

Emergence of Indian Nationalism in Haryana (1900-1919)

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Abstract

Haryana was formed in 1966, it was earlier a part of Punjab and therefore there is a lot of mention of Punjab in the Indian freedom struggle but little is known of Haryana's contribution in terms of people's sacrifice and the places where significant events took place. People of Haryana participated in all freedom struggles viz., the revolt of 1857, Non-Cooperation Movement, Civil Disobedience Movement and Quit India Movement. Though the British Government took every measure to keep aloof people of Haryana from the freedom struggle but people of Haryana participated in the struggle with full spirit. There were many social and political leaders who lead the people in the freedom struggle. They did not leave any stone unturned when it came to get the freedom of the country. In this paper, an attempt has been made to analyse the main reasons behind the emergence of nationalism or political awakening in the people of Haryana and their participation in the Indian freedom struggle.

I

The first bugle of the 'great uprising' of 1857 was blared at Ambala on 10th May 1857, about nine hours before the outbreak at Meerut took place. It was here that the soldiers of the Native Infantry started the revolt. The incident quickly spread to all parts of Haryana which soon came to be known as the **1st Battle for Independence**. This uprising was not only confined to Ambala alone but was quite widespread. On 25 May 1857, both the sepoys and the civil population of Kurki rose in revolt. Meanwhile, the local people of **Hissar**, **Hansi** and **Sirsa** were up in revolt under the leadership of Lala Hukam Chand Jain, his nephew Faqir Chand Jain, Meena Beg, Mohammed Azim and Nur Muhammad. On 29 May, 1857, they killed 12 Europeans including the Deputy Commissioner of Hissar, **John Wedderburn**. Such was the resentment against the British Raj. Like other parts of Haryana, Rohtak also saw a violent uprising with all symbols of British Raj being attacked and destroyed. One **Bisarat Ali** of **Kharkhauda**, who was a Risaldar in the British Army, took charge of the revolt, along with Sabar Khan, a local peasant leader. The local people all came together and began attacking British property and residents. They soon attacked Rohtak. The Deputy Commissioner of Rohtak District, **William Loch** had to leave Rohtak but the Tehsildar, Bakhtawar Singh and Thanedar, Bhure Khan were killed. Finally, on 15 August 1857, Lt. W.S.R. Hodson supported by Major General Wilson arrived with reinforcements and superior arms and took on the locals who had revolted in **Kharkhauda**. Despite offering stiff resistance, the revolutionaries ultimately were defeated and Bisarat Ali was killed in the struggle. They then proceeded to **Rohtak District** to take on **Sabar Khan**, who was leading the revolt there. Sabar Khan along with the local peasants of Rohtak fought back with limited

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resources they had but ultimately Rohtak fell. However, by 16 November the same year, the revolt came to an end and the British consolidated their hold. Thus, almost all the parts of Haryana had come within the fold of the uprising viz., Gurgaon, Roorki, **Kharkhauda**, Rohtak, Hissar, Jhajjar, Ballabhgarh, Pataudi, Bahadurgarh, Dojana and Loharu. It is important to note, that the people of Haryana whether ordinary peasants, local soldiers and local leaders all participated in this uprising.

However, after the uprising, people of Haryana had to bear the brunt of their participation in the uprising. British Government punished them in many ways. British Government, as punishment, totally ignored the people of Haryana. They were not given educational facilities. It is very surprising that there was not even a single college in the region until 1928, and there were hardly any high schools worth the name. The people were exclusively farmers, but received nothing as agricultural assistance. The doors of government services were almost closed to them. Means of communication were neglected. Thus, the British Government took every step to keep aloof people of Haryana from the Independence struggle.

As resulted, in the first decade of 19th century, Haryana was by far a very backward region. The people were not economically well off. Its 64 percent population was dependant on agriculture directly or indirectly for their subsistence. There were no perennial rivers, no adequate canal system and therefore condition of agriculture was not satisfactory. The position of industries was also dismal. The people were mostly uneducated. The press was yet to be developed. In the early twenties, the region had only a few newspapers. Most of them were Urdu and Hindi weeklies and monthlies of which an Urdu religious called *Sadiq-ul Akbar* from Rewari, an astrology paper named *Jyotish Martand* from Gurgaon and caste based *Ahir Patrika* from Rewari, *Jat Gazettee* and *Jat Sepoy* from Rohtak, *Thakur Patrika* from Hissar and *Brahmin Samachar* from Jagadhari had respectable circulation. The *Cantonment Advocate* from Ambala gave a general review of difficulties of the people of Ambala.

