

Chapter – III

1857 War of Independence and the Role of the People of Azamgarh

My home town Azamgarh which has been so active to maintain its Independence since about 1000th A.D. and for this purpose fought many Wars even against Moghal Rulers supported Sher Shah Suri against Humayun and defeated and arrested Chabeli Ram a General of Aurangzeb. The District is full of Martyrs who fought against British in 1857 not only in Azamgarh but in other parts of India including Bihar. Peer Ali Khan leader of Revolution of 1857 in Patna Division who attained the Shahadat on 7th July 1857 when he was hanged by the then commissioner of Patna Division William Taylor. William Taylor himself described the brave Peer Ali Khan in his book "Our Crisis- 3 months at Patna" published 1st in Calcutta in 1858 and then its subsequent two editions from London in 1858 and 1882. However, in spite of his great sacrifice our own Historians made him an unknown & unsung forgotten and insignificant individual.

William Taylor in his said book himself described Peer Ali Khan as follows: -

"Peer Ali was a model of the desperate and determined fanatic; repulsive in appearance, with a brutal and sullen countenances, he was calm, self-possessed and almost DIGNIFIED and demeanor".

"After the capital sentence had been pronounced upon him.....Heavily fettered, his soiled garments, stained deeply with blood and wound on his side.....the last hope departed, (but) not for a moment did he betray agitation, despondency, or fear. On being asked whether he could do anything to make it worth while to spare his life, he answered with Supreme coolness and some contempt, "Do you think I am afraid to die..... Not I, there are some cases in which it is good to save life, others in which it is better to lose it. You may hang me, or such as me, everyday, but thousands will rise in my place, and your object will never be gained. The day is nigh (near) thank God, when you Ferangees

will be thrown out of the country. Now hang me, I have nothing more to say.”

I will emphasis the lines:-

“You may hang me, or such as me, everyday, but thousands will rise in my place, and your object will never be gained. The day is nigh (near) thank God, when you Ferangees will be thrown out of the country. Now hang me, I have nothing more to say.”

This was said by Peer Ali Khan on 7th July, 1857 and the sentiments as well as brave posture was repeated 87 years later by Sardar Udham Singh while he was sentenced to death in 1940 for killing General Dyer in London . Latest example of such bravery was seen while Saddam Hussain was brought to the gallows when he refused to wear the mask and looked straight in the eyes of those who wanted to hang him which was shown live on the TV.

Peer Ali Khan born in 1820 in village Mohammadpur Distt. Azamgarh my hometown was a poor man. He had no selfish motive or interest except purely “National” interest and attained the Shahadat. As a brave man he did not beg for his life rather boldly told William Taylor that he will prefer death over betraying his fellow warriors. His place will be filled by thousands others. Such patriotic sentiments were kept away from future generations. How many Indians are, or were aware about Peer Ali Khan and his “Words” recorded by no one but William Taylor himself who was responsible to hang Peer Ali Khan for espousing patriotism? It is now after 150 years I wrote the book on Peer Ali Khan, titled “Excavation of Truth-Unsung Heroes of 1857 War of Independence” that Janab Imtiaz Ahmed Director Khuda Baksh Oriental Public Library Patna convened the Seminar on 3rd of July 2007 on Peer Ali Khan and gave me an opportunity to read a paper which was widely covered by all the News papers of Patna with the result the Bihar Government specially Mr. Nitish Kumar the Chief Minister of Bihar took the cause and named a prominent road as “Peer Ali Khan Road” and the ground where Peer Ali Khan was hanged as “Peer Ali Khan park”. Why not the people of Allahabad write the details of Liyaqat Ali Khan and

his followers and some sort of memorial is built so that the new generation takes the lesson from his life and be proud of his deeds.

The people of Azamgarh always remained economically poor because they were always against the establishment. The Muslim & Rajputs of Azamgarh jointly fought against Moghals and then against the Nawabs of Oudh. They even fought and defeated the Army of Aurangzeb and arrested his General Chabeli Ram.

With Such a background how the people of Azamgarh could have remained behind against British in the 1857 War of Independence.

