

The Revolt of 1857 and the Revolutionary Leader Babu Veer Kunwar Singh

SANJEEV KR. SINGH

Researcher

Department of History, Sidhu Kanhu Murmu University, Dumka (Jharkhand) India

Key Words : Revolt, Soldier, Social discrimination, Hindu-Muslim conspiracy

INTRODUCTION

Although the revolt of 1857 broke out during the rule of Company ruler Lord Canning but the main factors responsible for it were Lord Dalhousie's imperialistic policy, economic exploitation, humiliating maltreatment, unsatisfactory governance and social discrimination. Most of the British historians ask whether it was a military revolt or Hindu-Muslim conspiracy. The Britishers regarded it as military revolt because they wanted to conceal their failure and reality. Secondly their opinion regarding Hindu-Muslim conspiracy was the outcome¹ of their biased opinion. It is for this reason from the very beginning they started thinking that either the Hindus stimulated² the muslims or muslims stimulated the Hindus.

But the reality was that there prevailed dissatisfaction all around in the form of soldier³ social, political and religions dissatisfaction. The introduction of greased cartridge kindled the fire of uprising against the despotic rule⁴ when Mangal Pandey soldier of the 34th Native Infantry refused to use the cartridge and led an attack. This revolution was started on May 10, 1857 by Indian soldiers but it spread like a jungle fire in the country and soon it engulfed the entire north and central Indian its womb. Even though the uprising of 1857 was suppressed, it shook⁵ the British rule in India to its very foundation. Lakhs of farmers, landlords, artisans and soldier fought bravely for more than a year and added a glorious chapter⁶ to Indian history by their exemplary bravery and sacrifice.

During the revolt of 1857 hindu, muslim and the soldiers all took joint measures to force the Britishers to quit India. The bravery of Mangal Pandey spread the revolt. The fire of revolt spread to Kanpur, Lucknow, Allahabad, Jhansi, Delhi and in Bihar to Danapur Regiment and Ramgarh. In opposition to company's despotic and cruel⁷ rule the soldiers of Meerut set out on a journey to Delhi 10 May 1857 and on the other hand the Indian soldiers in Danapur, Bihar proclaimed self rule and rose with weapons against the British rule on 25th July 1857. After killing the Britishers of infantry the Indian soldiers moved towards Jagdishpur. The revolutionary soldiers knew that and able leader is must who could lead the fight against the Britishers and none other then the brave 80 year old fighter Veer Kunwar Singh of Jagdishpur can provide efficient leadership. As soon as the Indian soldier reached Danapur this modern Bhisma jumped into the battle field to teach the Britishers a lesson challenged the Britisher taking the rein⁸ of revolt in his hand. For giving strong opposition to the Britishers he had formed a regiment of ten thousand patriot soldiers repaired the fort and set up a gun factory. Veer Kunwar was such lion whose roar shivered the Britishers in the history of the world this is the first example where a warrior eighty years old challenged the might of English soldiers⁹ having a sword in his hand.

Hukumat ki buniyad dhadhaye chala ja, Jawano ko baagi banaye chala ja

Varas aag bankar Firangi ke sar pe, Taquabur ki duniya dhahaye chala ja.

The megastar of the revolt of 1857 Babu Veer Kunwar Singh had extraordinary personality whose undaunting brave and courage is saluted by the whole nation. He was born in landlord's family on 23 April 177 at Bhojpur Shahabad in present Bhojpur. His father Sahebjada Singh and mother Pancharatan Kuwari were the descendants of famous ruler of Bhoj Dynasty who were Ujjainiya Parmar Kshatriya. Babu Veer Kunwar Singh had been related to famous Chandel Rajpur rulers of Giddhaur. The worthy son of worthy parents Kunwar Singh inherited the trait of protest against the Britishers from his ancestors. He was against the traditional belief and conventions. He had neither exploitative bent of mind nor communal. The famous historian Dr. Ramsharan Sharma called him the Symbol of national integrity. It was for this reason he had the full support of the people of all caste¹⁰ and religion. Just like Khod ladi mardani (Laxmibai) Veer Kunwar Singh was a great brave male warrior. The poem was to be published in 1929 which was banned by the British government. It was extracted by the principal Manoranjan Prasad Singh and edited by Ram vriksha Benipuri. Its lines are as follows.....

Assibaras ki haddi mein jaaa josh purana tha,
Sab kahte hain Kunwar Singh bhi bada veer mardana
tha.

