



HIDDEN HISTORIES OF SIRSA'S FREEDOM FIGHTERS: A RESEARCH STUDY

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ABSTRACT:

The contribution of the Azad Hind Fauj (Indian National Army-INA) to India's independence is well-documented in mainstream history, but the stories of many soldiers, particularly those from smaller towns and rural regions like Sirsa, Haryana, remain largely overlooked. This research paper uncovers the overlooked contributions of Azad Hind Fauj soldiers from Sirsa, Haryana, during India's freedom struggle. Through archival research, interviews, and primary sources, this study sheds light on the motivations, military campaigns, and personal struggles of Sirsa's Azad Hind Fauj soldiers. The paper explores their recruitment, training, and participation in key battles, including Imphal and Kohima. This research paper seeks to recover and highlight the untold stories of the men from Sirsa who answered Subhas Chandra Bose's call to join the INA during World War II. Drawing on oral histories, local records, and secondary sources, the paper examines the socio-political context that led to Sirsa's involvement in the INA, the motivations of the volunteers, and the hardships they faced during their service in the INA. By documenting the sacrifices of these unsung heroes, the paper aims to honor their legacy and ensure that their contributions to India's freedom are no longer forgotten.

KEYWORDS:

NETA JI SUBHAS CHANDRA BOSE, INDIAN NATIONAL ARMY (INA), WORLD WAR II, INDIAN INDEPENDENCE MOVEMENT, SIRSA DISTRICT, FREEDOM FIGHTERS.

INTRODUCTION:

The name of the district Sirsa has been taken from its headquarters Sirsa. It is said to be one of the oldest places of North India and its ancient name was Sairishaka, which finds mention in Mahabharata, Panini's 'Ashtadhyayi' and Buddhist text 'Divyavadan'. It must have been a flourishing city in the 5th century B.C., as it has been mentioned by Panini. The contribution of the Azad Hind Fauj (Indian National Army-INA) to India's independence has been well-documented in mainstream history. However, the stories of many soldiers, especially those hailing from smaller towns and rural regions like Sirsa, Haryana, have remained largely overlooked. This research paper aims to uncover the significant yet underappreciated contributions of Azad Hind Fauj soldiers from Sirsa during India's freedom struggle. Through a combination of archival research, oral histories, and analysis of primary sources, this study brings to light the motivations, military engagements, and personal struggles of Sirsa's INA soldiers. The Indian National Army, led by the indomitable Subhas Chandra Bose, played a crucial role in India's quest for freedom by aligning with Axis powers during World War II to challenge British colonial rule. This bold move was rooted in the belief that armed resistance was essential to expedite independence. Within this larger narrative, Sirsa, a district steeped in agrarian traditions and nationalist sentiment, emerged as a surprising yet significant contributor. Despite the region's socio-economic limitations, it produced brave soldiers who were deeply inspired by Bose's call: "Give me blood, and I will give you freedom." Their stories, often passed down

through generations as local lore, remain conspicuously absent from historical records. The primary objective of this research is to highlight the unique experiences of Sirsa's soldiers within the INA, exploring their motivations for joining, the rigorous training they underwent, their participation in pivotal battles such as Imphal and Kohima, and the personal challenges they faced. This study seeks to bridge the gap between local oral histories and formal historical documentation by drawing on a mix of archival research, interviews with descendants, and analysis of rare primary sources such as letters and photographs. Archival research has been a cornerstone of this paper, involving the examination of enlistment records, military documents, and regional historical accounts preserved in libraries and institutions. Complementing this, oral histories provide invaluable first-hand perspectives and emotional depth. Conversations with descendants of INA soldiers and community elders shed light on how these men's contributions impacted their families and the socio-political landscape of Sirsa. Additionally, reviewing letters and photographs, many preserved by local families, brings authenticity and richness to the narrative. The findings of this research reveal a multidimensional picture of Sirsa's contribution to the INA. Many soldiers from this region were motivated by a blend of nationalist fervor, a sense of duty to their community, and the powerful leadership of Subhas Chandra Bose. The rigorous training they endured and their participation in the harsh conditions of battle tested their resilience and conviction. Oral histories recount the extreme difficulties faced, such

