

Chapter 2

The First war of Independence and Haryana warriors

Around 9 hours before the outbreak of the uprising in Meerut began on May 10, 1857 the 60th Native Infantry openly revolted at Ambala (now in Haryana). As a man took weapons from the regimental area and detained their European superiors, the Sepoys broke from their positions. However, to their great astonishment, they were suddenly surrounded by significantly more European forces. The Sepoys were unable to carry out their strategy further in the light of the situation.

In his book ‘The Revolt of 1857 in Haryana’ Prof KC Yadav, former Reader, Department of History, BN Chakravarty University of Kurukshetra writes, “In north-western India the first military station to feel the contagion of the mutiny was Ambala. Besides being a large cantonment, this city was also one of the three Musketry Depots to which detachments from different regiments in the Panjab and the North-Western Provinces had been detailed for training in the use of the ‘notorious’ Enfield rifle.”¹

As Atul Yadav, Associate Professor of History, Government PG College, Ambala Cantt wrote in The Tribune on May 12, 2018, “On hearing the news of the happenings at Ambala, Meerut and Delhi, people of Haryana also rose up and opposed the British authorities. It was a good opportunity for them to take revenge from the British as well as moneylenders. Almost entire Haryana witnessed the revolt. Gurgaon, Rohtak, Hisar and Karnal districts and people living in the states of Jhajjar, Ballabgarh, Farrukhnagar, Pataudi, Bahadurgarh, Dujana and Loharu also joined the revolt by the end of May 1857 but Ambala district joined a bit later. The states of Jind, Kalsia and Buria and also 11 small ‘jagirs’, however, remained calm and unaffected throughout owing to strict measures taken by feudal chieftains.”²

Further writes Prof KC Yadav in his book The Revolt of 1857 in Haryana, “The actual uprisings of the sepoys at Ambala and Meerut on the same day on 10th May 1857 confirm that the plan had been worked out by the sepoy leaders in advance. This simultaneity was not a matter of chance or coincidence. Fearing a leakage, the plan was not shared by the leaders with all the sepoys: it was kept a closely guarded secret with a few top leaders.

¹ Forrest, Selections from the Letters, dispatched and other State papers, Vol. 1, page 3

² 1857 uprising sparked at Ambala, engulfed entire state, The Tribune, May 12, 2018

Ambala was the centre of 1857 First war of Independence

A study of the event at both Ambala and Meerut indicates that the sepoys' plan was to rise in revolt while the Europeans were attending the Sunday church services. They wanted to catch them unawares and unguarded. The uprising of the sepoys at Ambala in the morning and at Meerut in the evening is explained by this fact. The rest of the details of the revolt were to be worked out locally by the leaders in the two cantonments. The existence of a premeditated plan of rising at Meerut—the 20th Native Infantry and 11th Native Infantry would rise and the 3rd Light Cavalry would follow them after releasing their comrades from the jail, was confessed by a native officer of the 3rd Light Cavalry to Lt. Gough. The final part of the plan involved going to Delhi after completely destroying the Europeans at the two stations. The British were, however, too alert to be caught napping at Ambala, and the sepoys failed to translate their plans into action. But they succeeded at Meerut. Had the Ambala troops succeeded like those at Meerut, the British would have found their work of a century undone overnight.”³

The 1857 uprising was significantly influenced by the Ambala district. Then, Ambala served as a major military storage facility. At the end of April 1857, Sham Singh, a sepoy of the 5th Native infantry, who proved to be traitor, had informed Forsyth, the Deputy Commissioner of Ambala at the time that a general rising of the Sepoys would take place in the beginning of May 1857. On Sunday, May 10, 1857, around 9 a.m., an Indian regiment, the 60th Native Infantry, rose in open revolt at Ambala, followed by the 5th Native Infantry at midday. But to their great amazement, they discovered that more European forces were surrounding them. Sham Singh, the informer, who had given the tip-off to the British DC of Ambala and they ambushed the Indian soldiers, preventing them from carrying out their plans. Then, close to Kali Palton Pul, some 120 sepoys were hanged to death by an oak tree. The civilian population was similarly negatively impacted to the sepoys. Everyone among them did, in fact, stand against the British and play a key role in the struggle, irrespective of caste, creed, or religion.⁴

Flames of 1857 uprising spread over the districts of Haryana

The flames of uprising, from Delhi reached the Gurgaon district. When about 300 Sepoys marched from Delhi to Gurgaon, they received overwhelming support from the local populace. On May 12, 1857 W. Ford, Collector-Magistrate of Gurgaon, attempted but failed to control the "rebels" in the

