Freedom Struggle in Ambala (1929-1938)

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Abstract

Freedom Movement has very significant place in Indian history. The people of India participated in it bravely in order to get India free from the clutches of British Government. The people of Ambala have played a vital role in the Freedom Movement. Throughout the period of India’s struggle for freedom, the people of Ambala made its considerable share with men, material and money in supporting the Gandhian Movements, the Hyderabad Satyagraha and the Indian National Army. Ambala is one of the leading districts of Haryana and its contribution to the National Movement in Haryana cannot be ignored. Next to Hissar, Rohtak, Ambala was perhaps one of the most active participants in the Freedom Movement. The first bugle of the great uprising of 1857 was blared at Ambala on 10th May 1857. It is very significant and meaningful for the historians to know the contribution made by the people of Haryana especially the people of Ambala who took active part in the Freedom Struggle. The objective of this study is to throw light on the role of the people of Ambala so that everyone can know easily the contribution of these people in the Freedom Struggle.

Key Words: Freedom Struggle, Indian History, Ambala, Freedom Movement

1 Introduction

Ambala has been an important place in North India for the last many years. Ambala is one of the leading districts of Haryana and its contribution to the National Movement in Haryana cannot be ignored. Next to Hissar, Rohtak, Ambala was perhaps one of the most active participants in the Freedom Movement. With the spread of the western education, urbanization and techno-economic changes, the people especially the town-dwelling middle classes were influenced. Ambala has plenty of historical sources of ancient and medieval period which throws light on all the aspects of the history of Ambala. As far as British period is concerned, the maximum parts of Haryana came under British rule in 1805-06. Britishers established their cantonment at Ambala in 1843-44, so that they can closely watch the entire activities of Sikhs in Punjab.

Though Punjab came under the British rule in 1849 but, the importance of Ambala increased day by day for the Britishers. There were two basic reasons for its importance. Firstly, Shimla was declared as a summer capital of India by Lord Dalhousie and Ambala was the one of the most important town between Delhi and Shimla, so it was converted as a transit camp for the British officers who used to travel from Kolkata-Delhi to Shimla and secondly, it was a strong military base by the Britishers. The first bugle of the great uprising of 1857 was blared at Ambala on 10th May 1857, about 9 hours before the outbreak at Meerut took place. So, Ambala played a significant role in the uprising of 1857. Ambala was a military depot of great importance then. A large number of
European and Indian troops were stationed here. In 1857, as elsewhere, the entire Indian troops stationed here were vaguely disaffected towards the Britishers. On 10\textsuperscript{th} May 1857, an Indian regiment, 60\textsuperscript{th} Native Infantry rose in open revolt at Ambala. The sepoys left their barracks, seized arms from the regiment store and arrested their European officers. But within no time, they found themselves surrounded by a large number of European forces. Both the forces stood still for a while and the Britishers had no alternative but to agree to the sepoys.

For a long time after this uprising, the people of Ambala kept on suffering for their opposition and indifference towards the British in the crisis. As a result, the people became backward. But soon the powerful winds of change began to blow in the country with full force in the last quarter of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century and the first quarter of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century. As a result the people of Ambala were influenced and became politically awakened and enlightened. They started having organizations of their own, first at local and then at national level. Arya Samaj, Anjuman-Rifah-I-Ambala City, Sanatan Dharma Sabha, Anjuman-I-Islamiya Ambala City, and Singh Sabha etc. were established in Ambala. The people of Ambala took active part in their activities and their principles affected a lot the notions of the people of all the socio-religious reform movements of the period.

2 Objectives of the study

The main objectives of the study are:

1. To identify the people Ambala who took active part in the Freedom Struggle.
2. To throw light on the role of the people of Ambala so that, everyone can know easily the contribution of these people in the Freedom Struggle.

3 Methodology

Data has been collected from various sources. It has been collected from textbooks, periodicals, newspapers, research journals, District Gazettes, the educational reports, Reviews, Encyclopedias, Dictionaries and printed books. NCERT Library (New Delhi), Central State Library (Ambala Cantt.), Library of Kurukshetra University, Kurukshetra, M.D. University, Rohtak, Panjab University, Chandigarh as well as the State Archives of Haryana at Ambala City and Panchkula have been consulted.