as scarce supplies, challenging terrain, and the psychological toll of prolonged warfare. Despite these adversities, their unwavering commitment left an indelible mark on both their hometown and the broader freedom movement. Understanding the involvement of Sirsa's soldiers in the INA deepens our appreciation for the diverse and often unseen sacrifices that fueled India's independence. The socio-political influence of their actions resonated through the region, inspiring future generations to value freedom and national pride. By documenting these contributions, this research aims to honor the legacy of Sirsa's unsung heroes and ensure their place in the historical narrative of India's fight for freedom. I have collected data of eight freedom fighters from Sirsa district of Haryana who were in the Azad Hind Fauj, whose names are Badri, Bhadur Singh, Ram Jass Khod, Dhanraj, Darshan Singh, Munshi Ram, Surja Ram, Bishan Singh. The data of these freedom fighters are collected by survey method, official website of government and book published.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- ❖ This research aims to identify the specific individuals from Sirsa who served in the Azad Hind Fauj and document their personal stories, military roles, and the extent of their contributions to the Indian independence movement.
- ❖ By focusing on Sirsa, the study seeks to preserve the local history and bring attention to a region that played an unsung role in the larger context of India's struggle for freedom.
- ❖ Understanding the reasons why the citizens of Sirsa joined the INA and their lived experiences—both on and off the battlefield—will provide deeper insight into their commitment and the hardships they faced.
- ❖ This research will analyze the broader impact of the INA's activities on the local community of Sirsa, examining how these soldiers' participation influenced regional identity and collective memory.
- ❖ The study aims to enrich the existing body of literature on India's freedom struggle by integrating the stories of these unsung heroes into the national narrative, ensuring that their sacrifices are acknowledged and remembered.
- ❖ By documenting these histories, the research intends to pave the way for further scholarly work on the contributions of lesser-known communities and individuals in the Indian independence movement.

Finally, this study aims to educate and inspire current and future generations by showcasing the bravery, resilience, and patriotism of Sirsa's INA soldiers, fostering a sense of pride and continuity in the history of India's quest for freedom.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a mixed-methods approach:

1. Interviews: Conducting semi-structured interviews with descendants of INA soldiers, local Historians, and community elders who possess oral knowledge of the period.
2. Primary sources: Private papers, letters, and diaries of Azad Hind Fauj soldiers.

ANALYSIS

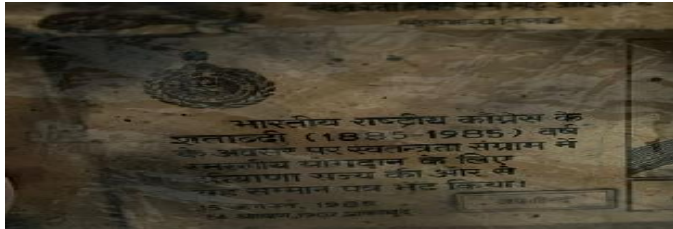
The Indian National Army (Also known as the Azad Hind Fauj) was an armed force formed by Indian Nationalists in 1942, through the patronage of the Imperial Japanese Army, to secure independence for India. Sirsa, a district in present-day Haryana, contributed significantly to the INA through individuals who joined the movement driven by patriotism and the leadership of Subhas Chandra Bose. Research indicates that many of these unsung heroes came from modest backgrounds, motivated by a sense of duty to liberate their homeland from colonial rule. Sirsa, popularly regarded as one of the oldest cities in Northern India, is located in Sirsa district in the state of Haryana. It is widely believed that it derived its name from Sairishaka, the ancient name allocated to it in the famous epic, the Mahabharata. The city of Sirsa functions as the administrative headquarters of the district, and used to be called Sarsuti or Sirsapattan in ancient times. The city of Sirsa is shrouded by mystery and age-old legends – some of the more popular ones narrate that the name Sirsa was derived from the sacred river Saraswati, which once flowed across it, and another states that a King named Saras founded this city sometime in the 7th century. Bordering the states of Rajasthan and Punjab, the entire district was constituted into the state of Haryana in 1966, and in 1975 two tehsils, namely Dabwali and Sirsa, were incorporated into it, resulting in the present-day district. The willingness of these soldiers to face harsh conditions, arduous journeys, and the threat of death speaks to their unwavering commitment. The eight Unsung Heroes of Sirsa: The Forgotten Struggle of Azad Hind Fauj Soldiers are follow:

(i) BADRI:



Badri was born in 1920 in Ludser village, Punjab (now in Haryana), to a patriotic farmer family. His father, Daya Ram, was an active social worker and Arya Samaj member, instilling a strong sense of patriotism in him from a young age. At 20, on June 1, 1940, Badri joined the British army. In 1941, his battalion was deployed in Singapore, where they encountered Japanese forces. His battalion eventually aligned with the Japanese to support the efforts of

Rasbihari Bose in forming the Azad Hind Fauj (Indian National Army) for India's independence. Badri served in the Gandhi Brigade within the Azad Hind Fauj. During his imprisonment, Badri was placed in the "black category" (the most dangerous group), where he endured severe torture, poor food, and grueling labor. He was released from jail in 1946 and returned home to a hero's welcome. He married Gulabo Devi, and together they had seven children. Badri passed away in 1999.



Tamra Patra awarded to Badri on the occasion of centenary of INC in 1985.



Certificate of freedom fighter issued by Indian National Congress

(ii) BAHADUR SINGH:



Bahadur Singh was a freedom fighter from the village of Manak Diwan, near the Rajasthan border in Sirsa district, Haryana. He was the eldest son of Chet Ram and Rajjo Devi. From a young age, he actively participated in India's freedom struggle, sacrificing his youth and family life for the cause. At 27, he married Chando Devi, and they had eight children: three sons—Omparkash, Rajender Singh, and Surjeet Singh—and five daughters—Abhikalan, Keshar Devi, Vimla Devi, Saraswati Devi, and Sumitra Devi. Bahadur Singh joined the Indian National Army (INA) on December 15, 1942, and was assigned to the machine gun branch in the Nehru Brigade. He was arrested by the British during the conflict and imprisoned in Rangoon jail, from which he was released in 1946. A humble person, Bahadur Singh was honored for his contributions to the freedom struggle. He received a Samman Patra (Tamra Patra) from Haryana's state government on August 15, 1985, and another from Haryana's Chief Minister Bansi Lal on October 21, 1997. Bahadur Singh passed away on

September 8, 1997, at the age of 80.



Tamra Patra awarded to Bahadur Singh by Government of Haryana, 21st October, 1997.



Tamra Patra awarded to Bahadur Singh on 15th August, 1985 on the occasion of INC centenary.

(iii) RAM JASS KHOD:



Ram Jass Khod, the son of Choudhary Sheokarn, was an unsung hero of India's independence movement. Born in Darban Kalan village, Sirsa district, Haryana, Khod became actively involved in the freedom struggle during his teenage years. He worked to awaken and motivate people in his village to join the movement, inspired by the powerful speeches of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose. On February 15, 1942, Khod joined the Indian National Army under the Gandhi Brigade. During the struggle, he was arrested by the British and sent to various jails, only to be released in 1946. Even after his release, he remained committed to the cause of India's freedom. Khod married Lichma Devi, and together they had six children: three sons—Dulha Ram, Madan Lal, and Rajender Singh—and three daughters—Santosh Devi, Bimla Devi, and Maina Devi. After India's independence, Khod turned to agriculture in his village. He was honored with a Tamra Patra by both the Government of India and the Haryana government for his contributions to the freedom movement. Ram Jass Khod passed away on October 6, 2006. In his memory, his family erected a statue in their

village to honor his sacrifice and service to the nation.



