of independence against the foreign slavery, in spite of the leading role of the Indian soldiers of the British army and many feudal lords, was also fought by many farmer and local traders on the their economic issues and large populace due to the tyranny of the British administration. The economic cause led to the masses joining the revolt since the majority of the population was dependent on agriculture and British land revenue system tried to extract as much revenue as possible leaving the masses with nothing to survive. The revolt was also joined by the Taluqdars as they were sceptical about the summary settlement introduced by the British Government. The leaders of the revolt also came from the imperial family like Begum of Awadh, Rani Jhansi, Nana Saheb and many more.

Indian society, especially the North Indian society is undeniably most deeply and emotionally attached to the Revolt of 1857. No other revolt could see such a wide emotional impact. Perhaps the most

important question of Indian history which cannot be ignored by anyone may it be called sepoy mutiny, regaining of Mughal power or an effort to restore the feudal status by the feudal lords. There is no denying of the fact that where ever revolt was spread it was with aim to remove the British rule from India also the revolt got the support of the masses a great extent. Although the revolt was started by sepoys but it was the masses which supported the mutineers in all possible ways.

The dates of the mutinies at the other centres, followed after the massacre of Meerut and Delhi, spread in a pattern like after Delhi on 20<sup>th</sup> May Aligarh revolted followed by 23<sup>rd</sup> at Etawah and Mainpuri, on 27<sup>th</sup> Etah and 30<sup>th</sup> Lucknow revolted.<sup>i</sup> The pattern shows that it was moving as if it was travelling down the Ganges plans from Delhi with a time gap between various stations required for the news to travel from one place to other. Lawrence anticipated the condition and sent a cable to Canning informing about the districts that they were full of rumours and they all were on the verge of revolt. Once the revolt started in Lucknow the other district like Sitapur, Faizabad, Gonda Bahraich, Sultanpur and Salon followed in quick succession.<sup>ii</sup> The mutineers in each district were provoked by the preceding district to revolt as Lucknow followed by Sitapur later followed by Gonda and Bahraich. Faizabad which had mutineers from Jaunpur, Azamgarh and Benaras was followed by Azamgarh. Azamgarh, Jaunpur and Pratapgarh were followed by Benaras and Allahabad. So the revolt spread like a wildfire affecting the connecting districts and the chain continued.

The sepoys, during the revolt, acted mainly on the rumours about the British atrocities and panic

and desire to take vengeance against the working of British government. Fear and panic called for more of such things and it spread from one sepoy to another generating activity and more panic and all this brought men together, ignited their hatred leading to violent actions. The unity amongst the sepoys were mainly due to the fact that they all were almost from the same background so they can easily connect to the panic and fear with each other. The way the rule of Nawab in Awadh was ended or the way the summary settlement was carried out in Awadh all left a mark in the mind-set of the sepoys. They started to believe that the British administration is all out to destroy all the things they had cherished and were important to them. The 'greased cartridge' experience must have given a critical element of psychological over-stimulation, converting perception into action. The mutiny thus represented a collective opposing mentality that included a complex matrix of dread, worry, and optimism.' <sup>iii</sup>

The revolt was started by the Indian sepoys in May 1857 and it was started in Awadh in that very month. Kanpur was under the command of Sir Hugh Massey made preparation for the adverse condition of the mutiny in advance. According to him it was 'no passing and groundless panic' but a deliberate scheme for the overthrow of the British power.' <sup>iv</sup> He moved all the European and Eurasians to a fortified place with all supplies stored. The revolt started in Kanpur on 4<sup>th</sup> June. The native sepoys gathered all the regiments stationed in Kanpur and selected Nana Sahib as their leader. The sepoys ransacked the city and killed all the European who came across them be it men, women or children. A message was sent by Nana Saheb in the British garrison which stated that 'all those who are in no way connected with the act of Lord Dalhousie, and are willing to lay down their arms, shall receive a safe passage to Allahabad'. <sup>v</sup> After initial denial by the English officers they agreed to the proposal. A safe passage was arranged through 40 boats on the morning of 26<sup>th</sup> June. As all the men, women and children boarded the boats Tantia Topi the military adviser of Nana

Saheb charged on the boats and killed many of them and rest were captured.