People of Azamgarh declared the war against British on 3rd of June' 1857 from all around the district. Practically every and each village inhabited by Muslims and Rajputs revolted. But as in other parts of India Azamgarh was also full of "TRAITORS" who supported British administration and were made beneficiaries of loyalty to British and created many Harak Chands.

The District is predominantly inhabited in Villages and the people are involved in Agriculture. G. B. Malleson in his book, "The Indian Mutiny of 1857" at page 31 writes, " Mr. Thomson who was responsible to Rule Azamgarh, Jaunpur, and Gorakhpur, due to his western style of land management, created discontent and conspiracy among the Zameendars of the above districts. The system which Thomson tried to introduce was tried by Akbar in effort to consolidate and control the territories and after six months of its introduction withdrew the scheme as he found that it created more discontent against his rule specially in the districts of Azamgarh, Jaunpur and Gorakhpur. Where Akbar had feared to tread, Thomson rushed in." page 349, "The difficulties of the situation were too considerably aggravated due to the action of Thomson the land owners of Azamgarh and Gorakhpur virtually revolted."

Two important towns, Mau & Mobarakpur where the Noor Baafs (weavers) are dominantly established, were practically economically destroyed because of British Policies. Large part of its population migrated to Maharashtra where, Memanpura, Malegaon & Bhiwadi is populated by these Noor Baafs.

The people of Azamgarh were so strong in their conviction to throw the British out of Indian soil that their resolve attracted persons like Shahzada Firoz Shah, Babu Kunwar Singh & Syed Ahmed Shaheed to Azamgarh.

The revolt in Azamgarh was not based on religion. The people revolted against the policies of British which included Muslims, Rajputs/Chattaries.

A circular by Shahzada Firoz Shah is called "Azamgarh Proclamation". Even British Historians & writers termed it a secular proclamation in tone and tenor representing different groups. It was the nearest thing produced during the uprising as a manifesto of national independence. Its opening sentence sets the tone noting that both Hindus and Muslims are being ruined under the Tyranny and oppression of the infidel and treacherous English, hence pick up the arms to fight against enemy of your country. It was also based on the social issue that English have over taxed the land owners, monopolized, all posts of dignity and emoluments, in Civil and armed services, and have put Indians on lower grade, including its artisans. They had dislodged the local manufacturers and flooded the market with cheap British imports and had put restrictions on the weaving of clothes by local weavers rendering them completely out of job. (Ref. G.B. Maleson, W.G. Forest & T.R. E. Holme's books)

Mr. Rajab Ali from village Bamhur Dist. Azamgarh led the people and broke open the gate of District jail and released the inmates on 3rd June 1857. Simultaneously Maulvi Mohammed Naeem Khan of village Mohammadpur led a group of young men of the village for Azamgarh but was intercepted in Bazar Mohammadpur with the business community of the Bazar who were acting as British agents in the area and had a pitched battle and defeated them. He was however, persuaded by another person of the village who was on the post of Subedar in British Army not to proceed further and put the entire village to destruction by British. The clash in Bazar Mohammadpur was got recorded in the Thana as fight on personal grounds at the behest of Subedar Baba to save the village and its people.

Raja Iradat Jahan the Raja of Mahul in the District of Azamgarh refused the control of British on the annexation of Oudh by Britishers in February 1856 and declared his allegiance to Bahadur

Shah Zafar. The British attacked at Mahul where Iradat Jahan his son Muzaffar Jahan and their two brave Generals Amar Singh and Mokhdoom Baksh led a strong army and gave a befitting defeat to Britishers. On being defeated British adopted their tested policy of treachery and took into confidence a relative of Iradat Jahan, Raja Farhat Jahan and offered him the Nizamat of the Area if he persuades Raja Iradat Jahan to meet them for conciliation. Not suspecting the treacherous intentions of British and the greed of Fasahat Jahan, Iradat Jahan agreed to meet the British and reached at Pawai with few guards. On arrival British who had collected large number of Army surrounded him and killed Iradat Jahan and his guards which included Muslims & Hindus as well. After killing Iradat Jahan the British killed Fasahat Jahan also telling him that if you can deceive your brother we cannot trust you either.

