

AZIZUN OF LUCKNOW

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EUROPEAN EMPIRES OF THE LONG NINETEENTH CENTURY JUSTIFIED COLONIAL RULE BY CLAIMING A "CIVILIZING" MISSION. THIS OFTEN INCLUDED TRYING TO GET WOMEN TO BEHAVE IN WAYS THAT EUROPEAN RULERS THOUGHT WERE CORRECT. AS THE BIOGRAPHY OF AZIZUN DEMONSTRATES, MANY WOMEN IN THE COLONIES DID NOT NEED OR WANT TO BE "CIVILIZED", AND AS A RESULT THEY OFTEN PLAYED AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN RESISTANCE.

LUCKNOW - CAPITAL OF THE KINGDOM OF AWADH, A WEALTHY PRINCIPALITY OF THE MUGHAL EMPIRE, 1856, NEIGHBORING TERRITORY OF THE BRITISH EAST INDIA COMPANY.

AMONG ITS CITIZENS WERE THE TAWA'IFS, POWERFUL WOMEN WHO PROVIDED COMPANIONSHIP AND HOSPITALITY TO ELITE MEN. AMONG THEM WERE A VERY FEW WHOSE SKILL AS MANAGERS AND ENTERTAINERS MADE THEM WEALTHY AND FAMOUS.

THE MOST CELEBRATED OF THESE WAS AZIZUN, A TAWA'IF WHO WAS AMONG THE WEALTHIEST PEOPLE OF LUCKNOW.

IN 1856, THE BEIC ANNEXED AWADH, OCCUPYING LUCKNOW. THEY BELIEVED THE TAWA'IFS WERE PROSTITUTES, AND SOUGHT TO ELIMINATE THEM.

AZIZUN QUICKLY BECAME AN OPPONENT OF BRITISH RULE. WHEN A REBELLION BROKE OUT IN 1857, SHE USED HER POSITION TO DISCOVER THEIR MILITARY POSITIONS AND STRATEGY, AND OPENED HER HOME TO REBELS AS A MEETING PLACE.

SHE ALSO RECRUITED OTHER WOMEN TO SUPPORT THE REBELS, AND SERVE AS NURSES. FINALLY, AZIZUN DRESSED AS A MAN, AND ACTUALLY PARTICIPATED IN BATTLE HERSELF.

LIKE OTHER WOMEN, AZIZUN SAW COLONIALISM AS A THREAT TO HER WAY OF LIFE. SHE DIDN'T NEED TO BE "CIVILIZED", AND INSTEAD ACTIVELY FOUGHT IN THE GREAT REBELLION AGAINST BRITISH RULE.