The city of Benaras a place of pilgrimage was under the command of Brig George Ponsonby. The British planned to move to Chunar a safer place as soon a mutiny broke out in Benaras but was not agreed by the officers especially by the commander of Sikh regiment. Here also they took refuge in a strong building with all men women and children. It was planned by the British officer to unarm the native sepoys who were around 1000 in number since the sepoys at Azamgarh has already revolted against the British forces <sup>vi</sup> creating panic under the British officials. For this purpose they were asked to assemble at a place surrounded by Sikh and other British soldiers, the native sepoys revolted. The mutineers moved out of the place of assembly and entered the city. Col Neill, who came from Calcutta for the rescue the British forces in Awadh, with his men and Sikh soldiers helped in regaining control over the city very soon. Jaunpur and Gorakhpur also revolted. At Jaunpur the Sikh stationed there excited by the story of the manner in which their countrymen had been put down at Benaras, rose in revolt on the 5<sup>th</sup> June. Although, reoccupied very soon but still it was a constant trouble for the Britishers for very long period of time. Gorakhpur was perhaps kept under control for long time by Judge William Wynyard, also revolted, but here also British consolidated their position very soon with the help of Gorakhas, the troops that came for their help from Nepal <sup>vii</sup> The rebels were defeated once again when they again made an attempt to regain their hold over Gorakhpur.

Allahabad, under Col. Simpson, was the place of strategic importance as through this place only the supply could reach to either Kanpur or Lucknow. Connected with Calcutta by land route, by water ways and even by railways and also was in close proximity of Jaunpur Azamgarh, Benaras and Gorakhpur. It was felt dangerous to place Allahabad under the native soldiers so few European soldiers were called from Chunar to protect Allahabad. <sup>viii</sup> The sepoys of 6<sup>th</sup> Native Infantry revolted and killed many officers of the regiment. The mutineers

ransacked the city and destroyed railway projects, European shops and telegraph system. The sepoys planned to march to Delhi but later on divided into many groups they left for their villages leaving the city. But the revolt although started by the sepoys in Allahabad was later taken over by the land owners and other groups mainly due to the adverse policies of the British administration. The revolt was led by Laiakat Ali<sup>x</sup> a school teacher but was soon suppressed. Col Neill after gaining control over Benaras moved to save Allahabad. Soon he made rapid gains firstly clearing the suburbs like Daryaganj for the movement of troops to enter Allahabad fort. Within a week the whole of Allahabad was cleared of rebels and British again established control over the city. Women and children were also sent to Calcutta.

Bareilly also revolted in June 1857 under the leadership of Khan Bahadur Khan. After subjugating the British forces Khan Bahadur formed his own government in Bareilly. The mutineers admitted him to be the self-declared Nawab of Bareilly. He continued the fight against the British and was a persistent cause of trouble for the British army. He was of the view that Bareilly will not be annexed till Lucknow is in the hands of the mutineers. Campbell after securing the position of the Company in Lucknow, moved to Bareilly and after fierce fight was able to defeat the forces of Khan Bahadur. Khan Bahadur fled to Nepal but was captured and was sentenced to death in 1860.

Lucknow, the main centre of revolt in Awadh, rose in revolt on 30<sup>th</sup> May. Mutiniers from all over the Awadh province started to assemble in Lucknow. All over the city proclamations in Hindi, Urdu and Persian were put calling the people both Hindus and Muslims to unit, rise and exterminate the firangis. People indulged in the acts of violence as symptom of popular hatred and unrest. It was generally felt in the city that things were going to happen suddenly. It was commonly believed that the rule of the Company Bahadur has collapsed.<sup>x</sup> In Lucknow, as in Meerut and elsewhere, the outbreak commenced with the burning of bungalows, firing and attacks on the British officials and establishments.

The revolt at Lucknow was one of the longest revolt was led by Begum Hazrat Mahal and the Taluqdars in Awadh. The revolt of Begum and Taluqdars was mainly due to the treatment of the British towards the Nawab and the summary settlement which led to the financial loss to the Taluqdars. The main aim of the Taluqdars to participate in the Revolt was to revert the summary settlement and regain the lost land.<sup>xi</sup> The Taluqdars were unhappy with the British attitude of collecting forcefully the revenue which was due on the Taluqdars after implementation of summary settlement.<sup>xii</sup> This is corroborated by the British officer's communication with the home government where he says force was used to collect the dues from Raja of Tulsipur. Raja of Kalakankar was also sceptical of losing few villages due to the new settlement. The process of grabbing the areas of Taluqdars started way back in 1801 and gradually large part of the land was acquired by the British.<sup>xiii</sup> The Taluqdars lost many villages out of their control like Lal Madho Singh of Amethi lost 505 villages out of 807, Beni Madho lost 119 villages out of 269<sup>xiv</sup> and many more Taluqdars lost their traditional land. The main aim of the land settlement was to destroy the status of the Taluqdars therefore land under them to a large extent reduced thereby, reducing their position.<sup>xv</sup> The Taluqdars tried to take revenge from the British government which they got during the revolt of 1857. Almost about thirty two Taluqdars from various parts of the Province participated in the revolt against the British forces.<sup>xvi</sup> They all participated in the revolt leaving aside their own conflicts with each other for the bigger cause.