4 Research Findings

4.1 Puran Swaraj

The year 1929 had opened on a very disturbing note. The death of Lala Lajpat Rai about this very time worsened the situation still further. With the sporadic revolutionary activities, the year 1929 witnessed the year with political and industrial unrest, the economic depression and discontent. The year also witnessed with hectic activities of the Congress in Haryana. On 8-9\textsuperscript{th} March 1929, Punjab Provincial Political Conference was held at Rohtak\textsuperscript{1}. This meeting was attended by Motilal Nehru and Jawahararl Nehru. Several important resolutions were passed in this conference. New Congress Committees were formed at Ambala, Rohtak, Hisar and Karnal\textsuperscript{2}. With the new energies inculcated by establishing the Congress Committees, the Congress session was held in 1929 at Lahore. In this session, for the first time the resolution of the declaration of ‘Puran Swaraj’ (complete independence)
was passed. It was pledged to carryout the Congress instructions issued from time to time for the purpose of establishing ‘Puran Swaraj’. In this session, the Congressmen were urged to resign their seats in the Supreme and Provincial Legislature and not to stand for future elections. It was also resolved not to participate in the coming Round Table Conference.

After the midnight of 31st December 1929, Jawaharlal Nehru, the idol of young India and the President of the Indian National Congress, hoisted the flag of Independence before a mammoth gathering in the city of Lahore, the heartland of the Punjab and thus, heralded a new phase of the Freedom Struggle. ‘Complete Independence’ and not more ‘Domination Status’ became the slogan of the National Movement. A clarion call was given to the country to fight for this. But what was the programme of the future action? The people did not knew yet, “the wheels had been set moving but we were to begin”, wrote Jawaharlal Nehru.

The All India Congress Committee had been authorized by the Lahore Congress of December 1929 to chalk out a plan of action but everybody knew that the real decision lay with Mahatma Gandhi. All eyes were turned towards him and the working committee. The working committee of Congress met on January 2, 1930 and fixed January 26, 1930 as a day for the countrywide demonstration in support of its demand for Complete Independence. On this Day, determination of ‘Puran Swaraj’ was made. Resolutions were passed and the pledges were taken all over the country.

In Haryana, public meetings were held. Resolutions for the celebration of complete independence were passed. The people of Ambala did not remain in back. Consequently, Independence Day was celebrated in almost all the cities, towns and big villages of Ambala Division.

4.2 Civil Disobedience Movement

On 14-16th February 1930, the Congress Working Committee passed the Civil Disobedience Resolution at Sabarmati and Gandhi was given the right to guide the movement. On 6th April, a countrywide Civil Disobedience Movement was started. On 2nd March, Gandhi warned the Viceroy about the launching of the ‘Satyagraha’. On 2nd March 1930 Gandhi undertook the historical Dandi March with 78 Satyagrahis hailing from various regions including Haryana. The All India Working Committee of Congress laid stress on the desirability of Civil Disobedience in its initial stages taking the form of violation of the salt laws. Prominent leaders Gopi Chand Bhargava, Neki Ram Sharma, Suraj Bhan, Abdul Ghaffar Khan etc. toured the whole of the State to make the campaign success. At Ambala, the salt laws were violated under the leadership of Abdul Ghaffar Khan and Bhagat Ram. At Ambala City, Abdul Ghaffar Khan organized a big procession on 6th April 1930, the day of declaration of Civil Disobedience Movement. It passed through the main streets of town with national
flags. A public meeting was held and addressed by Abdul Ghaffar Khan. While addressing the meeting, he pointed out the desirability and the necessity of the Muslims’ participation in the freedom movement. On 26th April 1930, another procession was led by Abdul Ghaffar Khan through the main bazaars of Ambala City. A large number of ladies singing the National Song also accompanied the procession. The procession terminated at local Anaj Mandi where the salt law was broken by preparing contra-brand salt. At Anaj Mandi, a public meeting was held under the chairmanship of Abdul Ghaffar Khan where the contra-brand salt was auctioned and it fetched Rs.80. Here the process of breaking salt law went on for three days. Lala Duni Chand Ambalvi also toured several places of Ambala district asking the people to violate salt laws.

