

## CONTOURS OF RESISTANCE: SOCIAL AND POLITICAL DIMENSIONS OF THE NON-COOPERATION MOVEMENT IN HARYANA (1920-22)

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### **Abstract**

*The Non-Cooperation movement stands as a significant chapter in India's struggle for independence, marked by the convergence of socio-political catalysts and the transformative impact it had on the mindset of various regions. This research paper delves into the often-overlooked aspect of Haryana's participation in the Non-Cooperation movement, examining its evolution from loyalty to dissent against the British Empire. The study investigates the multifaceted influences that shaped Haryana's response, including the aftermath of World War I, the harrowing Massacre of Jallianwala Bagh, the poignant Khilafat issue, and Gandhi's adoption of nonviolent policies. These factors intertwined with the call for Swaraj, initiating a significant shift in Haryanvi people's political consciousness. Utilizing an array of primary sources, contemporary accounts, historical records, and scholarly articles, this paper traces the nuanced progression of Haryana's involvement in the Non-Cooperation movement. It analyzes the local dynamics, socio-economic implications, and the impact of these events on the psyche of the people, elucidating the transition from allegiance to dissent against colonial rule. This research aims to outline the transformational trajectory of the people of Haryana, with a particular emphasis on how the Non-Cooperation Movement has contributed to the development of political consciousness amongst them. This research will examine many areas and provide evidence as to how Haryana fits within the overall history of India's fight for independence, showing the change from loyalty to active Resistance to British rule.*

**Keywords:** Non-Cooperation, Swaraj, Satyagraha, Boycott, Swadeshi, Loyalty, Dissent.

## Introduction

The Non-Cooperation Movement was 100 years old in 2020 and was a key moment in India's struggle for independence. Led by Mahatma Gandhi, it was the first huge, organized way for many different parts of Indian society to collectively resist British rule. Beyond being just a political campaign, the Non-Cooperation Movement also created a sense of resistance and resilience, and it allowed for the development of a form of mass politics that was based on non-violent action. In addition it was the beginning of people from the rural areas and from smaller, local communities being involved as active participants in challenging British colonial authority. There were also several areas, including Haryana, that became important for being active participants in the Non-Cooperation Movement within the context of the wider Indian struggle for independence. This study will look at the Non-Cooperation Movement in Haryana from a regional perspective; it will analyze the social and political aspects of the movement as well as look at how local expressions of anti-colonial resistance were shaped by this period.

The concept of Non-Cooperation with the British Government and the boycott of foreign goods, while promoting Indian goods, was not a novel idea when Gandhi initiated the Non-Cooperation movement. Approximately seventy years before Gandhi's movement, the Namdhari better known as Kukas first advocated for non-cooperation with the government and disseminated the message to boycott foreign goods, emphasizing the promotion of Swadeshi products.<sup>1</sup> This sentiment was further echoed by Swami Dayanand Saraswati, who also highlighted the significance of Swadeshi. Even during the agitation against the partition of Bengal in 1905, the principles of swadeshi and the boycott of foreign goods gained prominence.<sup>2</sup> Thus, the notion of Non-Cooperation with the British government was not new in India. However, it was during the evolving landscape of the second decade of the twentieth century that Mahatma Gandhi immensely popularized and significantly escalated the idea of Non-Cooperation, garnering nationwide attention and support for the cause.

Mahatma Gandhi's decision to launch the Non-Cooperation movement in 1920 was the culmination of multiple factors deeply embedded in India's socio-political fabric. At the core of this movement lay the widespread discontent among Indians regarding British colonial rule. The