A statue of Ram Jass Khod made by his family installed in Darban Klalan,

(iv) DHANRAJ:



Dhanraj, born in October 1918 in Kumahria Kagdana, Haryana, came from a modest farming family. His father, Dhija Ram, was a farmer, and his mother, Bujji Devi, was a homemaker. Dhanraj received his early education at Kagdana Primary School and later helped his father with agriculture. At the age of 22, Dhanraj joined the British Army on August 1, 1940, and was sent to Singapore. However, inspired by the speeches of Subhas Chandra Bose, he decided to join the freedom movement in February 1942. He became a Sipahi in the Nehru Brigade of the Azad Hind Fauj and was deployed to Burma, Thailand, and Rangoon, where he fought for India's independence. He was eventually arrested by the British and imprisoned. After India's independence, Dhanraj returned to his village and continued his life as a farmer, embracing a simple lifestyle and wearing khadi clothes. His contributions to the freedom struggle were acknowledged by both the central and state governments, and he was awarded the Tamra Patra. Dhanraj passed away on February 10, 1997, at the age of 79, leaving behind a legacy of patriotism and sacrifice.

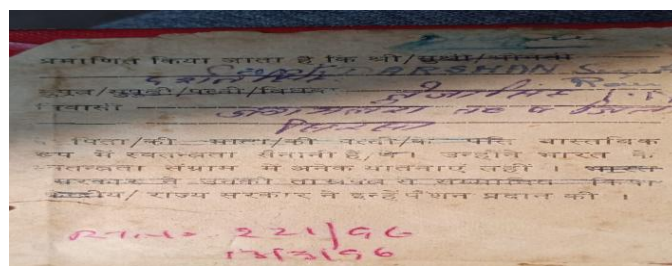


Family of Dhanraj holding Tamra Patra

(v) DARSHAN SINGH:



Darshan Singh, born on October 30, 1915, in Chakk, Lyallpur district (now in Pakistan), was an unsung hero of India's freedom struggle. The son of Teja Singh and Balwant Kaur, Darshan Singh completed his education up to the 8th grade. At 18, he joined the British Army on October 30, 1933, and served in various locations including Afghanistan, Sikandrabad, Madras, and Pinak. During World War II, Darshan Singh was deployed to Japan and Malaya, where he joined the Indian National Army (INA) under Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose. While fighting for India's independence, he was captured by the British Army. He was imprisoned in Bengal and Multan jails, where he endured severe mistreatment and torture. He was confined in bar fetters, with metal rods running from his elbows to his knees, and kept in dark cells with no reading material. After spending months in captivity, he was released in 1946. After the partition of India and Pakistan, Darshan Singh's family migrated to Jagmalera village in Sirsa, Haryana, where he led a simple life. His contributions to the freedom movement were recognized by the Government of Haryana, which awarded him two Tamra Patras: one on August 15, 1985, for his role in the independence struggle, and another on October 21, 1997, during the grand celebration of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose's centenary. Darshan Singh passed away on January 15, 1997, at the age of 82, leaving behind a legacy of sacrifice and patriotism for the nation's freedom.



Received a certificate of freedom fighter

(vi) MUNSHI RAM:



Munshi Ram, born on May 4, 1922, in Rampura Bagria, Sirsa district, Haryana, was the youngest son of Panne Ram. He had two older brothers and a sister. Munshi Ram received his primary education in nearby Chaharwala village before assisting his father with farming. At the age of 19, on June 28, 1941, Munshi Ram joined the British Army as a gunner. However, he was deeply inspired by the speeches of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose and decided to join the freedom struggle in 1942. He fought alongside others against the British Army, particularly at Imphal, but was captured and arrested by the British government. Munshi Ram was imprisoned in Lahore and Multan jails, where he endured harsh conditions. After his release in 1946, he played a crucial role in maintaining peace and communal harmony during the partition of India. For his significant contributions to India's independence movement, Munshi Ram was honored with the Samman Patra (Tamra Patra) by the Government of Haryana on August 15, 1985, and again by former Chief Minister Bansi Lal on October 21, 1997. Munshi Ram passed away on September 14, 1991, leaving behind a legacy of courage and patriotism.