There after Muzaffar Jahan S/o Iradat Jahan with a strong army attacked the British at the villages Naghra defeated them and retained the areas under him and around Mahul including Pawai. Muzaffar Jahan remained ruler of Mahul & Pawai etc. and kept the British away from his area up to 1860 but ultimately the British with the help of Jang Bahadur of Nepal arrested Muzaffar Jahan in 1860 in Tigra Village and was kept him in Agra Jail. This shows that the people of Azamgarh revolted in 1856 itself and continued their fights till 1860 i.e. over four years.

After arresting Muzaffar Jahan the Britishers confiscated all the Jagirs of Muzaffar Jahan. Out of said confiscated properties a large chunk was given to one Indigo Planter Martin and named the area as Martin Ganj. The area even to-day is known as Martin Ganj and the brave fighters of freedom Iradat Jahan, Muzaffar Jahan his Generals Amar Singh and Makhdoon Baksh are forgotten. Those betrayed these Martyrs and the Nation are enjoying the fruit of treachery and the Shohda as well as their family is suffering till date. Muzaffar Jahan after his death was buried in village Rudauli of Distt. Azamgarh.

Raja Iradat Jahan was buried in Mahul by the side of his father Resalat Jahan and the sepoy who accompanied him and were killed, (Muslims) were buried in Garhi Mubarakpur & Hindu sepoy were cremated in Garhi Manekpur both in the vicinity of Mahul. Iradat Jahan's brother Bashrat Jahan adopted Sufi-izm and had settled in Kachochi-Sharif. Raja Anjum & Raja Tajdar the descendants of Raja Iradat are staying in Jaunpur but have maintained their connection with

Mahul, unknown & un-noticed by the subsequent generation of the District and the country as a whole.

In 1857 the situation in Azamgarh became so grim for British that practically all British functionaries left Azamgarh to safer places of neighboring districts towards Bihar. The land owners of Azamgarh, Jaunpur and Gorakhpur became hostile. Azamgarh was the 1st to display disaffection. The bulk of 17th Regiments N.I. stationed in Azamgarh raised the flag of revolt on 3rd of June 1857 but marched to Oudh to help Begum Hazrat Mahal.

K.K. Datta in his book at page 111 "Biography of Kunwar Singh" wrote"-

"A British contemporary military officer wrote in his book, The Mutiny of Bengal Army (Dec. 1857) at page 53, "that the crisis came, at first apparently, a mere military mutiny, it speedily changed its character, and became a National insurrection. The Rajput & Muslim villages in Bihar, those in the districts of Azimgarh (Azamgarh) Goruckpore (Gorakhpur) and Deoria and Allahabad division of Oudh shook off our rule and declared War against us."

K.K. Dutta further quotes Sir James Outram:-

"It was the result of Mohammedan conspiracy which utilized Hindu grievances to its own advantage. The cartridge incidence precipitated the Mutiny before it had been thoroughly organized and before adequate arrangement had been made for making Mutiny a first step to popular insurrection."

G.B. Maleson in his book, "The Indian Mutiny of 1857" wrote that the situation in these districts were so aggravated that land owners vertically revolted and Lord Canning the Governor General requested Jang Bahadur the virtual ruler of Nepal to help. Jang Bahadur himself was usurper in Nepal and had assumed extra constitutional powers by killing the entire cabinet including Prime

Minister of Nepal. Jang Bahadur with 3000 Nepali Troops entered Gorakhpur by the end of July 1857 and captured it for British on 1st of August 1857. He captured Azamgarh on 13th August and Jaunpur on 15th August 1857. The moment Nepali troops left these districts the people again began troubling British. This forced Lord Canning to shift his headquarter from Calcutta to Allahabad and on 9th February 1858 he reached Allahabad. Even from their full control of Azamgarh & Jaunpur was a distant dream for British.

As late as on 25th, April 1858, Mr. Robert Davis, officiating Magistrate of Azamgarh wrote to F.B. Gubbins Commissioner of 5th Division at Banaras, from his camp at Shivpur, that there was enthusiasm and friendliness for Kunwar Singh among the common people of Azamgarh District.