³ KC Yadav, The Revolt of 1857 in Haryana Chapter III The Outburst, p. 51

⁴ Cave-Brown, The Punjab and Delhi in 1857. Vol. I, pp. 41-2.

nearby village of Bijwasan, now in South West Delhi district. When the 'rebels' stormed the district administration, the Collector- Magistrate again failed to stop them. The district's administrative centre was taken over by "rebels," who also looted the government's coffers and torched the homes of Europeans and those who supported them. The district jail was closed, and moneylenders' files and other documents were burnt.⁵

Led by Sadruddin, a farmer who belonged to village Pinangwan, the tough and dynamic Mewatis marched in considerable numbers through Mewat and formed a "*dhar*."⁶ In their route, the Meos plundered Tauru, Sohna, Ferozepur, Punhana, Pinangwan, and Nuh. Rawats Jats and Rajputs, who British colonial masters support were decisively beaten as the Meos got the support of Sarot Jats living in Hodal and Pathans of Seoli.⁷ Major W. Eden, the political representative of the Jaipur state, was attacked by a strong group of rebels commanded by Thakur Shiv Nath Singh, a former minister of Jaipur, who was forced to immediately leave Mewat and return to Jaipur.⁸

Rao Tula Ram and his cousin Rao Gopal Dev led the people of *Ahirwal*⁹ in a valiant uprising. The tehsildar and the thanedar were removed by the Raos, who went to the tehsil headquarters in Rewari with 400–500 followers. They took the possession of government buildings and seized funds from the treasury. In the engagement of Nasibpur, close to Narnaul, the British forces suffered significant losses, and Colonel Gerard was slain. Ahirs and Mewatis combined their forces. When Rao Tula Ram could only offer a meagre wage in places around Rewari, Mewatis who had enlisted as fighters—occasionally travelling from Dausa and Bharatpur (Rajasthan)—were content. . Small traders Harsukh Rai and Mirza Gafur Ali spearheaded the resistance against the British in Palwal. Dhanna Singh Rajput seized command in Faridabad. Farrukhnagar's populace was commanded by Nawab Ahmed Ali.

Under the direction of Kharkhoda farmer leaders Bisarati Ali and Babar Khan, the Ranghars of Rohtak rose up and eliminated any reminders of British authority from their region. Tafazzal Hussain from Delhi assisted them. Not only did they burn records and pillage affluent people, but they also destroyed government papers, records, and documents. They also set fire to the Judges

⁵Montgomery, Vol. II, p. 514; Kaye and Mallison, A History of the Sepoy War in India, Vol. VI, p. 139.

⁶Jwala Sahai, Sketches of Mutiny (Gurgaon District), p. 7

⁷The compiler of the DG Gurgaon (pp. 24.25) has tried his best to twist the facts to show rebels' risings were acts of looting and plundering. But he fails to hide the truth completely

⁸Jwala Sahai described it thus: "(Major Eden's) artillery opened fires in different quarters, burnt villages and destroyed a number of the Meos."

⁹Ahirwal literally means the 'Abode of the Ahirs', an agricultural caste which is found in great majority in this region. Its headquarters, for socio-cultural purpose is Rewari.

Court, government buildings, and offices. To release detainees, they broke into the local jail forcibly. Tafazzal Hussain stormed the town of Sampla and set fire to every residence owned by a European. Additionally, the Customs bungalows at Meham, Madina, and Mandothi were set on fire, and funds from the district treasury were taken¹⁰.

Led by Muhammed Azim in Hissar and Hukam Chand, a middle-aged Jain trader, his youthful nephew Faquir Chand, and a Muslim acquaintance Meena Beg, the populace in the Hissar district rose up in revolt against the British¹¹. After the Collector was killed in Hissar, prisoners were released from jail, and European residents' homes were burned down while two women, Mrs. Jeffery and Mrs. Smith, and their children were brutally murdered by their servants. Wedderburn, the Hissar Deputy Commissioner was killed. While David Thompson, the tehsildar of Hissar, was killed by his peons, Mrs. Barwell and Mrs. Wedderburn, along with their children, were killed by the mutinous army. In total, 23 people were killed¹².

However, to re-establish civil authority in Hansi, Tehsildar Ahmad Nabi Khan of Hissar and a few mounted soldiers were sent. When the Jamalpur revolutionaries assaulted the Tosham tehsil, they killed the thanedar Piyare Lal, Qanungo Khazan Singh, and Tehsildar Nand Lal. A bastion of the revolutionaries, the village of Hajimpur near Hansi, was set on fire by General Van Courtland. Following that, Mangla village was attacked and set on fire. The Ranghars, the Delhi army, and Muhammad Azim resisted Jamalpur village, which was also taken and set ablaze.

