

Modern Indian History Series

1857 Revolt : Kanpur, Lucknow, Bihar, Assam, Allahabad

UPSC | Modern Indian History

Kanpur | Lucknow | Allahabad | Bihar | Awadh | Central India | Rohilkhand

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Kanpur — The First Crisis

Nana Saheb, Wheeler's entrenchment, Satichaura Ghat, and the Bibighar tragedy

1. Kanpur in Revolt (June 1857)

By June 1857, Kanpur was in open revolt. British officers and families had no fort — they gathered near the river in a makeshift defensive camp called **Wheeler's entrenchment** with women and children. Rebels surrounded the camp. Days dragged on with brutal heat, dwindling food and water, disease, and constant firing.

2. Nana Saheb & Tatya Tope

Nana Saheb was the adopted son of Peshwa Baji Rao II. After the Peshwa's death in 1851, the British **refused his pension**, citing that adopted sons were ineligible. Feeling insulted and cheated, he joined the rebels and became the main leader at Kanpur.

His trusted military aide **Tatya Tope** handled battlefield planning and operations. Together they controlled the town and kept pressure on the besieged British camp.

3. Satichaura Ghat (27 June 1857)

Nana Saheb offered safe passage by boat to Allahabad. The desperate British accepted. On **27 June 1857**, they moved to Satichaura Ghat. As boarding began, **firing erupted** — nobody understood what happened first.

Panic spread; many British men were killed at the ghat and in the water. The promise of safe passage ended in blood.

Surviving women and children were brought back into the city and locked inside a house called **Bibighar**.

4. The Bibighar Massacre (15 July 1857)

British forces under **Henry Havelock** and **James Neill** advanced from Allahabad toward Kanpur. Fearing the British would free the prisoners, rebels killed the women and children in Bibighar on **15 July 1857** — one of the darkest incidents of the revolt.

The British captured Kanpur in mid-July 1857. Upon discovering Bibighar, their rage fuelled extremely harsh reprisals. **Nana Saheb vanished** from Kanpur, never to be heard of again. **Tatya Tope escaped** and kept the rebellion alive, moving from place to place and collecting fighters for months to come.

Lucknow — The Long Siege

Begum Hazrat Mahal, the Residency siege, and the months-long struggle for Awadh

5. Why Lucknow Erupted

Lucknow was the capital of **Awadh**, annexed in 1856. Nawab Wajid Ali Shah was removed; the old system collapsed. Nobles and talukdars lost power, and many Company sepoy came from Awadh — so anger here

was highest. When the revolt wave spread in late May–June 1857, Lucknow erupted.

Begum Hazrat Mahal led the resistance in the name of her son **Birjis Qadr**. Talukdars provided ready-made leadership with their retainers and manpower. Lucknow became a slow, stubborn siege — unlike Kanpur's sharp, fast crisis.

6. The Residency Siege

After a major defeat at **Chinhat (30 June 1857)**, the British pulled back fully into the **Lucknow Residency**. Inside: soldiers, officers, women and children. Outside: rebel sepoys and local fighters. Daily sniping, shelling, dwindling food, disease. The Residency became a small island under constant siege.

Date	Event
30 Jun 1857	Defeat at Chinhat; British retreat into Residency
~25 Sep 1857	First relief force reaches Residency but cannot clear city; siege continues with more troops trapped inside
Mid-Nov 1857	Colin Campbell's larger force breaks through rebel positions
19–27 Nov 1857	Evacuation of civilians and wounded; Residency siege ends
1–21 Mar 1858	Full British operation; Lucknow captured completely

7. Tatyá Tope's Counter-Attack on Kanpur

While British forces shifted toward Lucknow, Kanpur weakened. **Tatyá Tope attacked Kanpur again from 19 November 1857**. Heavy fighting followed. By **6 December 1857**, the British secured Kanpur again. Tatyá Tope escaped once more.

Allahabad — Brief Fall, Then British Base

How the Company lost and recaptured a strategic city within the same month

8. Allahabad (June 1857)

Company sepoys rebelled and British authority broke momentarily. **Maulvi Liaquat Ali**, a local religious teacher, stepped forward. He saw British rule as arrogant and disrespectful, and gathered supporters to

run rebel control.

But Allahabad stayed in rebel hands only briefly. The British struck back and recaptured it **within June 1857**. After that, Allahabad became a **key British base** — a safe point for collecting troops, guns, and supplies for operations toward both Kanpur and Lucknow.

The Revolt Beyond — Regional Centres

Bihar, Awadh countryside, Haryana, Ballabgarh, Central India, Assam, and Rohilkhand

9. Bihar — Kunwar Singh of Jagdishpur

In July 1857, the revolt reached Bihar. **Kunwar Singh**, an almost 80-year-old zamindar from Jagdishpur near Arrah, felt the British were eroding his power through land and revenue control. When sepoys mutinied at **Danapur**, he joined them.

Siege of Arrah: 27 July–3 August 1857. Kunwar Singh kept fighting through 1857–58, won a battle near Jagdishpur on **23 April 1858**, and died soon after on **26 April 1858**.