heavy-handedness of the colonial administration, typified by the Rowlatt Act of 1919, which curtails civil liberties and allows for arbitrary arrests without trial, caused widespread outrage. Additionally, the egregious massacre at Jallianwala Bagh in Amritsar, where unarmed civilians were mercilessly killed by British troops in 1919, acted as a catalyst for Gandhi's resolve to resist such atrocities non-violently. Moreover, economic exploitation, discriminatory policies, and the lack of representation for Indians in government institutions intensified the brewing resistance against British rule. Gandhi's alliance with the Khilafat Movement, aiming to support the Ottoman Empire's Caliphate, not only symbolized his commitment to unity among Hindus and Muslims but also provided a platform to foster collective discourse. His principle of non-violence, deeply rooted in Satyagraha, convinced him to mobilize the masses towards a strategy of Non-cooperation, urging Indians to boycott British institutions, goods, and administrative roles. The confluence of these factors, along with Gandhi's moral leadership and commitment to non-violent resistance, led to the pivotal initiation of the Non-Cooperation movement, marking a crucial phase in India's struggle for independence.

Mahatma Gandhi decided August 1 to launch the Non-Cooperation Movement.<sup>3</sup> In December 1920, the Indian National Congress met in Nagpur and rejected constitutional means of agitation, handing over control of the freedom war to Gandhi. He persuaded the Congress to adopt a new constitution, which declared the attainment of Swaraj (self-rule) by "peaceful and legitimate" (replacing the word "constitutional") means as the aim of the Congress, and spelled out his program of non-violent Non-Cooperation.<sup>4</sup>

The special session of Congress held at Calcutta in September (from 4 to 9 September) 1920 under presidency of Lala Lajpat Rai. The resolution of Non-Violent Non-Cooperation was passed by 1855 votes to 873 votes.<sup>5</sup> It was a watershed moment in Congress history; whereas in previous sessions, the Congress President was first among equals, Gandhi emerged as the dominant rebel leader.<sup>6</sup> Gandhi had announced his nonviolent Non-Cooperation movement to rectify the wrongs of the Khilafat and the Punjab. He had truly promised Swaraj within a year if the country implemented his programme and gathered Rs. 10 million for the Tilak Swaraj Fund, enlisted 10 million members for the Congress, and installed 2.5 million spinning wheels in

villages to make the boycott of foreign fabric effective.<sup>7</sup> Certain programmes have already been identified to make it a widespread movement throughout India. Provincial and local groups were organised to make it a nonviolent popular movement. This movement's objectives included the following:<sup>8</sup>

- 1- To relinquish titles and honorary posts, as well as resign from nominated seats in municipal bodies.
- 2- To boycott government courts and establish national courts completely operated by Indians.
- 3- To boycott government-owned, aided, and regulated schools and colleges in favor of establishing national schools and colleges in their respective locations.
- 4- Both candidates and voters should boycott the elections for national and provincial legislative bodies.
- 5- To abstain from attending government Durbars and other official and semi-official functions.
- 6- To boycott British-made items and promote Indian-made goods.

### **Non-Cooperation movement in Haryana (South-East Punjab)**

Following the Rowlatt Satyagraha and the massacre at Jallianwala Bagh, the people of Haryana felt hatred toward the British government. The issue of Khilafat inflamed people's feelings even further. Abdul Aziz of Gohana was a prominent figure in the khilafat movement.<sup>9</sup> In 1920, two religious divines, Maulvi Baqaullah and Sufi Iqbal, were arrested and imprisoned in Rohtak for making anti-British remarks at Sonipat mosque. Mahatma Gandhi took use of this resentment to launch a nationwide protest the British government. Haryana residents enthusiastically participated in this movement.

Congress committees were established at the district and tahsil levels to successfully carry out the Non-Cooperation movement. Pt. Shri Ram Sharma, a freedom fighter, visited the Sonipat district and spread the word about the cause. The Non-Cooperation campaign had not made much progress, but the Congress party attempted to maintain popular morale by conducting public forums. The authorities dampened the people's spirits by arresting their leaders. Haryana

responded positively to the Non-Cooperation programme. A large majority of Congressmen opted to jump into the conflict right away. To begin, they organised propaganda committees to travel around cities and villages preaching Non-Cooperation.<sup>10</sup>