Villagers of Panipat district refused to pay land revenue and joined hands with the revolutionaries of Rohtak and marched to Delhi. They returned after 22 days and threatened to attack the Collector's camp, while 19 other large villages mostly in Bhalsi and Korana 'Zails' (group of villages) rioted, burnt some government buildings, committed robberies and murders, and refused to pay land revenue. The Gujjars did not remain behind and plundered the countryside. All these villages were fined and punished in various ways. In the city of Panipat, an open rebellion took place where Bu Ali Shah Qualandar led the movement and attacked the Collector's camp but was prevented by some Jind troops. Many revolutionaries were caught and hanged.

Rather of paying land taxes, villagers in the Panipat district joined together with Rohtak rebels and marched to Delhi. At the same time when 19 other

¹⁰ Cave-Brown, Vol. IJ, pp. 142,144

¹¹ Cave-Brown, Vol. I, pp. 275-78; Chick, pp. 714-15; Jwala Sahai, p. 290

¹² For details see, 'Narrative of Events at Hissar' by an eye witness (Munshi Baktaawar Singh) vide Kanhaya Lal- *Tarikh—i-Baghawat- i-Hind*, pp. 196-9; Report of Cnpt. Stafford, vide Chick, pp. 706-7; Foreign Secret Consultations, Nos. 100-103, 25 September 1857.

sizable villages, chiefly in the Bhalsi and Korana "Zails" (group of villages), burned some public buildings, plundered and murders, and refused to pay land revenue, they returned after 22 days and threatened to attack the Collector's camp. Leaving behind, the Gujjars pillaged the area. All of these communities received fines and other forms of punishment. In the Panipat city, there was an open uprising under the direction of Bu Ali Shah Qulandar, who attempted to attack the Collector's camp but was stopped by some Jind forces. Many rebels were apprehended and hanged.

Two Walliullahite Maulvis took charge in Thanesar after Jats and Dalits set fire to government facilities there. They enlisted Gujjars as warriors and imposed a 10% livelihood tax on all large retailers after announcing Zafar's rule. People spoke out against British control in Ladwa, Pehowa, Kaithal, and Pundari as well.

Before bombarding and setting fire to Jalmana village, the British first assaulted the settlement of Ballah. Numerous village forts constructed during the Sikh era were demolished in 1858. During the uprising, Jagadhari's bankers exhibited a patriotic attitude.

Heroes of 1857 uprising in Haryana

Rao Tula Ram & Gopal Dev: Rao Tula Ram was descendent of the Raos of Rewari enjoying an Istamarari jagir of 87 villages granted by the British in 1805 in place of a big jagir granted by Mughal Emperor Humayun. He became Jagirdar in 1839 on his father's demise. Rao Tula Ram led the 1857 uprising in Ahirwal. After the battle of Narnaul on 16th November 1857, he moved into Rajasthan and joined Tantya Tope's forces for one year. On December 24, 1858, he sent a petition to Governor-General Lord Canning stating that he considered himself "an offender, but as he looked up to the Government as his protector, he begged to solicit that a pardon be granted for all offences against the British Government, unconditional pardon, amnesty and oblivion of all except those who directly or indirectly took part in the murder of British subjects." He left India in 1862, travelled to Iran and Afghanistan in the winter of 1862 after being denied a pardon, and passed away at the early age of 38 suffering from dysentery in Kabul on September 23, 1863.

Gopal Dev, Rao Tula Ram's first cousin, was son of Rao Nathu Ram and he was in 1829 at Rcwari. When his father passed away at the age of 26, he succeeded to his paternal Jagir of 41 villages. He kept close ties with his cousin Tula Ram and they were "on friendly footing" with one another.

He led Tula Ram's men as a General during the 1857 uprising. He put up a valiant fight in the Narnaul battle. He escaped into Bikaner State once the

combat was ended. He got refuge with one of his relatives in the village of Udairamsar in the Bikaner State.