K.K. Datta further wrote at 81 of his book:-

“From the letter dated 23.12.1856 of Reyasat Ali of Calcutta to Yusuf Ali of Patna it was learnt that close of 1856 Peer Ali Khan and Maseezzaman had gone to Lucknow from Kanpur where a great religious War had taken place. This was the year Oudh was annexed to British.”

“Bithore being just 12 miles from Kanpur, where some of the associates of Peer Ali lived.”

Charls Allen, in his book “God’s Terrorists’ at page 125& 145 wrote:-

“Patna Lucknow, Delhi and else where groups of idealists sought to over through the company Raj and exchanged cautiously worded correspondence Had these various conspirators acted together the outcome of the 1857 Mutiny would have been very different.”

“A book seller named Pir Ali Khan noted for his enthusiasm for his religion and his hatred for the

English, Taylor already had information suggesting that Pir Ali was the leading member of a cell taking its orders from the rebels in Lucknow, and now a bundle of letters found in his possession confirmed this. They had come from book seller in Lucknow and contained instructions as to how Pir Ali was to further the cause of the, “Futeh-e-ooper Nasara” or victory over the Nazareners (a terminology used for British in those days). Pir Ali had also been charged with the task of persuading the leaders of the Wahabees in Patna to join the revolt, but in this he failed, probably because Lucknow correspondent had urged that the rebels should join forces with all religious groups in India even it that meant working with Shias and Hindus.”

These details depict the important role played by Peer Ali Khan and that his area of operation was not only confined to Patna Division but Oudh territory as well

At page 82: K.K. Datta writes:-

“It appears that besides the Wahabees two groups of people at Patna were engaged separately against the Government:-

One was Lucknow group-consisting of Peer Ali Khan, Yousuf Ali Khan and Imamuddin. This group started to work just after Oudh annexation.

Another group of Ali Kareem & Waris Ali and some others drew inspiration from Delhi.

In one of the letters of Maseeuzzaman to Peer Ali he was advised to keep close contact with Ali Kareem and Wahabees as well as Hindus. Maulvi Wazeehul Haque a Wahabee leader was also fully aware of the Peer Ali's plans.

Immamuddin a close Associate of Peer Ali Khan who was arrested wounded confessed that he was on pay role of Peer Ali along with others which included Hindus also. Raja of Betia was also with Peer Ali Khan”.

Peer Ali Khan of Village Mohammadpur of Azamgarh was the leader of the revolution in Patna Division and led the revolt in Patna on 3th of July 1857 and attained the Martyrdom along with his followers on 7th of July 1857. His group included Hindus of Patna and also the entire Rajwar community of Rajgir town of Bihar at the outskirts of Patna and the sepoys, other than Sikh sepoys of Danapur cantonment. It is unfortunate that the Sepoys of Danapur could not revolt on 3rd of July 1857 hence the support which Peer Ali Khan was expecting on 3rd July 1857 could not reach him. The Danapur sepoys could revolt only on 25th July 1857. Babu Kunwar Singh of Jagdishpur being friend of William Taylor did not join Peer Ali Khan & group on 3rd July 1857, but took advantage of the Sepoys of Danapur who also could reach to the help of Peer Ali on 3rd July 1857 and revolted on 25th July were taken by Kunwar Singh under his command in an effort to regain his lost / mortgaged Jagir from the money lenders hands.

Details about Peer Ali Khan can be had from my already published book “Excavation of Truth- Unsung Heroes of 1857 War of Independence” published by Kanishk publishers & Distributor, Ansari Road Daryaganj-New Delhi, in May 2007

Prior to the above book very few people knew about Peer Ali Khan who played such an important role against the British and on National cause and remained forgotten for the last 150 years.

Janab Imtiaz Ahmed Director Khuda Baksh oriental Public Library-Patna is taking keen interest in the search of more details on Peer Ali Khan and with his efforts Mr. Nitish Kumar Chief Minister of Bihar has constituted a Committee to work on the subject of Revolution in Patna Division led

by Peer Ali Khan. Janab Imitiaz Sb, has been able to locate the letters which were found in the house of Peer Ali Khan after his arrest in Patna.

We the Muslims are being treated shabbily because we have allowed our true History to remain buried under the thick layers of Archives and allowed the vested interest free hand and open field to propagate falsehood specially by those - whose forefathers were loyal to British and helped in enslaving our Mother Land.

