



# Babu Veer Kunwar Singh

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LOK SABHA SECRETARIAT  
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**Babu Veer Kunwar Singh** (1777-1858) was one of the brave heroes of the First War of Independence (1857-58) waged by the people of India against the foreign rule. The brilliant warrior put up a valiant fight against the forces of the East India Company during the uprising in 1857. Kunwar Singh was the chieftain (zamindar) of the royal Rajput house of Jagdishpur, near Arrah, currently a part of Bhojpur district, Bihar State. He was enthroned in 1826 following the death of his father Raja Sahabzada Singh. His estate consisted of two parganas and several talukas in Shahabad district. During India's First War of Independence Kunwar Singh actively led a group of armed soldiers against the British troops. In spite of his old age, Kunwar Singh's name evoked deep concern and fears among British Army Officers. He gave a tough challenge to the British forces at several places, made their moves difficult at many places and recorded victories in many battles. Kunwar Singh had his sympathies with the soldiers who revolted against the British and due to formidable challenge he posed, at certain times it seemed that unless the British forces took prompt action, the entire western Bihar would be in blaze and slip from British control. He was Bihar's last lion, routing the forces of Captain Dunbar and Captain Le Grand at Arrah and Jagdishpur and who surprised the British forces in Azamgarh.

The Indian Rebellion of 1857 began as a mutiny of sepoys of East India Company's army on 10 May 1857, in the town of Meerut, and soon erupted into widespread rebellions in various parts of India. Major hostilities occurred at several places, including Bihar. The rebellion posed a serious threat to Company power and battles were fought between the British forces and forces led by Princely States, rebellious

Indian soldiers, etc. in several regions and cities. Thus it became **India's First War of Independence**, against the colonial rule.

On 25 July 1857, rebellion erupted in the garrisons of Danapur. The Indian soldiers in revolt moved towards the city of Arrah, a town with considerable British presence and were joined by Kunwar Singh and his men. Veer Kunwar Singh assumed command of the soldiers who had revolted at Danapur on 25 July 1857. Two days later, his forces occupied Arrah, the district headquarter. Mr. Boyle, a British engineer in Arrah, had already prepared his house for defence against such attacks. As the rebels approached Arrah, all European residents took refuge at Mr. Boyle's house. A siege soon ensued and came under attack from the forces led by Kunwar Singh.

On 29 July, about 415 Government troops were sent out from Danapur to rescue the besieged British men in Arrah, but this force led by Captain Dunbar that approached Arrah by crossing the river Sone was ambushed by the fighters led by Kunwar Singh before reaching their destination. The troops led by Captain Dunbar was severely defeated and driven back. Out of 415 men who came, only 50 were left alive and crossed back the river Sone. Kunwar Singh, who was known for his guerilla warfare, effectively deployed his fighters in small groups.

By the end of July, Major Vincent Eyre marched towards Arrah. On 2 August, some 16 miles (about 26 kms) short of Arrah, the Major and his troops were ambushed by the rebels. There was intense fight between the two sides. Kunwar Singh, however, could not defend much longer and left his ancestral village.

After participating in the battle of Kanpur, Kunwar Singh reached Lucknow in December 1857 where the King of Oudh honoured him with robe of honour and issued a farman awarding him the area comprising the Azamgarh district. In March 1858 he occupied Azamgarh. In Azamgarh, Kunwar Singh's fighting skill

was feared by the British forces. His presence was a factor that was heavily taxing on the latter's capabilities. On 22 March 1858 Kunwar Singh and his men gave a big surprise at Atrolia, 23 miles from Azamgarh and forced the British forces led by Col. Milman to retreat all the way back to Azamgarh. The seige of the area by Kunwar Singh led to heightened anxiety among British officers about the fall of the entire region. The situation was full of possibilities for Kunwar Singh to make further progress and the Governor General Lord Canning had to take urgent measures to deal with the situation as he was aware about the audacity and courage of Kunwar Singh. By guerrilla tactics, skilful command and motivation, Kunwar Singh could inflict big humiliation and losses on the British forces. Kunwar Singh had a strong hold on the soldiers who revolted and could marshal them well in the fight. As reinforcements kept coming for the British, Kunwar Singh engaged them on and off under the control of revolutionaries.

Kunwar Singh and his men then crossed the river Ganga and marched towards Jagdishpur. His first act in Jagadishpur was to completely defeat, with considerable loss, the troops led by Captain Le Grand of the 35th Foot on 23 April 1858. The British forces led by Captain Le Grand had come from Arrah to fight with the rebels on hearing about their return and were terribly crushed by Kunwar Singh's forces. On 23rd April he re-entered his Palace. Kunwar Singh reportedly had cut off his hand with his sword when a bullet hit it, and dropped it into the Ganga as an offering. Veer Kunwar Singh passed away on 26 April 1858.

His legacy as a fearless warrior remains an inspiration for generations. Col. G.B. Malleson in his book titled, "The Indian Mutiny of 1857", originally published in 1891 wrote "the veteran.....had more than repaid the British for the insults he deemed they had showered upon him.....Kunwar Singh died three days after he had defeated Le Grand." Even after the death of Kunwar Singh guerilla model fight continued

between the government forces and the forces he once led. The British could not gain a decisive victory over the freedom fighters in the region for a long time. The chieftain in the district of Shahabad, Babu Veer Kunwar Singh has earned a lasting name and fame as the authentic Bhojpuri folk-hero who took on the British for freedom of the motherland. Kunwar Singh was a man of generous disposition. He gave numerous grants to individuals and for the maintenance of shrines including a Muslim shrine in the Patna city. In honour of the memory of Kunwar Singh and his contribution to India's freedom movement, a commemorative stamp was released on 23 April 1966 by the Government of India. As India remembers and honours the country's valiant freedom fighters Babu Veer Kunwar Singh stands out as one of the brave heroes of the First war of Independence.

*[The portrait of Babu Veer Kunwar Singh was painted by Shri Gopal and will be unveiled on 22 December 2008 by the Hon'ble Prime Minister of India, Dr. Manmohan Singh. The portrait has been donated by Shri Ram Vilas Paswan, Union Minister of Chemicals and Fertilizers and Union Minister of Steel, and National President, Lok Jan Shakti Party.]*