The salt laws were torn into a hundred pieces at Ambala. Astoundingly, the activists who did it were women. A successful procession was held at the roads of Jagadhri. At many places in Ambala District, salt was made. Among those places, Ambala and Jagadhri was the important. A procession was led by Ms. Vidyawati, a daughter of Lala Duni Chand Ambalavi and made salt by her at Anajmandi. In addition, Ms. Jamna Devi and Mahadevi also worked with the other leaders for the success of the movement.

Meanwhile, Swadeshi was also adopted as an important programme. The illiterate persons were also motivated by Swadeshi. For example, a tailor of Jagadhri denied stitching the foreign clothes. Similarly, businessmen at Ambala were also pledged not to sell foreign clothes. At Ambala about 5,000 persons promised to wear Khaddar. The boycott of foreign goods was also a part of the Civil Obedience Movement. 17th March was fixed as foreign cloth boycott day. But, before the boycott work was actually taken in hand, the propaganda work was started. Leaders like Madan Malaviya, Gopi Chand Bhargawa, Neki Ram Sharma, Abdul Ghaffar Khan and Suraj Bhan toured the districts of the Ambala Division and exhorted the people to boycott foreign goods. After that, a lot of propaganda was made by the Congress leaders and Congress volunteers in this region. On 10th April, a meeting was held at Rohtak Mandi in which Suraj Bhan made a speech regarding the boycott of foreign goods.

In Ambala, Duni Chand and Abdul Ghaffar preached all this. On 26th April, Abdul Ghaffar led a procession asking the people to boycott ‘Badeshi’ and in May 1930 also, he visited Ropar and Kharar tehsils urging the people to boycott it. Even ladies also took a procession and hold a meeting at Ambala Mandi on 24th June 1930 at which resolution was passed to boycott foreign clothes. On August 1, a bonfire of foreign cloth was made at Ambala district and meeting attended by about 4,500 persons was held. The people took a solemn pledge to wear Khaddar only. At village Ladwa (now in Kurukshetra district), a meeting was held on August, 4 and there also, a Congressman Dalip Chand made propaganda against the use of foreign clothes. Some women started picketing at temples and allowed entry to only those persons who were in Khaddar. Prominent leaders such as Lala Duni Chand Ambalvi, his wife Ms. Kamla Devi, Lala Suraj Bhan, Sardar Kapoor Singh, and Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan visited at various places of Ambala District. All the categories of persons were participating and the students also did a great job. The students of D.A.V. School, Shahabad made salt in the premises of the school and broke the salt law. Then, the people of Shahabad organized a procession led by Mr. Rajender Singh who was a son of a police officer (S.H.O.), Sh.Bichatar Singh whose duty was to stop such unlawful activities. The father snatched the tricolour from his hands but, he could not close his mouth. He continued to shout indefinitely: ‘Inquilab Zindabad’, ‘Angrezi
Sarkar Hai Hai’, ‘Gandhi Maharaj Ki Jai’ etc. These students also went to the nearby villages and gave the message of ‘revolt’ to the farmers there.

Some futile efforts were made for boycotting the educational institutions. The progress of the movement was marked by a rapid decline in attendance at schools. The students resorted to strikes and committed some acts of indiscipline\(^2\). On March, a number of students of Arya Samaj High School assembled in the courtyard of Arya Girls School, Shahabad under the leadership of Shri Phagu, a shopkeeper of Shahabad and made a procession with a Congress flag through the streets of Shahabad shouting out “Inquilab Zindabad and Malkiat Barbad”\(^22\). Thakar Datta, headmaster, Arya Samaj D.A.V. High School, Shahabad, was also carried out anti-government agitation through Aziz Ahmed Sheikh of Shahabad, a patwari near Thanesar\(^23\). Patwari Aziz Ahmed used to come in the Muhallas of hohars and Sheikhs in Shahabad and tried to persuade them to engage in Civil Obedience\(^24\).

The Zaildar of Thol, Choudhary Pritam Singh described that on 24\(^{th}\) May 1930, some 30-40 students, mostly about 15 years old, visited Nishamgarh village. They had the tricolour in their hands. They incited the farmers not to pay land revenue and join the Civil Disobedience Movement. After doing their work there, they went to village Kewari. There too they did the same thing. Thereafter, they visited several villages and gave the message of Civil Disobedience Movement. On August 4, a complete hartal was observed in Ladwa and Dilip Chand, Anukar Prasad and Prem Chand with 25-30 students of local District Board School took out a flag procession and paraded the town with anti-government shouts. Dilip Chand Bajaj with the assistance of some students of the school actively picketed the school and prevented the students from entering it. In 1930, the picketing of polling booth for the election of the Assembly and Council was attempted. At Ambala district, some shopkeepers abstained from voting and the attempt to picket at two polling stations resulted in the arrest of the picketers. Thus, the boycott of picketing in these fields was also made.