Begum Hazrat Mahal was one of the prominent leader in the revolt who led the mutineers at Lucknow. The Begum was the second wife of Nawab Wajid Ali Shah. After her husband was exiled to Calcutta and the rebellion broke out in Awadh and she made her son Prince Birjis Qadr as the ruler of Awadh and herself as his regent. She made all-out effort to protect the position of the Birjis Qadr by revolting against the British. During the revolt she took the command of the rebelling forces in Lucknow and continued to fight against the

British forces till she fled to Nepal to save herself from being caught by the British.

The command of Awadh was under able hands of Sir Henry Lawrence he realised the level of the panic in advance and the first thing he did was to take control of artillery from the hands of Indian soldiers. The Residency was made the base for the Britishers in Lucknow. On 30<sup>th</sup> May, as soon as the rumour spread that the rule of the company has ended, the Residency was surrounded by the Indian soldiers who has resorted to revolt against the British. After the death of few of the British army officers Lawrence himself led the British forces and forced the mutineers to retreat. He visited many places of the city in disguise and was constantly planning the future course of action. But he was constantly getting bad news like death of mano of his able army personals, revolt also got ignited in Sitapur a place very near to Lucknow. Later in Bithoor Nana Saheb also revolted. Even after repeated attempts the mutineers were, however, not able to get hold of the residency where all Britishers were hiding.

By the end of June 1857, the mutineers got control of almost whole of Awadh except Lucknow. In Lucknow the mutineers gathered their force at Chinhath to attack on the Britishers. British forces marched under Lawrence towards Chinhath with around 600 soldiers much less than the mutineers strength of 15-16 thousand. The forces of Maulvi Ahmadullah from Faizabad also joined the mutineers in the fight against the British forces. Lawrence was not able to withstand the onslaught of the advance of the mutineers and was forced to retreat his forces. About 118 British soldiers died in the battle. The Indian sepoy followed the British soldiers from the Daliganj Bridge where they were stopped. From this point they started shelling the Residency and gradually gained control over the prominent places under the control of British forces.<sup>xvii</sup>

Raja of Mahmudabad was the first Taluqdar who participated in the revolt. Gradually the control of Awadh shifted in the hands of the Indians. Lawrence on the other planned to vacate Machchi Bhawan the second base of the Britishers and bring

all the English men women and children to the Residency. All the ammunitions that could not be removed from the Machchi Bhawan were put on fire so that the mutineers could not use it. The blast was so heavy that it could be felt even at the Residency. After vacating Machchi Bhawan, the Britishers were now only confined to Residency in Lucknow losing their entire stronghold in the city.<sup>xviii</sup>

A fierce conflict took place at Residency in July 1857 the English forces were able to withhold their control over Residency so now their major task was to protect it from the mutineers and protect its inhabitants. But on 2<sup>nd</sup> July a bomb fired by the mutineers exploded in the room of Lawrence and he succumbed to the injuries but before his death he placed Major Banks as his successor and Col. Inglis as the army commander.<sup>xix</sup> Major Banks also died soon due to bullet injury and now Lucknow was left in command of army commander. Day by day it was becoming difficult for Britishers to withstand the onslaught of the mutineers pressure on the Residency. Not a single wall was left without the mark of shelling by the mutineers. These condition continued till arrival of reinforcement and British army was somehow able to maintain their hold over Residency with great difficulty.

The British General was waiting for reinforcement from Kanpur under General Havelock. In September Havelock sent message to Lucknow that it will take another 25 days for him to reach Lucknow and also asked not to surrender or negotiate with the mutineers.<sup>xx</sup> Havelock started from Kanpur with 3000 soldiers he first had to face strong resistance at Unnao which was getting huge support of the local populace.<sup>xxi</sup> Havelock had to retreat back to Kanpur due to the resistance of the forces of Taluqdars and the local populace who were fighting without any proper arms and ammunitions. He messaged Calcutta to send reinforcement in order to gain control over Lucknow. After getting reinforcement under Major General Outram and proper preparation they were able to cross Unnao but were again stopped at Alambagh by Raja Jiyalal. A fierce battle was fought between the Indian and British force which was ultimately won by British.