A visit at Munshi Ram's home and talk to their sons Chhotu Ram

(vii) SURJA RAM:



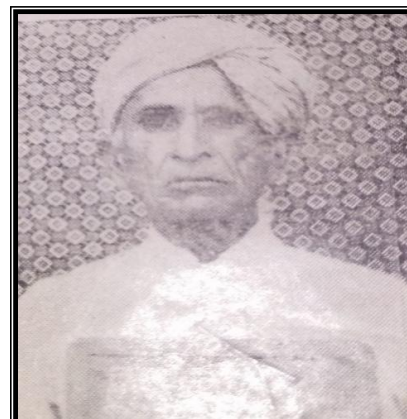
Surja Ram, born on August 15, 1923, in Dhukra village, Sirsa district, Haryana, was the eldest of four brothers and three sisters. His parents, Chunni Ram and Ghotu Devi, were farmers, and Surja Ram never attended formal schooling, helping his father in agricultural work instead. At the age of 18, on June 6, 1941, Surja Ram joined the British Army and was stationed in Singapore. During the military campaign, he was captured by Japanese forces. Inspired by the powerful speeches of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, Surja Ram joined the Azad Hind Fauj, serving in the Azad Brigade to fight for India's independence. However, he was apprehended by the

British at the Burma border and subsequently imprisoned in Kala Paani (the Cellular Jail) for seven years, enduring harsh conditions. He was released in 1946. For his contribution to the freedom struggle, Surja Ram was honored with a Samman Patra (Tamra Patra) by the Government of Haryana on August 15, 1985, and received another recognition from Bansi Lal, the former Chief Minister of Haryana, on October 21, 1997. Surja Ram passed away on April 5, 2011, leaving behind a legacy of dedication and patriotism.



A visit at Surja Ram's home and talk to their wife Madi Devi and grandson Abhay Singh

(viii) BISHAN SINGH:



Bishan Singh, born in 1912 in the village of Jamal, Sirsa district, Haryana, was a freedom fighter from a modest agricultural family. He was the second child of Hari Singh and Nima Devi and had three brothers and one sister. Singh completed his education up to the eighth grade at the Government School in Jamal. From a young age, Singh was driven by patriotism and participated actively in India's freedom struggle, drawing inspiration from Mahatma Gandhi. His dedication led to his arrest at the age of 24 by the British authorities, resulting in a 12-month imprisonment in Sialkot Jail. Singh married Parvati Devi, and they had a family of seven children, six boys and one girl. After India's independence, Singh returned to farming and continued contributing to his community. For his dedication and sacrifices, he was awarded a Tamra Patra by Indira Gandhi, the then Prime Minister of India. Later, on 21 October 1997, he received another Tamra Patra from Bansi Lal, the former Chief Minister of Haryana, recognizing his efforts in the struggle for freedom. Bishan Singh passed away on 17 February 1987, leaving behind a legacy of courage and commitment to his country.



Honoured a Samman patra (Tamar Patra) for his freedom struggle by the Indira Gandhi former Prime minister of India on 21st October 1997.

CONCLUSION

This is an inspiring and detailed account of the contributions of soldiers from Sirsa, Haryana, who played vital roles in the Indian National Army (INA) under the leadership of Subhas Chandra Bose during the fight for India's independence. Their stories highlight the bravery, sacrifice, and patriotic fervor of men from rural backgrounds, often overlooked in mainstream historical accounts. These soldiers, despite coming from agrarian and modest families, made significant contributions to the INA and the broader freedom movement. The accounts of Badri, Bahadur Singh, Ram Jass Khod, Dhanraj, Darshan Singh, Munshi Ram, Surja Ram, and Bishan Singh provide valuable insights into their personal journeys, motivations, and experiences during and after their participation in the struggle for independence. The hardships they faced—ranging from imprisonment and torture to enduring challenging wartime conditions—speak to their unwavering commitment to the cause of India's freedom. In addition to the archival research, interviews with descendants and the preservation of local lore offer a unique perspective that enriches the historical narrative. The legacy of these unsung heroes from Sirsa is a testament to the diverse and inclusive nature of the freedom struggle, where contributions from various regions, including smaller towns and rural areas, played an

essential role in achieving independence. This research serves to acknowledge their sacrifices and bring their stories into the collective memory of India's fight for freedom, ensuring that their contributions are not forgotten. It is a tribute to the strength, resilience, and patriotism of the people of Sirsa and a reminder of the broader, often unrecorded, dimensions of India's independence movement. This research highlights the need for a more inclusive historical narrative that acknowledges all contributors to India's independence. By bringing the sacrifices of Sirsa's INA soldiers to light, it ensures that their legacy continues to inspire future generations.

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