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PEER ALI KHAN: THE UNSUNG HERO OF INDIA'S FIRST WAR OF INDEPENDENCE

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ABSTRACT

This article delves into the life and contributions of Peer Ali Khan, an unsung hero of India's First War of Independence in 1857. Born in 1812 in Muhammadpur, Uttar Pradesh, Peer Ali Khan's journey from a humble beginning to becoming a pivotal figure in the uprising against colonial rule is explored. His role as a bookseller and a secret revolutionary leader in Patna, along with his unwavering commitment to the cause of freedom, exemplify his significance in the historical narrative. The article also highlights his capture, refusal to yield under pressure, and his enduring legacy, commemorated by the Bihar Government through the Shaheed Peer Ali Khan Park and a dedicated road.



KEYWORDS : *life and contributions , cause of freedom , historical narrative.*

INTRODUCTION

In the annals of India's fight for freedom, the year 1857 stands as an indomitable testament to the First War of Independence, a momentous period that swept through North, West, and Central India. While history readily associates this revolt with well-known figures like Mangal Pandey, Tantia Tope, and Rani Lakshmi Bai, it often overlooks the contributions of countless unsung heroes. One such hero is Peer Ali Khan, whose story resonates as a symbol of unwavering courage and defiance against colonial oppression.

Early Life and Education: Born in 1812 in Muhammadpur, situated in the Azamgarh district of Uttar Pradesh, Peer Ali Khan's life took an unexpected turn when, at the tender age of seven, he fled his home and found refuge in Patna. A benevolent zamindar not only sheltered him but also provided him with an education, raising Peer as his own. Eventually, Peer Ali Khan established a bookstore in Patna, a seemingly innocuous venture that would later play a significant role in the fight for freedom.

The Bookstore and Suspicions: During the tumultuous times of the 1857 revolt, Peer Ali Khan's bookstore became a suspected hub for rebel activities. William Taylor, the Commissioner of the Patna Division from 1855 to 1857, recorded in his book that Peer Ali, originally from Lucknow, had resided in Patna for many years. Taylor suspected that Peer Ali Khan may have established his bookstore with the sole intent of fomenting the insurrection.

Peer Ali Khan's Revolutionary Role: Peer Ali Khan's role as a revolutionary leader during the First War of Independence in 1857 was pivotal in the struggle against British colonial rule. His actions

and contributions exemplified his commitment to the cause of freedom and marked him as a key figure in the uprising. Here's a detailed explanation of Peer Ali Khan's revolutionary role:

- 1. Leadership in Patna:** Peer Ali Khan emerged as the leader of the July 1857 upsurge in Patna, a significant city in the Bihar region. This leadership position was not merely symbolic; it carried immense responsibility, as Patna was an important center during the revolt.
- 2. Secret Communication and Coordination:** Peer Ali Khan operated covertly, recognizing the need for secrecy and effective communication among the revolutionaries. He played a crucial role in distributing important leaflets, pamphlets, and messages among the like-minded individuals who were part of the anti-colonial movement. These communications were vital for planning and organizing protests and actions against the British.
- 3. Coded Messages:** In the era when communication was vulnerable to interception by colonial authorities, Peer Ali Khan went a step further by using coded messages. This demonstrated a level of sophistication in his approach to coordinating the resistance. The use of codes helped maintain the element of surprise and ensured the safety of the network of revolutionaries.
- 4. Influence on the Uprising:** Peer Ali Khan's leadership and communication skills played a significant role in shaping the Patna uprising. He motivated and inspired others to join the cause of resisting British rule. Under his guidance, the revolutionaries in Patna executed actions that challenged the colonial authority in the city.
- 5. Fearless Commitment:** Perhaps the most defining aspect of Peer Ali Khan's revolutionary role was his unwavering commitment to the cause. Despite the mounting pressure from British authorities, he refused to back down or provide information about the revolt, even when offered amnesty. His famous declaration, "You may hang me, or such as me, every day, but thousands will rise in my place, and your object will never be gained," exemplified his fearless spirit and resilience.
- 6. Public Execution:** Ultimately, Peer Ali Khan paid the ultimate price for his commitment to the anti-colonial cause. He was publicly executed on July 7, 1857, but his steadfastness in the face of death only served to highlight the depth of his dedication and the inspiration he provided to others in the struggle.

Peer Ali Khan's revolutionary role was characterized by his leadership, effective communication and coordination, use of coded messages, influence on the uprising in Patna, and his fearless commitment to the cause. His actions and sacrifices contributed significantly to the larger movement against British colonial rule during the First War of Independence, making him an enduring symbol of resistance and determination.

The Uprising and Capture: The uprising and subsequent capture of Peer Ali Khan marked a critical juncture in his role as a revolutionary leader during the First War of Independence in 1857. This event played a significant role in both his personal story and the broader context of the anti-colonial struggle. Here's an explanation of the uprising and capture of Peer Ali Khan:

- 1. The Uprising in Patna:** On July 3, 1857, Peer Ali Khan led the uprising in Patna. This uprising was part of the larger wave of anti-colonial protests and revolts that had swept through various regions of India during the First War of Independence. The Patna uprising aimed to challenge British colonial authority in the city.
- 2. Targeting British Interests:** During the uprising, the revolutionaries, under the leadership of Peer Ali Khan, strategically targeted symbols of British interests and authority. They initially attacked the house of a Catholic priest located in the heart of Patna. However, the priest managed to escape, preventing any harm to him.
- 3. Killing of Dr. Lyell:** Following the unsuccessful attempt on the priest's house, the revolutionaries turned their attention to Dr. Lyell, the principal assistant to an opium agent. In a bold move, they killed Dr. Lyell. This act demonstrated the determination of the rebels and their readiness to confront and challenge the British establishment directly.
- 4. Peer Ali Khan's Tracing and Capture:** Unfortunately for Peer Ali Khan and his comrades, the British colonial authorities were swift in their response. After the killing of Dr. Lyell, efforts to trace

the leaders of the uprising intensified. It was during this phase of the investigation that Peer Ali Khan and his revolutionary activities came under scrutiny.

