

(BIOGRAPHY)

UDA DEVI: THE FORGOTTEN LIONESSE OF INDIA'S FREEDOM STRUGGLE

History often remembers freedom fighters through famous names, grand statues, and well-known stories. Yet, hidden beneath these celebrated narratives are brave men and women whose sacrifices were just as great, but whose lives remain largely unknown. One such courageous woman was Uda Devi, a fearless warrior of the 1857 Revolt who challenged both British power and deep-rooted social discrimination. Her life was marked by hardship, courage, and unshakable determination. Though history mentions her only briefly, her story deserves to be told in full, for it carries powerful lessons for us even today.

Early Life: Born into Struggle

Uda Devi was born in the early 19th century into a poor family belonging to the Pasi community in Awadh (present-day Uttar Pradesh). The Pasi community was considered a lower caste in the rigid social structure of that time. From birth, she faced discrimination, poverty, and neglect, as society placed severe limits on what a woman like her could dream of or achieve. She grew up watching her people suffer under social injustice and economic hardship, made harsher by the British colonial system combined with caste oppression. These early experiences quietly shaped her strong spirit and deep sense of injustice.

Marriage and a Turning Point

Uda Devi's life took a significant turn when she married Makka Pasi, a soldier in the army of Begum Hazrat Mahal, the queen of Awadh. This marriage brought her closer to the center of political resistance against British rule. Through her husband, who was deeply committed to the cause of freedom, she began to understand that British rule was a system that crushed dignity and traditions. When the Revolt of 1857 broke out, Makka Pasi joined the fighting openly. Instead of staying behind as expected, Uda Devi chose to stand with him, stepping out of traditional roles into a world of danger and resistance.

The Revolt of 1857: A Call to Action

For Uda Devi, the 1857 uprising represented a personal chance to fight back against years of humiliation and injustice. Tragedy struck when Makka Pasi was killed in battle by British forces. Instead of breaking her, his death ignited a fire within her, transforming grief into determination. She vowed to take up arms and face the enemy herself.

A Warrior in Disguise

Knowing that a woman would not easily be allowed on the battlefield, Uda Devi adopted clever strategies, including disguising herself as a man. Her most remarkable act took place during a battle near Sikandar Bagh in Lucknow:

She climbed a peepal tree overlooking the battlefield.

From this position, she fired at British soldiers with deadly accuracy.

Confused and frightened, the soldiers could not pinpoint the source of the shots.

Reports indicate she killed more than a dozen enemy soldiers during this attack.

Eventually, the British realized a sniper was in the tree, surrounded it, and fired at her.

Even when wounded, she continued to fight until she was shot dead.

Death and Silence in History

Uda Devi died as a martyr. However, her sacrifice did not find a prominent place in history books, largely due to her gender and caste. While British records mentioned her bravery with surprise and shock, her story faded from mainstream narratives after the revolt was crushed. Indian society also failed to give her the recognition she deserved for a long time, as the contributions of women from lower castes were often ignored or minimized.

Why Uda Devi Matters Today

Uda Devi's story reminds us that freedom was achieved through the sacrifices of countless ordinary people, not just famous leaders. She represents the marginalized voices in the freedom struggle and challenges narrow, elite-focused versions of history. For women, she is a symbol showing that they are not weak or passive and can rise to lead even in the most difficult conditions.

Lessons from Her Life

Courage Is a Choice: She was not born powerful but chose to be brave.

Pain Can Become Strength: She transformed personal loss into national determination.

Equality Must Be Fought For: Political independence is incomplete without social equality.

Ordinary People Can Do Extraordinary Things: An ordinary woman without formal education shook a powerful empire.

Remembering the Forgotten Is Our Duty: Honoring heroes like her is essential for an honest understanding of history.

Conclusion: Uda Devi stood tall when women were expected to be silent. Her life tells a simple truth: even the quietest voices can roar when they rise for justice.

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