Haryana's villages overwhelmingly supported the Non-Cooperation movement. Only in Rohtak district did more than 60 key villages have Congress Committees after Congress representatives visited these villages in three batches, each consisting of three or four workers.<sup>11</sup> On October 8, 1920, Mahatma Gandhi, Shoukat Ali, Muhmad Ali, and Abdur Rehman attended an assembly in Rohtak and urged people not to support the Be-Iman (dishonest) government.<sup>12</sup> On November 6-8, 1920, Ram Bhaj Datt, a well-known Congress leader from Lahore, addressed the gathering in Rohtak and passed a resolution in favor of Non-Cooperation.<sup>13</sup>

### **Non-Cooperation and Education**

The government's educational institute boycott scheme was effectively implemented in practically every town in Haryana. Students such as Chander Sain, Mohan Swami, and Mangli Ram abandoned schools and institutions. Shri Ram Sharma, Ram Phul Singh, Ajyodhya Prasad, Suraj Parsad, Niyader Singh, Lekh Ram, Madan Gopal, Janki Das, Shiv Narain Bhatnagar, Ram Roop Sharma, Mauli Chandra Sharma of Jhajjar, President of the Students' Union, Law College, Lahore, Inder Sain Vashisth and Deshbandhu Gupta quit college and joined the Non-Cooperation Movement. Students of Rohtak's Vaish High School went on strike, and the Municipal High School and Jat School were closed as a result. Many instructors quit after Sonipat Hindu High School disaffiliated itself from Punjab University.<sup>14</sup> Efforts were made to build national schools, such as when 155 Mahatma Gandhi lay the foundation stone for Jat National High School in the presence of almost 25,000 people in December (1920).<sup>15</sup> The Vaish High School Bhiwani, was turned into a National School.

### **Progress of the Movement**

On January 2, 1921, a procession was arranged by Sonipat Congress Committee, the leaders spoke against *begar* and put some people of Sonipat to shame for helping the government officials. They instigated the people to observe hartal on the eve of the visit of Duke of Connaught to India.<sup>16</sup> A joint conference of Hindus and Muslims was organised on May 13, 1921,

and leather workers were notably invited. The leaders brought people's attention to the horrors of Jallianwala Bagh. On May 18, 1921, another gathering was scheduled in Sonipat. A conference was organised at Anaj Mandi (Sonipat) at 8 p.m., during which the leaders advised the lower classes not to offer *begar*. Following that occurrence, Congress organising work began at Gohana. People must resort to wearing khaddar. Many political gatherings took place in the Jain temple compound. Many communities in the Gohana area contributed generously to the Tilak Swaraj Fund. Various committees worked hard to propagate Mahatma Gandhi's message. For example, in February 1921, the Rohtak Congress Committee created a five-member propaganda committee that visited Sonipat, Bari, Jhajjar, Dighal, Jahasgarh, Matanhail, Ladayan, Sahlawas, Losli, and Gudyani. On March 31, 1921, the A.I.C.C. met in Bezwada and decided to collect one crore rupees for the Tilak Swaraj Fund; to form a volunteer team of at least one crore members; to promote various boycotts - social, educational, legal, and economic; to distribute twenty lakh spinning wheels to provide work for the unemployed; and to replace foreign cloth with hand-made Indian cloth.<sup>17</sup>

Shri Ram Sharma, a well-known Jhajjar politician known as the Grand Old Man of Haryana, took part in this agitation. He left college and toured the region with his friends to promote the campaign. He also founded the Urdu weekly journal 'Haryana Tilak'. In 1921, he was barred from giving speeches, and in 1922, he was arrested for hoisting a banner with a portrait of Bal Gangadhar Tilak on it.<sup>18</sup> On 5 June 1921, a delegation led by Ram Roop, together with a teacher and two students from Vaish High School in Rohtak, set out from the Swaraj Ashram in Rohtak and visited Bari Bahu, Madina, and Meham, delivering talks on the Non-Cooperation and Khilafat issues.<sup>19</sup>