It is because of our inaction that vested interest and those pro-British even in this free India are taking liberty to brand these "Shohda" as "Traitors" or "Terrorist". Read Times of India-Lucknow Edition dated 27.04.2006 wherein Maulvi Liyaqat Ali Khan and his followers are branded as "Traitors". Read Hindustan Times-New Delhi dated 19.11.2006 page 14 where "Syed Ahmed Shaheed" has been branded as the "India's Osama" of 19th Century" (i.e. terrorist). I am told that the History book prescribed by Bombay University for its B.A. Part-I in 17th Chapter Shaheed Bhagat Singh and his fellow Martyrs are named as "Terrorist". IN U.P.'s Civil Services Examination paper a question was asked to the effect, "Bhagat Singh ki Inqalabi "DAHSHAT GARDI" ke bare mein kya khayal hai". The paper setter uses the word "Dahshat Gardi" meaning in his eyes Bhagat Singh and his followers were Dahshat Guard (Terrorist). Similarly the famous Historian Bipan Chandra and Prof. Neelandari Bhattacharya of J.N.U. said:-

"Duniya badal gai hai lehaza Bhagat Singh ke Inqalabi "Dahshat Gardi" ke mottalliq hamari rai per nazar sani karni hogi" (See Qaumi Awaz-N. Delhi dated 06.11.2007 an article by Hamid Meer)".

If you will, still sleep, and will not peep into the past and highlight great deeds of our ancestors and will hesitate to tell the truth, very soon our young generation will know only the falsehood, as is being told to them that those fought for the Nation were "Traitors" or "Terrorists" and those who supported the British to enslave India were Nationalists.

Such people are in plenty in our country who for various reasons and vested interest are still treating themselves as loyal to British. They feel shy to highlight the great deeds of genuine

Martyrs who genuinely fought for the sake of the independence of the country because it is Muslims who are in Majority. In case the young students of History, the professors of colleges will not wake up to unearth the truth from Archive's dump and district records country will be left with only falsehood and the truth will remain buried and will vanish forever and India and its people, particularly Muslims, will have to remain in disgrace forever.

Azamgarh, Ism-e-Ba-Mussamma i.e. greatness in all walks of life, in its soil, air and water and in its name. It's people are born free, live for freedom and die for free India.

The above paper was read by me at Raza Library – Rampur U.P. India on 23rd. December, 2007 and the same was published in the Journal of Khuda Baksh Oriental Library- Patna in its issue volume No:151

Here I would like to correct the discrepancy which has cropped up about Pir Ali Khan. In an article written by Maulana Ziauddin Islahi of Darul Mosannefeen Shibli Academy Azamgarh, in the Journal called **“Naya Daur”** Urdu being published by Information and Public relation Department, Government of U.P.. The issue April-May 2007 came to my hand some times in June, 2007 by the time my book, **“Excavation of Truth”** was already published. While I was reading the said article titled, **“ 1857 KI Jang-e-Azadi Aur Azamgarh”** at page 273 of the Journal, I found that Maulana Ziauddin Saeb wrote, **“ Ek Aur Moverrikh ney likha hai ki Maulana Peer Ali ko Jab Phanseee dee Janey Lagee to who Muskaraker Uski Taraf Barhey. Sirf uss waqt Ankhen Dabdaba-eeen jab unho ney apney Azeez Bete ka naam liya.”**. On my enquiry from Ziauddin Saheb on telephone that Pir Ali Khan was not married hence, from where did he get this information that on hearing the name of his son his eyes got tears? He said that he read it in some book written by some one of Amroha, but he did not remember his name nor the name of the book. I tried to findout from Dr.Abu Saad Islahi Librarian of Raza Library of Rampur to findout the book written by some one of Amroha on 1857. But he could not be of any help.