Thus, there was no newspaper or journal with political background. A powerful instrument which moulds public opinion was conspicuous by its absence. However, this does not mean that there were no political discussions in Haryana at that time. The educated people, especially in the cities (one percent of the total population of the state) used to subscribe to such papers as *Hindustan*, *Sudarshan*, *Koh-i-noor*, *Bharat Mitra*, *Shri Venkateshwar Samachar*, *Abhuday* and *Chunar* and they were aware of the political development in the country.

II

It is noteworthy that the oppressive policies and negligence of the British Government could not break the spirit of the people of Haryana. Facing all the difficulties, they participated in the national movement. Local leaders played important role in the social and political awakening of the people of Haryana. They did not leave any stone unturned when it came to get the freedom of the country. Most of the leaders of Haryana were ardent followers of Arya Samaj. Some of these leaders were inclined towards Congress. Among them some are following:

If we carefully study these thirty five leaders, among them twenty six belonged to the urban areas and nine to the villages. With the exception of two, all the other thirty three leaders came from the

	Name	Caste	Rural or Urban	Influenced by	Profession
1	Murli Dhar (1870-1928)	Bania	Ambala (U)	Arya Samaj	Legal Practice
2	Duni Chand (1872-1962)	Khatri	Manakpur (R)	Arya Samaj	Legal Practice
3	Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan (1889-1976)	Muslim Rajput	Laha (R)	-----	Politics
4	Abdul Rashid (1897-1946)	Muslim Rajput	Ambala (U)	-----	Legal Practice
5	Sadhu Ram (1898-)	Saini	Kandiyai (R)	Arya Samaj	Business
6	Kaka Ram (1897-)	Bania	Kaithal (U)	Arya Samaj	Business
7	Khem Chand (1897-1939)	Bania	Karnal (U)	Arya Samaj	Business
8	Ram Gopal (1898-1938)	Bania	Panipat (U)	Arya Samaj	Business
9	Shadi Ram (1899-1945)	Bania	Panipat (U)	Arya Samaj	Business
10	Shadi Lal (1897-1935)	Bania	Gurgoan (U)	Arya Samaj	Business
11	Chander Sain (1898-1942)	Brahman	Tamal (R)	Congress	Panditai
12	Parshadi Lal (1899-1943)	Brahman	Hodel (U)	Congress	Panditai
13	Sagar Chand (1899-1932)	Bania	Gurgoan (U)	Arya Samaj	Legal Practice
14	Matu Ram (1872-1942)	Jat	Sanghi (R)	Arya Samaj	Agriculture
15	Chhotu Ram (1882-1945)	Jat	Garhi Sampla (R)	Arya Samaj	Legal Practice,
16	Sham Lal (1883-1940)	Bania	Rohtak (U)	Arya Samaj	Journalism Legal Practice,
17	Daulat Ram Gupta (1895-)	Bania	Rohtak (U)	Arya Samaj	Business Business

18	Asha Ram Gupta (1892-)	Bania	Rohtak (U)	Arya Samaj	Business
19	Kanchya Singh (1889-)	Jat	Butana (R)	Arya Samaj	Agriculture
20	Tek Ram (1896- 1930)	Jat	Khidwari (R)	Arya Samaj	Agriculture
21	Kanshi Ram (1897- 1941)	Bania	Sonepat (R)	-----	Business
22	Piru Singh (1897- 1931)	Jat	Sanghu	Arya Samaj	Agriculture
23	Maulvi Abdul Aziz (1895-1939)	Muslim Rajput	Gohana (C)	Congress	Utensil making
24	K.A. Desai (1871- 1972)	Brahman	Navasari (U)	-----	Politics, Journalism
25	Noon Karan Shorewala (1885- 1925)	Bania	Bhiwani (U)	-----	Business
26	Neki Ram Sharma (1887-1953)	Brahman	Kelanga (R)	Sanatan Dharm Sabha	Politics
27	Kirpa Ram (1891-)	Bania	Sahdwa (R)	-----	Agriculture
28	Ram Chandra Baid (1891-1967)	Bania	Bhiwani (U)	-----	Business
29	Sham Lal (1892- 1942)	Bania	Sirsa (U)	-----	Legal Practice
30	Bukshi Ram Kishan (1893-)	Khatra	Gurranwala (U)	Arya Samaj	Legal Practice
31	Mela Ram Mota (1893-1927)	Bania	Bhiwani (U)	-----	Business
32	Banarsi Dass Baid (1896-1960)	Bania	Bhiwani (U)	-----	Business
33	Ram Kumar Bidhar (1891-)	Brahman	Bhiwani (U)	-----	Politics
34	Gokal Chand Arya (1898-1952)	Brahman	Bhiwani (U)	Sanatan Dharm Sabha	Business
35	Manohar Lal Sahdev (1899 1970)	Bania	Bhiwani (U)	-----	Medical Practice

middle classes and were either lawyers (seven) or businessmen (twenty eight). They were mostly Hindus (31), influenced by the Arya Samaj and the Sanatan Dharam Sabha. These leaders belonged to different caste groups viz., Banias (17), Brahmans (7), Jats (6), Rajput and others five.