The great warrior of 1857 Veer Kunwar Singh was not only an agile fearless champion player of the battle field but also adept in making strategy of war against well equipped commander and officer of British army¹¹.

By setting and example of his skill of warfare on 27 July 1857 he captured Arah with the help of revolutionary soldiers and proclaimed independent govt. there. This news stunned the British rulers and Caption Danver helped by five hundred European and Hindustani soldiers reached Arah. A fierce¹² battle was taken place there on 29 and 30th July 1857 in which captain Danver along with many soldiers was killed. The remaining soldiers fled to Danapur and Arah remained independent in the hands of Veer Kunwar Singh. The common folk along with Veer Kunwar Singh shared the joy of winning the battle. Mean while the company soldiers of Bengal artillery under the guidance of Vincent Ayer postponed Allahabad trip and returned back to attack on Arah. The fierce battle took place on 2-3 August 1857 among the soldiers of Veer Kunwar Singh and Vincent's armies in the forest of Viviganj (Arah) and Vihiyan. They marched towards Jagdishpur fighting gorilla war. Although he had to leave Arah in this war but in the words of Major Ayer

himself Kunwar Singh was a magician of warfare. We were helpless in front of him. Many historians accepted that in him there was the ability of a valiant megastar.

The suppressive¹³ measures taken by the British officers could not crush the real of revolutionaries due to Veer Kunwar Singh. In the hills of Kaimur the revolt was led by Amar Singh the younger brother of Kunwar Singh. Meanwhile Kunwar Singh reached Rohtas passing through Nokha. The agitating soldier of Ramgarh battalion choose Kunwar Singh their leader too. Taking all these soldiers with him Veer Kunwar Singh passing through Mirzapur, Ajamgarh, Benaras, Balia, Gajipur, Gorakhpur and Reewan reached Vanda. There he tried to meet Tantia Tope. From Banda through Kalpi he reached Lucknow. The Nawab Lucknow honoured by presenting royal uniform, rupees and farman to him. He visited Ayodhya also and in Kanpur he met Nana Saheb and participated in the battle. Kanpur was captured by Peshwa on 29 Nov 1857 and in this struggle Tantia Tope also took part.

Babu Veer Kunwar Singh showed his miraculous skill of warfare from the side of Peshwa in this struggle. India was under the wave of struggle¹⁴ at that time. In Delhi the last Mughal emperor Shah Alam led the battle whereas in Jhansi Valiant Laxmibai continued to exhibit her valour.

After well establishing Nana Saheb in Kanpur Veer Kunwar Singh marched towards Ajamgarh. Near Ajamgarh Ali karim along with his three hundred soldiers joined the army of Veer Kunwar Singh. Besides this on the bank of river Ghagra his nephew was present with one thousand eight hundred soldiers. Colonel Milman had already been present in Ajamgarh to protect it. On the ground of Atrolia¹⁵ on 22 March 1858 there took place fierce battle from where Milman had to run away for his life. The flag of Kunwar Singh was hoisted on the fort of Ajamgarh.

The British company got frightened by the success of his soldiers and his strong and brave personality. The success of Veer Kunwar Singh and the defeat of the company discouraged the high officials of the British company. The Governor General Canning ordered a stern order of military attack against¹⁶ him. Consequently the pressure of British soldiers increased on him. From Allahabad Lord Cook and from Lucknow Lngai marched towards Ajamgarh along with their respective soldiers. Veer Kunwar Singh having sensed their scheme and decided to leave Ajamgarh. Here he showed his farsightedness and left half of the soldier in Ajamgarh to