With great difficult the British army under Havelock and Outram was able to reach residency by the evening of 25<sup>th</sup> September. The British lost 535 soldiers and few Officers during their march towards Residency.<sup>xxii</sup> They were able to hold the Residency for some more time now with the reinforcement forces but were not in a position to improve their position in Lucknow. Large number mutineer sepoy from Delhi have also arrived in Lucknow making it difficult for the British force to regain control.

Under these circumstances an army from Calcutta under Sir Collin Campbell reached Kanpur and it further marched towards Lucknow. Campbell when reached Lucknow decided to reach Residency not by entering the city but taking the route along the Gomti river via La Martiniere College. When the forces were moving towards Residency they had to face a resistance at Sikander Bagh and many British soldier died at this place. The attack on British forces was led by a lady named Uda Devi who died fighting at this place. The other resistance faced by British forces was at Shahnajaf, Motimahal and Khurshid Manzil and all the resistance were won over by the British army. Havelock and Outram met at Khurshid Manzil to plan for the next move. They decided firstly to move the sick, women and children from Residency to Dilkusha and later they well be moved to Kanpur and then to Calcutta. Campbell also left for Kanpur with 3000 sepoy leaving Outram with 4000 sepoy in Lucknow.<sup>xxiii</sup>

Lucknow now became the main centre of the conflict. Both the rebels and the English realised the importance of having control over the city. It became the symbol of power and authority for both. Outram in a message to Canning wrote, 'I regard the reestablishment of our government as an impossibility so long as the capital, which is looked upon by every native as the seat of government is in the hands of the rebels. The abandoning of Lucknow will be very disastrous as it would be regarded as the loss of Lucknow as the forerunner of the end of British rule in India.'<sup>xxiv</sup> Maulvi Ahmadullah again made preparations to attack the British forces. But this time the Britisher had gather strength and Campbell was again called from Kanpur. English also

requested Rana Jang Bahadur from Nepal to help then in regaining full control over Lucknow. Begum tried to win over Rana by offering large part of Gorakhpur and Benaras as jagir to him but he refused to accept and continued to be with the British army. So the combined force of Outram, Campbell and Rana came to rescue Lucknow from the mutineers. The forces of Rana met the British army at Dilkusha. The combined forces included 57840 infantry, 11677 cavalry and 132 canons.<sup>xxv</sup>

The mutineers now also started working on organising their resources and organisation. They were getting huge support from the people of Awadh, Taluqdars and mutineers of other districts of Awadh. They worked to procure maximum arms and ammunitions. All kinds of ammunitions were being produced in Lucknow, artisans were called from Delhi especially for this purpose. Supplies from other districts were also maintained. Huge quantity of arms and ammunitions were left by the British forces in a well at the Residency which was left by the British forces. A workshop was set up at Faizabad for the purpose of repairing heavy guns.<sup>xxvi</sup> The mutineers also made full preparation under Begum for the battle with the British forces. The strength of the mutineers force included 36237 infantry, 5828 cavalry and 127 cannons.<sup>xxvii</sup> With the fall of Delhi in September 1857, the Indian sepoy now moved in large number to help the mutineers in Lucknow which was now the only hope as it was still out of the control of British forces and the cause of the revolt could be still defended at this place .

The British forces divided their forces into two part to enter the city from two different directions one under Outram and other under Colin Campbell. The forces of Outram has to face the firing of the mutineer the British forces in retaliation also opened fire and followed them forcing them to retreat and brutally killing all those who got caught. The other force under Campbell has to face a fierce battle with the group of leaders like Mohammad Riza Khan, Hisam-ud-daullah, Raja Hari Prasad, Raja Jiya Lal and few more were waiting for the Britishers to arrive at Begum Kothi<sup>xxviii</sup> in Hazratganj. After four hour of firing English were able to get inside the

Kothi killing Indians in large number. Gradually the Britisher under Campbell got hold of other centres in Lucknow like Sikanderbagh, Shahnajaf, Chhattar Manzil and many more centres from the control of the mutineers. On the other hand Outram also was able to free many place from the control of the mutineers like Residency, Machchi Bhawan Imambara, Musa Bagh and few other places of importance. By March 1858 the British was able to capture major parts of Lucknow.

After getting the commanding position on Lucknow the sepoys of the British army ransacked the whole city. Every house was searched and who so ever was available in the houses were brutally killed. They looted whatever came in their hand like expensive chandeliers, statues of bone china and porcelain, designer mirrors and they damaged everything that was of no use for them. The city was very badly devastated.