Sham Lal and Daulat Ram Gupta led another group to Kalanaur, Kelenga, Kharak, Kalanaur, Nigana, and Sudana.<sup>20</sup> In addition, eight other parties visited the remaining areas. Similarly, various parties engaged in active propaganda in Hissar district. The first delegation, comprised of Jugal Kishore, Bakshi Ram Kishan, Kedar Nath, and Shugan Chand, preached Non-Cooperation at Cherand Ravat, Khera Talwandi, Baina, and Sahdwa.<sup>21</sup> They also carried out their propaganda with zeal in the tehsils of Bhiwani and Sirsa. Neki Ram Sharma, Duni Chand, Sham Lal, and K.A. Desai visited Ambala and Karnal districts in addition to Hissar.<sup>22</sup> In the second place, the

Congress membership drive was intensified and Congress Committees were formed at every district headquarters and important towns. In Rohtak district 80 Congress 101 Committees, consisting of 7,500 members, were formed.<sup>23</sup> In Hissar 30 Congress Committees, consisting of about 3,100 members, were formed (the prominent ones being of Cherand Rawat, Khera Talwandi, 103 Bains and Sahdwa).<sup>24</sup> In Gurgaon district 20 Committees with about 2,050, members on rolls, were formed at Jatusana. In districts of Ambala and Karnal about 40 committees were formed 105 which had about 4,000 members on their rolls.<sup>25</sup>

Ambala division conference which held at Bhiwani on 22-24 October 1921. Mahatma Gandhi along with Murali Dhar, the Grand Old Man of Punjab, explained the Non-Cooperation program to volunteers and said:<sup>26</sup>

“Indians must not cooperate with this Satanic Government services; pleaders should not practice in their courts; leaders should boycott the Councils and students should refrain from going to Government schools and colleges.”

He then exhorted the people to wear hand spun Khaddar and organize their own panchayats to settle their differences. He advocated unity between Hindus and Muslims. Further he emphasized that “If 33 crores of Indians adopted the above course, the Khilafat and Punjab wrongs could soon be righted and Swaraj could be attained within a year?”<sup>27</sup> In the evening, about 6.30 p.m., another assembly was held in an open maidan, when Gandhiji and other leaders addressed a crowd of approximately 35,000 peasants. He urged peasants to join the Non-Cooperation campaign fully. Mahatma Gandhi was amazed by the joyful attitude of the Bhiwani people, where masses were sitting on carpets and chairs were not provided for the conference’s president.

### **Non-Cooperation and Lawyers**

Lala Lajpat advised Indian lawyers to boycott the practice, and Abdul Rashid, Duni Chand, Gulam Beg Naurang, and Durga Charan all ceased practicing in Ambala. In Karnal, they were followed by Ram Chander Vaid, Dwarka Das, Mohammad Abdul Majid, and Jugal Kishore. Bakshi Ram Kishan of Hissar, Sham Lal of Sirsa, and his name-sake (Sham Lal), a famous advocate in Rohtak, all discontinued their profession.<sup>28</sup> The Congress urged citizens to establish private arbitration tribunals in substitute of government courts. However, this did not meet with a

good response from the public. On May 26, 1921, K.A. Desai launched the only 'Rashtriya Nayalaya' (National Court) in Bhiwani.<sup>29</sup>

### **Prominent Freedom Fighters of Haryana who actively participated in Non-Cooperation Movement**



**Fig. 1. Pt. Neki Ram Sharma (Rohtak)**



**Fig. 2. Shri Ram Sharma (Jhajjar)**



**Fig. 3. Jugal Kishore (Hissar)**



**Fig. 4. Mul Chand Jain (Sonipat)**

Source: Retrieved from <https://amritmahotsav.nic.in/unsung-heroes-detail.htm?5950> (Accessed: 10 October 2023.)