10. Awadh Countryside — Maulvi Ahmadullah Shah

The revolt in Awadh spread beyond Lucknow into towns like Faizabad and the countryside. **Maulvi Ahmadullah Shah** emerged as a powerful organiser — travelling, giving speeches, and pushing villages to rise. The British feared him because he could keep the rebellion alive even after one city fell. He continued resisting into 1858 and was **killed on 5 June 1858**.

11. Haryana Belt — Rao Tula Ram

In mid-1857, revolt reached the Haryana belt near Delhi. **Rao Tula Ram** led from **Rewari**, refusing to accept the British reduction of local chiefs. He raised forces and supported the wider revolt around Delhi. After Delhi fell (Sep 1857), he escaped, continued organising resistance, and later went abroad seeking support. He **died in exile in 1863**.

12. Ballabgarh — Raja Nahar Singh

Raja Nahar Singh of Ballabgarh supported the rebels and helped Delhi with men and local strength. After Delhi fell in September 1857, the British hunted down regional supporters. Raja Nahar Singh was arrested and

executed in January 1858.

13. Central India — Rani Avantibai Lodhi

In the Mandla–Ramgarh region, **Rani Avantibai Lodhi** led the resistance. The British had interfered in her state administration because her son was a minor — she saw it as a step-by-step takeover. In 1857–58, she gathered local support and fought British forces. She **refused capture and died fighting**, choosing death over surrender.

14. Assam — Maniram Dewan

Maniram Dewan had served the old Ahom system and later worked with British tea interests, but turned against the British wanting to restore local rule. In 1857, he tried to organise rebellion and link up with sepoys. The British detected the plan, arrested him, and **hanged him in 1858**.

15. Rohilkhand — Bareilly

Bareilly became a major rebel centre in 1857. Two leaders stood out: **Bakht Khan** (covered in Ep 4), the artillery officer who went to Delhi as military commander, and **Khan Bahadur Khan**, who stayed connected to Rohilkhand, taking leadership in the Bareilly region. Rohilkhand remained active through 1857 into 1858 until the British returned with stronger force and crushed rebel control.

Region	Leader	Fate
Bihar (Jagdishpur)	Kunwar Singh	Died 26 Apr 1858 after battle victory
Awadh countryside	Maulvi Ahmadullah Shah	Killed 5 Jun 1858
Haryana (Rewari)	Rao Tula Ram	Died in exile, 1863
Ballabgarh	Raja Nahar Singh	Executed Jan 1858
Central India	Rani Avantibai Lodhi	Died fighting, refused capture
Assam	Maniram Dewan	Hanged 1858
Rohilkhand	Khan Bahadur Khan	Crushed by British, 1858

SUMMARY

Quick Revision — All Key Points

Kanpur (Jun–Jul 1857)

Nana Saheb (adopted son of Peshwa Baji Rao II) leads with Tatya Tope. Wheeler’s entrenchment besieged. Satichaura Ghat massacre 27 Jun. Bibighar killings 15 Jul. British recapture mid-Jul. Nana Saheb vanishes; Tatya Tope escapes.

Lucknow (Jun 1857–Mar 1858)

Begum Hazrat Mahal leads for son Birjis Qadr. Chinhat defeat 30 Jun. Residency siege for months. First relief Sep; evacuation Nov. Full capture 1–21 Mar 1858.

Allahabad (Jun 1857)

Maulvi Liaquat Ali leads briefly. British recapture within June. City becomes key British base for operations toward Kanpur and Lucknow.

Regional Leaders

Kunwar Singh (Bihar, d. Apr 1858), Maulvi Ahmadullah Shah (Awadh, killed Jun 1858), Rao Tula Ram (Haryana, d. exile 1863), Raja Nahar Singh (Ballabgarh, executed Jan 1858), Rani Avantibai Lodhi (Central India), Maniram Dewan (Assam, hanged 1858).

Rohilkhand & Bareilly

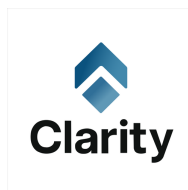
Bakht Khan goes to Delhi as military commander. Khan Bahadur Khan leads Bareilly region. Active 1857–58 until British crush rebel control.

Tatya Tope’s Persistence

Escapes Kanpur, attacks it again 19 Nov 1857. Secured by British 6 Dec. Tatya Tope keeps moving, collecting fighters, keeping rebellion alive across regions.

Key Pattern

Revolt spread like wildfire across North India but lacked unified command everywhere. British used Allahabad as base, recaptured centres one by one with superior organisation.



The Core Takeaway

The revolt spread from Meerut and Delhi to Kanpur, Lucknow, Bihar, Awadh, Haryana, Central India, Assam, and Rohilkhand. Every centre had its own leader and its own grievance.

But the pattern repeated everywhere: **fire without coordination**. The British used Allahabad as their base and recaptured centres one by one — superior organisation defeating dispersed courage. Kanpur fell fast, Lucknow resisted longest, and regional leaders fought bravely but alone.

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NEXT IN THIS SERIES

Episode 6: Rani Lakshmibai, Jhansi & the Final Phase of the Revolt

How the revolt reached Central India, the role of Rani Lakshmibai, and how the British finally suppressed it.