The begum realised that she could not live in Lucknow and continue to fight against the British forces so she left Lucknow on 16 March 1858 and carried on the revolt for another six months before finally leaving for Nepal. The Rana of Nepal however refused to give her permission to stay in Nepal but later on she was granted permission to stay with all her entourage. She very critically gave her reaction on the Queens Proclamation stating to be beware of the Queens promises by citing the deceitful nature of British rule in India. She was of the view that the British administration will not change and they will again cheat the nation no matter who is controlling the administration.<sup>xxix</sup> The statement clearly pointed the deceitful nature of the British rule and they will do the same in future also and it happened also in every possible way be it politically, economically or socially till the independence in 1947.

The revolt ended in favour of British administration. But the revolt also ended the companies rule in India. The Queen's Proclamation was read at Allahabad by Lord Canning. British administration learnt a great lesson and with announcement of Queen's Proclamation lot many changes were brought about in the administration. The rule of the company ended and the administration was taken over by the Queen Victoria herself. She got on the task of reforming the ills of the company rule. Her proclamation clearly stated now she wanted to establish welfare state in the country. It was promised that the Indian government will work for the welfare of common men, Taluqdars, farmers, Princely States and each and every segment of the society in the country.

The revolt was however not able to achieve for which was started but it certainly very strongly jolted the base of the British administration. Many names has been given to the revolt by different historians but it is very well accepted by all that it broke the very base of British administration in India and it took more than a year for British government to regain control. Although the revolt was started by the sepoys but soon got the support of vast populace, which clearly showed that everyone in society were some way or the other oppressed with the working of British system in India. The British administration would have never thought of such type of revolt without any proper preparations. It highlighted the weakness of the British working in India which ultimately ended the company's rule in India and placing the Indian administration directly under the British Crown and Parliament. The concept of welfare state was highlighted by the Queen's Proclamation; however, it was violated in the next ninety year rule of British in India in every possible manner.

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- <sup>i</sup> Rudrangshu Mukherjee – Awadh in Revolt 1857-1858, p.65
- <sup>ii</sup> Ibid. p.69
- <sup>iii</sup> Ibid., p. 75
- <sup>iv</sup> Col. G.B. Malleson – The Indian Mutiny of 1857, p. 129.
- <sup>v</sup> Ibid. p.172
- <sup>vi</sup> Ibid. p. 181
- <sup>vii</sup> Ibid. p. 235
- <sup>viii</sup> Ibid. p. 146
- <sup>ix</sup> Ibid. p. 150
- <sup>x</sup> Rudrangshu Mukherjee – Awadh in Revolt 1857-1858, p.68
- <sup>xi</sup> S.B.Chaudhary – Civil Rebellion in the Indian Mutinees, p.125
- <sup>xii</sup> Rudrangshu Mukherjee – Awadh in Revolt 1857-1858, p.39
- <sup>xiii</sup> W.H. Sleemen – A Journey Through The Kingdom of Awadh part 2, p.415
- <sup>xiv</sup> Mahendra Pratap – Awadh aur Purvanchal mein 1857, article in Udbhawana, p. 383.
- <sup>xv</sup> Rudrangshu Mukherjee – Awadh in Revolt 1857-1858, p 57-58
- <sup>xvi</sup> Ibid., p. 95
- <sup>xvii</sup> Dr. Aroop Chakravarty – Lucknow mein 1857 ki kranti – 2, p. 18
- <sup>xviii</sup> Ibid p.19
- <sup>xix</sup> Ibid, p. 22
- <sup>xx</sup> Ibid, p. 28
- <sup>xxi</sup> Rudrangshu Mukherjee – Awadh in Revolt 1857-1858, p.85-86
- <sup>xxii</sup> Dr. Aroop Chakravarty – Lucknow mein 1857 ki kranti – 2, p. 31
- <sup>xxiii</sup> Ibid p. 36
- <sup>xxiv</sup> Rudrangshu Mukherjee – Awadh in Revolt 1857-1858, p.90
- <sup>xxv</sup> Ibid. p.36
- <sup>xxvi</sup> Rudrangshu Mukherjee – Awadh in Revolt 1857-1858, p.89
- <sup>xxvii</sup> Dr. Aroop Chakravarty – Lucknow mein 1857 ki kranti – 2, p.36
- <sup>xxviii</sup> A building built by Amjad Ali Shah for his second wife Malika Ahad in 1844
- <sup>xxix</sup> Shakeel Siddique – Begum Hazrat Mahal – Ghor Purushwadi Samay mein Ek Stri ka Ladna, article in Udbhawana, p362