During the revolt he served as a general of Tula Ram's forces. He fought hard in the battle of Narnaul. After the battle was over, he escaped into Bikaner State in disguise. He found asylum with one of his relatives at Udairamsar, a village in Bikaner State. He stayed in perfect secrecy for four long years. The Deputy Commissioner of Gurgaon extended offers of surrender to him through his acquaintances, but he "persistently kept aloof and shunned all enquiries." His jagir of 41 villages in Rewari was consequently seized. He passed away in 1862 in Udairamsar, leaving behind an infant son. The British Government had issued strict orders to the effect that in no case should his family possession be allowed to increase. He, then resident of Gurgaon was arrested by the British authorities after the 1857 uprising and tried for sedition and he was found guilty and executed by hanging on 15 December 1857.

Mirza Gaffur Ali, a small trader and resident of Palwal, who actively led the people in 1857 Uprising was captured and hanged to death in December 1857.

Harsukh Rai, another small trader in Palwal who joined Mirza Gaffur Ali in 1857 Uprising in Palwal. He was captured by the British and executed at Delhi on 2 March 1858.

Dhanna Singh was a 'dare devil' fighter who was resident of Faridabad and took active part in 1857 uprising and helped defend Delhi from the invading British force. He was arrested after the Uprising and hanged in Delhi on February 4, 1858.

Udmi Ram and 22 rebels: During the 1857 uprising, Udmi Ram and 22 other rebels from Libaspur village in Sonipat attacked a convoy of British soldiers travelling from Delhi to a camp in Sonipat and killed several of them. British women were protected and held in the village chaupal by Udmi Ram and his comrades.

British troops began looking for Udmi and 22 rebels in order to violently put an end to the uprising. Sita Ram, who lived in the nearby village of Radhdhana, informed them of Udmi Ram and his comrades.

The British troops then descended upon the area and ransacked the villagers. They also detained Udmi and the rebels during a confrontation.

The British then inflicted torture on Udmi and his young wife, Ratni Devi, who were bound to a peepal tree and nailed to the palms of their hands and legs. On the 35th day, Udmi Ram passed away while still having his legs and palms

attached to the tree, and 22 rebels were crushed to death by a stone-made heavy road-roller.

Soon after the rebellion was put down, the British rewarded traitor Sita Ram by auctioning off the entire 550 acres of land in Libaspur village in his favour for a meagre Rs 200. The fleeing villagers spent nearly a decade living elsewhere before coming home to discover that their land had been taken from them. They again started their struggle through legal channels to acquire their land back, which was the only source of livelihood for them. Still most of land in the village are under the control of the descendants of the traitor Sita Ram.

Nahar Singh of Ballabgarh: Ballabgarh, a small state close to Delhi with a population of 57,000 and an area of roughly 190 square miles, was established in the first half of the 18th century by a man named Gopal Singh Jat. He had a descendent named Raja Nahar Singh, who was the leader at the time of the 1857 Uprising. Nahar, however, lacked the confidence and brains of his forefathers.

When Nahar Singh learned that the uprising had begun on May 11, 1857, he did not believe it was appropriate to rebel against the 'invincible' British force. He was forced to support Bahadur Shah Zafar because of his proximity to Delhi, the rebels' main stronghold, and his state's uprising against the British.

When Nahar heard the news of the outbreak of the revolt on 11 May 1857 he did not think it proper to rise against the 'invincible' British power. But since he was very close to Delhi, the centre of the rebels, and his entire state was up in arms against the British, he had no choice but to cast his lot with Emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar. He also sent a detachment of his cavalry consisting of some 30 sowars under Dafedar Kalandar Bax to Delhi and deputed his confidential agent to the Imperial Court. But he did not present himself at the Court, despite several requests of Bahadur Shah Zafar to this effect, and avoided going there by extending some pretext or the other. Nor did he comply with Bahadur Shah Zafar's requests for the supply of money.

However, Maninder Dabas writes in India Times dated Sep 24, 2016, titled 'The Story Of Raja Nahar Singh - The Unsung Hero Of 1857 Who Guarded Delhi's Freedom For Over 120 Days' "Raja Nahar Singh, the king of Ballabgarh, Faridabad who guarded Delhi's borders from British forces and kept Delhi liberated for over 120 days. Despite being hanged by the British near Kotwali, where fountain was built at Chandni Chowk, the British couldn't defeat by force and had to catch by treachery.

"In the first war of Indian Independence, on 16th May 1857, when Delhi was liberated, the army of Nahar Singh was on guard on the western border of Delhi. He had established military guard posts from Delhi to Ballabgarh, and

also had his men of intelligence on the ground. Raja Nahar Singh, who was one of the trusted lieutenants of Bahadur Shah Zafar, played an important role in repulsing successive British attacks on Delhi in the battles of Hindon and Badli-ki-Sarai. The Indian forces defeated the British and further extended Delhi's liberation from the British," he added.