### **Renunciation of Titles and Promoting Khaddar**

As regards the surrender of titles and resignation from honorary posts, a small number of persons came forward to do so. Murli Dhar of Ambala renounced his title of Rai Sahib conferred upon him in 1898. He also surrendered his 'Sanad' badge and 'Kaiser-i-Hind' Silver Medal, bestowed upon him in 1904 for public services.<sup>30</sup> Mirza Nazir Beg, Ganpat Rai, Gokal Chand, Nain Sukh Das and Banarsi Das from Bhiwani surrendered their Kursi Nashini medals and certificates. About a dozen people renounced Lambardari and Zaildari. Akhe Ram of Mitathal (Hissar) returned his recruiting badge and sanads of the Government.<sup>31</sup>

At a conference on April 2, 1921, the women of Hansi resolved not to wear foreign clothes. Hissar's cloth traders have agreed not to buy the foreign goods.<sup>32</sup> In Ambala, Local women played a key role: Smt. Bhag Devi (Duni Chand's wife), Mrs. K.A. Desai, and Mrs. Sham Lal among others went door to door in their districts collecting funds. By early 1922, most people in the area had abandoned ginned cloth and Khaddar was widely worn.<sup>33</sup> Several traders in southeast Punjab who had previously dealt in foreign cloth vowed to stop importing it. When a group of Congress volunteers visited Ambala's cloth merchants, about 60 dealers were

approached; 45 of them signed pledges to boycott foreign cloth and promised not to place any new orders until the end of December.<sup>34</sup>

Sirsa's cloth merchants resolved not to buy foreign cloths for six months to promote Khadi. Similarly, more than thirty Jhajjar cloth merchants and seventeen Bahadurgarh cloth merchants refused to buy foreign cloths. Swami Shraddhanand's visit caused roughly sixty cloth traders in Ambala area to refuse to buy foreign clothing. In September 1921, Madan Mohan Malaviya and Muhammad Ali visited Rohtak and encouraged people to wear Khaddar. Haryana's people enthusiastically promoted swadeshi. A wedding ceremony in Rewari was postponed by the bridegroom because bride was dressed in foreign clothes.<sup>35</sup>

The burning of foreign fabric was an important aspect of Gandhiji's Non-Cooperation movement. However, he supported the burning of imported cloth by consumers but not by cloth traders. Lala Sham Lai of Hissar pioneered the Haryana bonfire programme. First, he gathered all his family's clothing made of foreign cloth and burned them to ashes. In Bhiwani, Neki Ram Sharma burned the foreign clothes, and many people celebrated the 'New Holi.' The usage of khaddar became a sign of swadeshi adoption, and all Congressmen began wearing khaddar clothing. It gained popularity at all the gatherings held in Sirsa, Bhiwani, and Hisar.

Under the Swadeshi initiative, all retailers were urged to solely sell khaddar cloth. Congress Boycotted the elections of Central and Provisional Legislature, Duni Chand, Sham Lal, Jugal Kishore, Shri Ram Das, K.A. Desai, Harnam Singh boycotted the elections. Several meetings were held to urge the people to not cast their votes. Gandhi delivered a speech at Haryana Rural Conference at Bhiwani on 15<sup>th</sup> February 1921 talked about issue of depressed classes and importance of Khadi and said "Swaraj could be attained within one year from that month. The first indispensable condition was that the people remained non-violent even in face of provocation, whether from the Government or from amongst themselves...If non-co-operation was the movement of purification, all their evil habits had to go."<sup>36</sup>

The Non-Cooperation movement had also deep impact on the folk literature of Haryana. Vasundhara Gautam's notable work on Haryana's folk songs holds their own record of the freedom struggle, separate from the official one and it is a record made almost entirely by

women, most of whose names never got written down anywhere. Gandhi shows up in these songs next to local figures like Sir Chhotu Ram and Bhagat Singh, and he is not treated like some far-off national leader. He comes across more as someone whose ideas about self-reliance and dignity had already made their way into ordinary life. What Gautam is really getting at is that women took Gandhi's talk of swaraj and self-sufficiency and made it their own not just repeating a political slogan, but turning it into something closer to a personal sense of strength and independence.<sup>37</sup> Looked at this way, the folk song works almost like a second archive of the Non-Cooperation years, running alongside whatever the Congress was writing down officially, except this one keeps the women who actually sang Gandhi into memory at the center, instead of the men who wrote about him afterward.