protect it and left for Jagdishpur Arah along with his remaining soldiers. Lugal sent Douglas to run after Kunwar Singh. On April 17, 1858 Douglas attacked him. He shattered the efforts of Douglas and continued his mission and journey. The brave warrior Kunwar Singh had been in battle field since nine months. Now he was trying to swim across river Ganga when Douglas had been following him riding a horse¹⁷. Here he used tactics. He spread the rumor that he would make his soldiers cross the river Ganga with the help of elephants. Once again the Englishmen were cheated by the skills of Veer Kunwar Singh. The English General Douglas reached there and started waiting for him and mean while he was sailing across the river by a boat on bank of Shivpuri seven miles away from Valia. Douglas was surprised as to why Kunwar did not arrive there to cross the Ganga. It was then Douglas was informed that Kunwar Singh along with his soldiers had been sailing across the holy river Ganga by a boat. Immediately he rushed to Shivpuri bank but Kunwar's soldiers had already sailed across the river. The last boat was sailing across with Veer Kunwar Singh. The English soldiers fired at him and a bullet hurt his arm. In order to prevent the effect of poison he cut his arm away and assigned it to river Ganga. The history remembers this rare gift of Kunwar even today¹⁸ and keeps it alive. He was badly injured. Facing several hardships he reached his hometown Jagdishpur on 22 April 1858 but obeying the severe order of Company Governor General the soldiers well equipped ran after him and reached his hometown Jagdishpur where a historical battle took place on 23 April 1858. Under the leadership of Captain Leegrant a regiment of British soldier fought the last decisive battle with Veer Kunwar Singh in which Kunwar was garlanded with victory. Commander Leegrant was killed and the public of the whole area was overwhelmed with such grand victory¹⁹. This day of 23rd April is celebrated as the festival of victory throughout the country even today.

The injured old man due to continuous battle and exhaustion was coming closer to the end of his life. The pleasure of this historic victory did not last long and just after three days on 26th April 1858 Kunwar Singh passed away. Veer Kunwar Singh like a grand winner²⁰ left the land of India for good. Fighting formidable fights he kept the glorious tradition of Rajput alive. After his martyrdom the grand soldier of 1857 brought end to the revolt. Even the historians evaluated him as a great hero. A British historian Ruy Lilwalen Jones wrote about Kunwar Singh

and said that old Rajput fought bravely and grandly against the British soldiers. It was fortunate for the Britishers that he was eighty years old if he were young the English men would have to leave India in 1857²¹ itself. In this way several historians kept him alive in history by remembering his valour, courage, sacrifice and heroism. In the perspective of history and present I am of the opinion that Kunwar remain alive among common folk and therefore he should be awarded the title of 'Loknayak' for his rare contributions which will be quite apt for present, past and future.

In this way Veer Kunwar Singh became immortal in the history of freedom struggle movement. His liberal nationalism, farsightedness. Valour and sacrifice brought Indian journey closer to freedom.

REFERENCES

1. Unrest Against British Rule in Bihar 1831-1859 by Dr. K.K Dutta.
2. John Marshall, Notes and observations in India.
3. Dalhousie ka ghoshnapatra published 13 Feb 1856, G W Forest, selection from the letters, Dispatches and other state papers of the Govt of India, 1857-58 (Calcutta 1893), 2
4. G.D Beglar, Report of Tours in South Eastern Provinces in 1874-75 and 1875-76.
5. William Wilson Hunter, Annals of Rural Bengal and Bihar, London, 1860, republished Calcutta 1996 Page 137-38.
6. Thomas Watts (English Translation) on Yuwan Chwangs Tablers in India London, 1905 Page 180-181.
7. T. Rice Holmes, 'A History of the Indian Mutiny (London 1888)
8. C. Bal 'History of Indian Mutiny (London) Jild-2.
9. Justin Mearthy, A Short History of our own times (London 1883)
10. A. Dough, 'The Indian Rebellion. (London 1858)
11. Bipin Chandra and others Bharat ka Swatantrata Sangharsha Delhi University, Delhi.
12. W.H. Russel 'My Diary in India (London 1860) Jild 2
13. Major B.D. Basu ' Rise of the Christian Power in India. (Calcutta 1391)
14. Risala Asbab-e-Bagawat-e-Hind (1858) translated by Grahm and Colvin (Banarasi, 1873) page 12, 13 Dr. Siddiqi ka publication.

15. W.H. Russel 'My Diary in India', edited by Michael Edwards (London 1957)
16. The Mutiny of Bengal Army (December 1857) (G.B. Mailson) K.K. Dutta History of Freedom Movement in Bihar, Jild-1
17. R.C Majoondar, H.C. Roy Choudhary and K.K. Dutta- An Advance History of India, London 1948
18. S.A. Samuels 'Brief Narrative of events connected with the Removal of trailor – Datta.
19. K.K. Datta The Comprehensive History of Bihar and Bengal part 1 K.P. Jaiswal Institute Patna 1974 Page 145
20. S.N. Sen 'Eighteen Fifty Seven' Delhi, 1957
21. Rogy Lilwalen Jhones- The Great Uprising in India 1857-58, untold Histories India and British.