A significant feature of the Civil Disobedience Movement was against the high rent. A campaign against the payment of tax was launched. The Kisan Sabha advised its members to refuse to do beggar without any payment or sell their production without getting the market price\(^25\). A lot of propaganda for this campaign was done by the Congress volunteers in other districts of Ambala Division also. Vidya Dhar president, Congress Committee, Karnal propagated against the payment of land revenue and he asked the Zamindars to stop paying land revenue to that Government which was already robbing Indians of its wealth and money\(^26\). On 26\(^{th}\) August 1930 Nauratta Ram of district Karnal delivered a speech recommended non-payment of taxes\(^27\). Sadhu Ram also advised the same\(^28\).

The Government was alarmed by these activities and it took strong measures to arrest the people. To begin with, the Congress was declared an unlawful organization. A large number of Congressmen were imprisoned in Haryana as shown in Table I:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>No. of Satyagrahis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ambala</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karnal</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gurgaon</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hissar</td>
<td>380</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
The Gandhi Irwin pact was made on 5th March, 1931 by which the eleven months old mass movement was suspended and the political prisoners who were not charged with violence were now released in Ambala. As a result, the Civil Disobedience Movement came to an end. The nationalists got a chance to rehabilitate themselves. But, this was not to be. Soon after the pact became a reality, the Government began breaking into pieces.

The Congress activities increased in rural areas and in almost every village where a meeting was held, a Congress Committee was formed. Meetings were also held at Ambala, Kalka, Jagadhri, Hisssar, Bhiwani and Budhlada and the speakers exhorted the people to continue the anti-government agitation without having for the consequences. On 6th March 1931, Sardar Khanwasi of Jagadhari warned to the shopkeepers to stop the sale of foreign clothes otherwise, dharna will be given at their shops. On 6th April 1931, Congressmen went to Bilaspur and the sale of foreign clothes was banned. Two businessmen Shri Atmaram and Shri Sumerchand were penalized with Rs.5 and Rs. 14.25 for selling foreign clothes against the order of Congress and recovered on the spot. Similarly, a businessman of Ambala breached the promised to boycott the foreign clothes and penalized with Rs. 51 for the breach.

Another method adopted by the Congress to make the people politically conscious against the British regime was picketing of liquor shops which were carried out by the Congress volunteers in large numbers. The real object of picketing was two fold, first to reduce the consumption of liquor and secondly, to curtail the excise revenue. At some places those persons who bought liquor were subjected to indignities of various kinds such as parade in public on donkey with blackened face and garlands of shoes.

In Ambala, a liquor shop at Babyal village near Ambala Cantt was picketed. On August 7, a procession was taken out in Ambala Cantt at about 10 p.m. to protest against the arrest of some persons who had picketed liquor shops. The processions lasted from about 10 p.m. till midnight and kept the night nacreous with revolutionary shouts. On August 8, a partial hartal followed the arrest of certain leaders for picketing the liquor shops. A demonstration was made by 40 women before the house of liquor contractor. He was socially boycotted. Even the sweeper did not go to render conservancy services in his house.

In Ambala, the execution of Bhagat Singh, Raj Guru and Sukhdev on 23rd March 1931 excited great resentment throughout the country. Gandhi was allowed to represent the Congress at the Second Round Table Conference. But, it also proved unsuccessful. Gandhiji resumed Civil Disobedience Movement. The people of Ambala and its surrounding area sent a memorandum to Lord...
Irwin requesting him to commute the capital punishment having been passed on the three revolutionaries.

The people of Haryana region launched frontal attack on the Government and spoke a language which the people had not heard before. On 31st May 1931, Lala Sham Lal roared at Ambala: ‘There is no place for an alien Government in India’. The Congress will not let it rule the country. The Government took strong measures to arrest the people and Congress was declared unlawful organization. As a result, the Civil Disobedience Movement was again started on 4th January, 1932. The Satyagraha was resumed as before. The people of Ambala took an active part in making the Civil Disobedience Movement a success. People of Ambala offered themselves for arrest.

