

## Contribution of Bihar to the Uprising of 1857

The revolt of 1857 was the first major revolt during India's struggle for Independence against the colonial power which shook the British empire in India to its very foundations. The revolt began at Meerut on May 10, 1857, and soon embraced a vast area from Punjab in the north and the Narmada in the south to Bihar in the east and Rajputana in the west.

Bihar was one of the major centres of the outbreak of the revolt. The incident of the revolt in Bihar can be traced to Rohini village in Deoghar where on June 12, 1857, the soldiers revolted killing two English officials.

### Beginning of the Revolt in Bihar:

- At Patna on **July 3 1857**, a **bookseller Pir Ali** along with his associates killed Deputy opium Agent of the Patna Opium Agency, Dr Lyell. Later Pir Ali was convicted and hanged on July 7, 1857. William Tayler was the commissioner of the Patna division and had carried out operations against Pir Ali and his associates.
- After the uprising of Patna, **three of the regiments at Danapur** rose up against the company. On 26<sup>th</sup> July they marched into the district of Shahabad to join a well-organized movement against British administrative authority under the able leadership of 80-year-old Kunwar Singh of Jagdishpur.

### Role of Kunwar Singh:

- During the rebellion, many zamindars and local leaders were with the government, while the others actively participated in the rebellion and became its leaders. Kunwar Singh was one of them who was looked upon as a natural leader by the people of Bihar. In his stronghold at Jagdishpur, he had established a factory of arms and ammunition and stored provisions to feed an army of 20,000 men for six months.
- The **chief followers of Kunwar Singh** were his brothers Amar Singh, Rith Narayan Singh, his nephews Nishan Singh and Jai Krishna Singh and four zamindars of Shahabad. Kunwar Singh's party besieged the British garrison at Ara. In this critical situation, the British were saved by Major Eyre defeated the forces at Bibiganj on 3<sup>rd</sup> August. He captured Jagdishpur, destroyed munitions, buildings and even temples. But Kunwar Singh was not deterred.
- Kunwar Singh's activities crossed the borders of Bihar. He sought to act in cooperation with some of the prominent leaders and rebel troops in other parts of India viz., Gwalior, Lucknow, Azamgarh, Rewa and so on. Leaving

Bihar in August 1857, he moved from place to place fighting against British troops. In September 1857, Kunwar Singh made an attempt to enter Rewa territory but was opposed by Lt. Osborne. Joined by the Gwalior troops, they took part in the **Battle of Kanpur, Nana Sahab** and his allies were defeated. Kunwar Singh then marched towards Lucknow where he was presented with a robe of honour, a fireman for the district of Azamgarh and twelve thousand rupees in cash by Shah of Awadh. From Azamgarh, he proceeded towards Ghazipur. His plan was then to cross the Ganga and reoccupy Jagdishpur.

- On 21<sup>st</sup> April 1858, Kunwar Singh fought bravely against the British troops under Brigadier Douglas. He was severely wounded and lost his one arm. 23<sup>rd</sup> April 1858 Kunwar Singh was at Jagdishpur. A British force sent towards Jagdishpur under **Captain Le Grand** against Kunwar Singh suffered a severe repulse. Worn out by the fatigue and continuous fighting, he died after three days after the victory over Le Grand's troops. After that followers of Kunwar Singh continued the struggle in different parts of Bihar under the leadership of his brother Amar Singh.

#### **The spread of the Revolt in other areas of Bihar:**

- **Hazaribagh:** The companies of infantry at Hazaribagh revolted towards the end of July 1857. Madhab Singh was their leader. Soon they moved to Ranchi. In Ranchi, rebel sepoys revolted against Jaimangal Singh.
- **Palamau:** Under the leadership of Nilamber and Pitamber in alliance with Chero Zamindars made Palamau a centre of serious popular agitation during the revolt.
- **Singhbhum:** Raja Arjun Singh of Porhat and his brother led a formidable rising of the Kols of Singhbhum.

Besides these events, there was an uprising in Gaya where rebel troops along with disaffected villagers participated.

The revolt of 1857 was an unprecedented event during the British rule in India which saw the participation of people of Bihar with great enthusiasm which later enhances the sense of nationalism among the diverse sections of the society.