5. **Letters into the Hands of Authorities:** A crucial turning point in Peer Ali Khan's story occurred when two letters containing sensitive information or coded messages fell into the hands of colonial authorities. These letters were likely part of the secret communication network used by the revolutionaries to plan and coordinate their actions. The discovery of these letters firmly established Peer Ali Khan's role in the revolutionary movement.
6. **Capture and Arrest:** With evidence connecting him to the uprising, Peer Ali Khan was eventually traced and arrested by the British authorities. His capture marked a significant setback for the Patna uprising and the broader anti-colonial movement. However, it did not deter Peer Ali Khan from maintaining his steadfast commitment to the cause of freedom.
7. **Refusal to Yield:** Even in the face of arrest and the potential for severe consequences, Peer Ali Khan remained resolute. When offered amnesty in exchange for information about the revolt or his comrades, he steadfastly declined. His response was a clear manifestation of his determination and unwavering resolve, as he stated, "You may hang me, or such as me, every day, but thousands will rise in my place, and your object will never be gained."

The uprising and capture of Peer Ali Khan were pivotal moments in his involvement in the First War of Independence. The uprising in Patna targeted British interests and led to the killing of a significant colonial figure. Peer Ali Khan's capture resulted from the discovery of incriminating letters, and despite facing arrest and potential consequences, he remained steadfast in his commitment to the anti-colonial cause, becoming a symbol of resilience and defiance in the face of British rule.

Peer Ali Khan's Unwavering Resolve: Peer Ali Khan's unwavering resolve was a defining characteristic of his persona and played a crucial role in his involvement in the First War of Independence in 1857. This resolve was demonstrated in several key aspects of his life and actions:

1. **Resistance in the Face of Oppression:** Peer Ali Khan's unwavering resolve was most prominently displayed in his resistance against British colonial rule. Despite the tremendous power imbalance and the oppressive regime under which he lived, he chose not to bow down to the colonial authorities. He actively participated in the uprising against British rule, demonstrating his commitment to the cause of freedom.
2. **Refusal to Yield Under Pressure:** When Peer Ali Khan was captured by the British authorities, he faced a difficult choice. He was offered amnesty in exchange for information about the revolt and his fellow revolutionaries. However, he chose to remain loyal to the cause, refusing to betray his comrades or divulge critical information. His steadfastness under pressure showcased his unshakable dedication.
3. **Fearless Declaration:** One of the most iconic moments that showcased Peer Ali Khan's unwavering resolve was his declaration when offered amnesty. He boldly stated, "You may hang me, or such as me, every day, but thousands will rise in my place, and your object will never be gained." This statement encapsulated his fearless spirit and his belief in the enduring strength of the anti-colonial movement.
4. **Endurance in the Face of Death:** Even when faced with the prospect of a public execution, Peer Ali Khan did not waver. His willingness to face death with courage and without compromising his principles was a testament to his unyielding commitment to the cause of Indian independence. He remained steadfast until the very end.
5. **Inspiration to Others:** Peer Ali Khan's unwavering resolve served as an inspiration to others in the anti-colonial movement. His determination in the face of adversity motivated fellow revolutionaries and ordinary citizens alike to continue their struggle against British colonialism. His resilience became a symbol of hope and determination.
6. **Enduring Legacy:** Peer Ali Khan's legacy endures as a symbol of unwavering resolve and determination. The Bihar Government's decision to honor him with the Shaheed Peer Ali Khan Park and a dedicated road reflects the recognition of his significant contributions to the fight for freedom. These memorials ensure that his memory continues to inspire future generations.

Peer Ali Khan's unwavering resolve was characterized by his steadfast commitment to the cause of freedom, his refusal to yield under pressure, his fearless declarations, his endurance in the face of death, and his role as an inspiration to others. His resilience and dedication continue to be celebrated as a symbol of the indomitable spirit of those who fought against British colonial rule in India.

The Legacy of Peer Ali Khan:

Peer Ali Khan's courage and resilience continue to be celebrated and remembered by the Bihar Government, which has honored him with the creation of the Shaheed Peer Ali Khan Park at the very spot where he met his end. A road has also been named in his memory. Such endeavors ensure that the memory of this unsung hero remains alive in the public consciousness, a testament to the indomitable spirit of those who dared to challenge the British Raj.

CONCLUSION:

In the shadows of India's First War of Independence, heroes like Peer Ali Khan may have been overshadowed by more prominent figures, but their contributions were no less significant. Peer Ali Khan's unwavering commitment to the cause of freedom and his fearless defiance in the face of adversity make him a symbol of resistance that will continue to inspire generations to come. His legacy serves as a reminder of the countless unsung heroes who played pivotal roles in shaping the course of India's struggle for independence.

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