After analyzing the composition these leaders, a prominent question may be put here that why the urban middle class Banias and Brahmans were in majority in the congress. There were many reasons for this. First was the political consciousness among them. Second, in the undivided Punjab, the British Government introduced various acts such as the Land Alienation Act 1900. The object of the Alienation Act 1900 was to place restriction on the transfer of land in the Punjab with a view to checking its alienation from the agricultural to the non-agricultural classes (the money lenders, shopkeepers and professionals) most of whom belonged to the Hindu community. This act angered the Banias against the government. The legislation actually aimed at protecting the *zamindars* that constituted the section of the community loyal to British Government against the Hindu money lenders. The government also design this act with the object of ending the possibility of any agitation among the rural people and it was claimed that with this act the poor peasants would be helped against their economic exploitation, famine and epidemics.

Besides this, several others exploited legislative measures such as the Punjab Limitation Act 1904, the Transfer of Property Act 1904 and the Punjab Pre-Emption Act 1905 were passed to make the position of the peasants as strong against the money lenders. The Punjab Pre-Emption Act 1905 provided against the system that village had first claim on the land sold by a villager. The court of Wards Act of 1905 gave the local government the right to place insolvent aristocratic families under an official court of wards without the prior consent of the family. The Punjab Land Alienation Act Amendment Bill passed in 1906, further strengthened alienation restrictions. The main aim and object of this measure was to strengthen the position of District Officers. They were authorized to disallow gifts of land for religious purpose if there seemed some doubt, and statutory agriculturists were excluded from acquiring land.

These acts saved the peasants to some extent but as far as the physical possession of land was concerned, they did not check the real problem of rural indebtedness. The net effect of the act was that instead of providing relief, the act increased the hardships and sufferings of the rural people. Ordinarily, the money-lenders used to advance his money as loan to the peasants against his land during need, but since now that land could not be mortgaged, process of obtaining money became very difficult. It added to the woes and suffering of the peasantry. Second, it encouraged the emergence of agriculturist money lenders who steadily replaced the traditional *sahukaars*. The Banias were also unhappy over the Excess Tax Bill. The Bill was meant to enable the government to tax away all profits and to seize goods in payment. A Super Tax had also come into effect on 1 April 1917 with an intention of putting an extra burden on large incomes. The Banias were affected by the new Income Tax and the more searching methods of enquiry.

Dissatisfied with the above measures, the rural as well as the urban Hindu middle class, Banias fermented anti-British feeling and joined the Congress. Since the Banias were, by and large, Congress sympathisers, their traditional enemies, the rural peasantry, of which the Jats formed the bulk, remained aloof from the Congress. Similarly, the Brahman stood apart from the Jats, who under the influence of the Arya Samaj were active against the orthodoxy represented by the Brahmans. The Arya Samajists called them 'popes' and hurled insults on them. This annoyed the orthodox section of the Brahmans. There is another factor which played an important part in the discontentment of the

Brahmans. The Patel Marriage Bill, which the Sanatani (orthodox) Brahmans looked upon as inimical to their religion, antagonized the Brahmans. Thus, having hostile attitude towards the Jats and the government, they went into the fold of Congress. Neki Ram Sharma, Dindayal Vakhyanavachaspati and Thakur Das Bhargawa and hundreds of their followers are the examples of this type.

III

Another cause for the dissatisfaction of the people of Haryana was the First World War (1914-18). With the beginning of **World War 1**, the British turned to the local Indians for support. And India, responded by offering its sons for battle on behalf of the British Empire. **Haryana** was again at the forefront contributing **84,001 soldiers** that were recruited from four recruitment centres in **Delhi, Jhajjar, Rewari** and **Bhiwani** between January 1915 and November 1918. The Congress offered support for the British with the hope that the British would respond by rewarding a Dominion Status to India.