Arya Nand Sharma, secretary of the District Congress Committee and City Congress Committee Ambala, toured a number of villages in the district and exhorted the people to do their duty towards their country with regard to be constructive programme of the Congress. Assessing the situation correctly, Gandhiji withdrew the Civil Disobedience Movement on 7th April 1934. As in other States, the Haryana Satyagrahis from this region were also released from jails. In 1935, Congress completed its 50 years. Like other parts of India, Ambala Division also celebrated Golden Jubilee of Congress. On 30th December 1935, the whole of the area celebrated the occasion with joy and illuminations. Congress workers hold meetings everywhere.

At the end of the year 1938 witnessed a severe famine due to complete failure of rains in different parts of Haryana. A large number of human beings and the cattle died of starvation. Many people took to dacoity and robbery. Nearly four out of six lakhs of cattle were either sold or perished. In the fall of 1938, S.C. Bose, the President of the Indian National Congress, visited Haryana to supervise relief work going on the region for the famine stricken people here under the auspices of the Indian National Congress. The Congress President also studied the problems of the party during his visit and advised the local leaderships to vitalize the party. He met several delegations and visited many villages and addressed a number of political meetings where he exhorted the people to fight for Swarajya and gave added strength to the party. It reorganized itself and spread a network of Congress Committees from district to village level. The Table II shows the Congress Committees in Haryana in 1938-39. Table II shows that during 1938-39, the Congress had 5 District branches, 20 tehsil branches and 205 town & village branches in Haryana. It shows that the people of Ambala actively participated in the freedom movement.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dist. Congress Committees</th>
<th>No. of Committees</th>
<th>Tehsil Congress Committees</th>
<th>No. of Committees</th>
<th>No. of towns &amp; village Congress Committees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ambala</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Ambala</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kharar</td>
<td></td>
<td>Kharar</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Jagadhari</td>
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<td>Jagadhari</td>
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<td>Naraingarh</td>
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<td>Naraingarh</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karnal</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Karnal</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panipat</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
4.3 The Hyderabad Satyagraha

Before we turn towards the subsequent events towards freedom, the important happenings cannot be ignored. The Hyderabad Satyagraha was one of them in which the people of Haryana participated enthusiastically. The Muslim community could not tolerate the dominating Hindu positions. Though the Hyderabad State was ruled by a Muslim called ‘Nizam’, its main population was Hindu. As per 1936 census, the Hindu constituted 87% of the population and the Muslims only 10%. Certain restrictions were imposed on the right of worship. Some fanatic Muslim officers planned to curb the Arya Samaj activities in the State. Consequently, the Arya Samaj was declared illegal and anti-government. The Arya Samajists were deprived of all types of religious facilities. They were debarred from preaching doctrine, constructing their temples and organizing their Samaj. Consequently, the Arya Samaj planned a ‘Satyagraha’ under the leadership of Mahatma Narayana Swami and Swami Swatanand. A Satyagraha Samiti was formed. On 30th January 1939, Satyagraha Samiti declared Satyagraha.

In this agitation, the people of Haryana took leading part under the leadership of Swami Swatanand, Mahatma Khushal Chand and Mahashya Krishan. The Satyagraha Samitis were formed in all the important towns and villages of Haryana. The people of Ambala division were not back in this regard. Jathas were sent from the Gurukuls of Gharunda, Matindu, Jhajjar, Kurukshetra and Gundpuri. Fakir Chand of Sherda (Ambala division) died in the jail due to the absence of medical help. Anyhow, the Hyderabad State was compelled to change its decision and gave the right of worship on 19th July, 1939 to all the Arya Samajs. On 17th August 1939, the Satyagraha was withdrawn.
5 Conclusion

Ambala played a significant role in the uprising of 1857. The people of Ambala took active part in their activities and their principles affected a lot the notions of the people of all the socio-religious reform movements of the period. Ambala has plenty of historical sources of ancient and medieval period which throws light on all the aspects of the history of Ambala. Throughout the period of India’s struggle for freedom, the people of Ambala made its considerable share with men, material and money in supporting the Gandhian Movements, the Hyderabad Satyagraha and the Indian National Army.

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