Mohar Chander wrote few lines for the Non-Cooperation movement in which highlights the enthusiasm of the Haryanvi people for the movement. In the following lines he said:<sup>38</sup>

बन जाएंगे हर शहर में जल्लिआंवाला बाग। इस मुल्क से गर दूर ये सरकार ना होगी॥

दुश्मन को असहयोग से हम जेर (परास्त) करेंगे। इन हाथों में बन्दूक या तलवार ना होगी॥

हम ऐसी हकूमत को मिटा देंगे बिल्कुल। गम में हमारे जो कभी गमखवार ना होगी॥

## Conclusion

The Non-Cooperation movement was a significant part of India's fight for independence, having affected many areas of the country, including Haryana. In Haryana, the Non-cooperation movement was a turning point in moving from being passive supporters of the British to actively opposing the British Parliament. The Non-Cooperation movement in Haryana greatly changed how people thought about their situation under British rule and inspired people to stop using British-supported institutions such as schools, paying taxes to the British, and buying products from England. A change occurred in the way the people of Haryana viewed themselves. They

had considered themselves to be loyal subjects of British rule but by being asked to support a non-cooperation movement, they had a complete change of heart.

The feelings expressed by people in the Non-Cooperation movement fostered a bond between people in Haryana and gave them the strength to work together, encouraging them to make an effort to overthrow the colonial government. Despite this successful momentum, between 1920–1921, The Movement experienced a loss of momentum toward the end of 1921. The reasons for this slowing down can be grouped into three broader categories; namely (i) fatigue of the people caused through the prolonged struggle, and now experiencing difficulties in continuing participation as a result of their loss of enthusiasm; (ii) lack of a viable substitute for government institutions, a factor that has caused considerable disenchantment; and (iii) the fear of losing support by the upper classes from the government during the 1921 elections, resulting in considerable reluctance of the upper classes to support the movement. Among the notable figures during this period, Sir Chotu Ram and his followers actively distanced themselves from the movement, negatively affecting Gandhi's leadership and accusing him of conspiracy against zamindars by warning them that if they did not pay their taxes, they would have their lands seized by the government.

The event of the Chauri-Chaura incident in Bihar was the final reason as to why Gandhi decided to call off the movement. He realized that, as violence increased, it created an opportunity for the government to use the violence of the movement as a justification for taking actions similar to those taken by the government in the Jallianwala Bagh incident. His decision to terminate the movement was rooted in his steadfast commitment to nonviolence, unwilling to risk further bloodshed or provide justification for the government's oppressive tactics. In essence, the Non-Cooperation movement in Haryana was not merely a period of passive resistance; it represented a transformative phase, where the people evolved from being obedient subjects to becoming ardent dissenters against British rule.

Although social customs limited the public role of women in the Haryana region during the Non-Cooperation Movement, many of them made valuable contributions to the spread of Gandhian ideals. Women participated in Congress activities, encouraged the use of khadi, promoted swadeshi, and persuaded their families and local communities to boycott foreign goods and

support the national movement. Among the women associated with these efforts were Smt. Bhag Devi, wife of Dini Chand, Mrs. K. Desai, and Mrs. Sham Lal, who took part in nationalist activities and helped mobilise public support for Gandhian programmes. Their work, together with the efforts of many unnamed rural women, strengthened the movement at the local level and carried the message of non-violence and self-reliance into everyday life. Although their contributions have received limited attention in historical writings, they formed an important part of Haryana's participation in the freedom struggle.

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<sup>10</sup> *The Tribune*, 29<sup>th</sup> January 1921.

<sup>11</sup> *The Tribune*, 27<sup>th</sup> February & 1<sup>st</sup> March 1921.

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 29<sup>th</sup> January 1921.

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