In this war, the British were greatly helped by the peasants and the upper middle class of landlord. During this war, people of Haryana helped the British in their efforts in two ways, first by providing recruits and secondly by contributing money towards the war fund. The peasant's communities or the so called martial races viz., Jats, Ahirs, Gujars, Rajputs and Rors helped the British in the first way by joining the army in large numbers. They thought that after the war, government would reward them. Roughly speaking, Haryana provided a little less than half of the total recruitment from Punjab. Similarly, in contribution of money, the businessmen, contractors and landlords played their part significantly. They made substantial contribution to the war loans.

For example, during the First World War, Jind state sent a force of 8,673 men which presented 19% of the eligible males in state. On the outbreak of the war, ruler of Jind Maharaja Raghubir Singh offered the personal services of all his troops and those of 4 companies of the Imperial Service Infantry which were gladly accepted. Jind state also supplied 305 camel men and muleteers at a very short notice. It also supplied 2 machine gun, 200 camel packs worth Rs. 1,029 to the army. Six tents of about Rs. 2,600 were supplied for use as hospital in France. Field service kit and extra clothing of Rs. 1,60,850 was provided to imperial service troops. Thus, in the war, the Jind state rendered a great financial assistance. It gave Rs. 20,13,410 in gifts and invested Rs. 8,50,000 in war loans. The total number of casualties suffered by the Jind state was 172 which were high percentage of 3.5 of the men enrolled.

Thus, people of Haryana helped British in the World War I with every possible way. But what did the government do for them after the war. The peasants who had made the real contribution by giving their blood to win the war suffered a good deal after the war. Nearly 15,500 of them were thrown out of service in the wake of 'demobilisation'. They were not provided with any re-employment or any other means of subsistence. Secondly, after the war, the rising prices of the goods hit them very hard. This was not the end, and then came natural calamities of floods and epidemics like plague and influenza. Epidemics were more destructive in Gurgaon and Rohtak districts. In the cities, the relief work was organised but the villages were totally neglected.

Thus, the rural people who helped the British government in the war were totally neglected after the war. They did not receive any relief from the British Government. On the other hand, the princess, landlords and businessmen were looked after well in one way or the other by the government after the war. They were given *inams*, *jagirs*, *khillats* and titles for their services. For example, Maharaja Raghubir Singh of Jind was granted the rank of Lieutenant Colonel and hereditary title of

Rajandra Bahadur was conferred upon him. His permanent salute was increased to 15 guns. Jind won 47 medals including 1 Military Cross.

Instead, in 1918 the British came out with the **Rowlatt Bill** and the **Montagu-Chelmsford Reform Bills** that went against Indians and was opposed all over India. From 6-10 April 1918, there were *hartals* in towns like **Gurgaon, Ballabhgarh, Jhajjar, Rohtak, Sonapat, Rewari, Panipat, Ambala** and **Jagadhari**. But it was the **Jallianwala Bagh Massacre**, in Amritsar on 13th April, 1919, where hundreds of innocent, unarmed and completely non-violent protesters were massacred under the orders of **Brigadier General R.E.H. Dyer** that shook the nation and thus laid the foundation for the call for complete Azadi. **Haryana in the forefront of protest** by now, the **Non-Cooperation Movement** was gaining ground with more people joining in the call for independence. Several young citizens from Haryana who were studying in places like Delhi and Lahore gave up their education to jump into the freedom movement. Amongst the many names who joined the movement were **Deshbandhu Gupta (Panipat), Lala Janki Dass, Pandit Ram Phool Singh (Rohtak), Lala Ajudhya Prasad (Dadri), Chandrasen Vashisth (Gurgaon)** were amongst the long list of patriots.

Besides these sections, women of Haryana also played an important role in the Indian freedom struggle and we cannot ignore their contribution. The women workers of the Arya Samaj were also responsible for arousing national spirit among the people. A women branch of Arya Samaj of Hissar made efforts to employ women preachers to travel into the villages and make efforts for the change of the rural Jat women. The Superintendent of the Police reported that the women's branch at Hissar maintained secrecy regarding its intentions.

In retrospect, we can observe that the various oppressive policies and legislation of the British government made the life of the rural people miserable. Besides, during natural calamities British government did nothing to improve the condition of the people. The Brahmins and Banias were already annoyed with the government and some of them had already joined the congress movement. Now the peasants also became dissatisfied. Almost all the classes of Haryana were dissatisfied towards the British government. This made them to think that British government was a dishonest and selfish government. Local leaders also played important role in arousing national spirit among the people of Haryana. These reasons awakened the political consciousness among the people of Haryana. Thus, People from all sections of Haryana joined hands and participated in the Indian freedom struggle.

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