One day a book selling agent was sitting in the library of New Horizon School, Nizamuddin New Delhi and I found on the table of the Librarian the book titled, **“Tareekh Jang-e- Azadi-a-Hind 1857”** by Khursheed Mustafa Rizvi of Amroha. While reading the book at page 60 I found that

Mr. Khursheed Mustafa Rizvi quoted William Taylor in the following words:- **“Maulana Pir Ali ko Jab Phansi dee Janey Lagee to who muskara kar Uss taraf Badhey, Sirf uss waqt Ankhein Dab-dabaien Jab Unhoney Apney Aziz Bete ka Naam Liya,”** The above quotation was exactly the same as was quoted by Maulana Ziauddin Saheb. However when I read the above book Maulana Ziauddin Saheb was in Saudia Arabia for Haj performance and when he returned to India within few weeks, unfortunately had a fetal accident and died. I could not refer to him that the reference in the book of Khurssheed Mustafa Rizvi is a wrong translation and/or interpretation of the Taylor’s writing in his book, “ Patna Crisis-three months at Patna During the Insurrection of 1857” Published by Nisbat & Company London in 1858. What Taylor wrote in his book referred to above at pages 66 and 67 is as under:-



“After capital sentence had been pronounced upon him (Pir Ali), I sent for him (as I generally did with such criminals) and questioned him in my private room, in hopes of eliciting some further information regarding the plot.”

“Heavily fettered his soiled garments stained deeply with blood from a wound in his side. Confronted with myself and several other English Gentlemen, the last hope of life departed, not for a moment did he betray agitation despondency or fear.”

“On being asked whether he could do something to make it worthwhile to spare his life, he answered with supreme coolness and some contempt,”There are some cases in which it is good to save life, others in which it is better to loose it.” He then taunted me with oppression I had exercised, and concluded his speech by saying, “You may hang me or such as me, every day, but thousands will rise in my place, and your object will never be gained.”

“After this defiance , he joined his manacled hands, and said with the utmost politeness, as if he was on the best of terms with himself, the

world and me, “I have some thing to ask, “well, what is it?—“My house”? “It will be rased to the ground.”—“My property?”---- “It will be confiscated,”--- “My children,” and here for the first time his voice faltered and his tone betrayed emotions. --- On my asking him where his children were, he said they were in Oude, and all I could tell him was that, under the circumstances of that country, it was impossible to make either guess or promise in regard to them. He then salaamed respectfully rose, on the order being given, and walked out un-moved, and, to all appearance unconcerned.”

The above are the first hand text of William Taylor, who recorded the text of the talk which he himself had with Pir Ali Khan just before he was to be hanged. No where William Tailor mentioned that Pir Ali or William Tailor took or mentioned the name of Pir Ali’s son. By word children Pir Ali ment the children of his brother and the property which he inherited in the village Mohammadpur Dist. Azamgarh U.P.

For the above text of William Taylor Mr. Khursheed Mustafa Rizvi made the following text in Urdu at pages 60 and 61 of his book which was adopted by Maulana Ziauddin Islahi Saheb:-

“Maulana Pir Ali ko jab Phansi dee Jane Lagee to woh Muskra Ker Uss Ki Taraf Badhe. Sirf Uss Waqt Ankhen Dabdabaien Jab Unho-ne Apney Aziz Bete ka naam Liya.” Foran Hi ek Angrez Afsar ney Unkey Jazbat ka Faeda Utha Kar Kaha, “Pir Ali Tum Ab Bhee bach Saktey Ho Agar Sazish key dooserey logon ka naam batado.” Pir Ali Ney Khamooshi sey Angrez Afsar kee Taraf Munh phera, himmat aur sharafat sey bharpoor lehjay mein Kaha, “Zindaghi Mein Aisey Moqew bhi aatey hain jab jaan bachaney kee tamanna hoti hai lekin kuch aisey lamhey bhee hotey hain jin main jaan qurbaan karna hi sabsey badee neki aur khwahish hoti hai. Yeh lamha Unhee mein sey eik hai ki jab maut ko ghaley lagana abdi zindaghi paana hai.....Tum Mujhey Phanse dey saktey ho lekin hamarey osoolon ko nahien mar saktey. Main agar mer bhee gaya to meire khoon say Hazaron aisey paida hongey jo tumharee hukumat ko barbad ker deingey.”

From the above one will find that while translating From the English text in Urdu Mr. Khursheed Mustafa Rizvi used the words more out of his own Jazbat rather restricting himself to the actual text.