The British general, Hudson, who knew Nahar Singh from previous encounters, offered to spare his life if he apologised to the British Empire for whatever harm he had caused. But like a true patriot, Nahar Singh refused. He was hanged on 9th January, 1858 when he was only 35.

Shamsul Islam, a historian writes in his article in Mainstream Weekly dated May 15, 2021 titled 'Failure to Keep Record About Our Past - Looking back at India's 1857 Revolt Against the British on its 164th anniversary', "We cannot overlook the fact that Indians lost this War despite mass upsurge and support. The perusal of the contemporary documents makes it clear that it was due to the Indian stooges that we lost this War. Reasons are not difficult to find out.

Kaye was forthright in his conclusion that these were princes who helped the British in recapturing India after 1857 revolt. According to him, "It was one of the most curious characteristics of the mutiny-war, that although the English were supposed to be fighting against the native races, they were in reality sustained and supported by the Natives of the country, and could not have held their own for a day without the aid of those whom we hated as our national enemies," he added.

Karl Marx was almost the very first to grasp the true nature of the 1857 Sepoy Uprising. On June 30, 1857, he made the crucial point that the Indian Army just so happened to be "the first general centre of resistance which the Indian people were ever possessed of" to explain why the sepoys were the first to rise. He quoted Disraeli's statement that "the Indian disturbance is not a military mutiny, but a national revolt" with approval on July 28, 1857. Marx claimed on July 31, 1857, that what John Bull regarded as a military rebellion "is in truth a national revolt."¹³

There are many justifications for the conclusion in the letters. "Mussulmans and Hindus—have combined against their common masters;—the mutiny has not been confined to a few localities;—the revolt has coincided with a general disaffection—on the part of the great Asiatic nations," Marx wrote on June 30, 1857. On July 31, 1857, he wrote that the supposedly unaffected areas were experiencing "a very queer sort of quiet," despite the fact that signs of

¹³ Mainstream Weekly dated 14 May 2007, Marx and Engels on 1857 Revolt

discontent were still present there. "As to the talk about the apathy of the Hindus, or even their sympathy with British rule, it is all nonsense," he said (August 14, 1857).¹⁴ For, "the great difficulties the English meet with in obtaining supplies and transports—the principal cause of the slow concentration of the troops—do not witness to the good feelings of the peasants." Marx saw correctly (September 15, 1857) that the British posts were like 'insulated rocks amid a sea of revolution'.¹⁵

For all their sympathy with the Indian rebels, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels were not unmindful of Indian's ineptitude in the whole affair. Marx wrote on October 30, 1857 about the internal dissensions in the Delhi rebel camp, between the Mughal merchants and sepoys, between Hindus and Muslims. Engels drew attention on May 8, 1858 to the Indian drawbacks, 'the ignorance of military engineering' and total indiscipline. On July 6, 1858, he argued that 'the fate of the insurrection is dependent upon its being able to expand'. And on September 17, 1858 he concluded that the rebels had failed to conduct an active guerrilla warfare of harassing the enemy, of reorganising their forces in the respite granted by the summer and rains.¹⁶

Despite their sympathies for the Indian rebels, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels were unmindful of the Indians' ineptitude throughout the entire ordeal. On October 30, 1857, Marx wrote about the conflicts between Hindus and Muslims, Mughal merchants and sepoys, and the Delhi rebel camp. On May 8, 1858, Engels emphasised the shortcomings of the Indians, as well as their complete lack of discipline and "the ignorance of military engineering." He claimed on July 6, 1858, that "the fate of the insurrection depends upon its ability to expand." On September 17, 1858, he came to the conclusion that the rebels had failed to engage in active guerrilla warfare by harassing the enemy and reorganising their forces during the summer's respite and rains.¹⁷

Earlier, Engels had written to Marx: 'The sepoys must have defended the enceinte of Delhi poorly' (October 29, 1857) and 'we have not heard in a single instance that any insurrectionary army in India had been properly constituted under a recognised chief' (December 31, 1857).¹⁸

¹⁴ Mainstream Weekly dated 14 May 2007, Marx and Engels on 1857 Revolt

¹⁵ Mainstream Weekly dated 14 May 2007, Marx and Engels on 1857 Revolt

¹⁶ Mainstream Weekly dated 14 May 2007, Marx and Engels on 1857 Revolt

¹⁷ Mainstream Weekly dated 14 May 2007, Marx and Engels on 1857 Revolt

¹⁸ Mainstream Weekly dated 14 May 2007, Marx and Engels on 1857 Revolt

