

CHAPTER II

HISTORY

THE ANCIENT PERIOD

The antiquity of the district can be established on the basis of the discovery of Late Siswal, Painted Grey Ware, early historical Rangmahal and early medieval pottery from a number of its places.¹ The district was explored in 1883 by H.B.W. Garrick under the supervision of General A. Cunningham.² The report refers to small earlier excavations at Hari-pur and Sikanderpur some of whose material was displayed in the Gurdwara at Sirsa and at the town hall there.³ Later, Suraj Bhan,⁴ Silak Ram,⁵ and Breham Dutt⁶ explored a number of new archaeological sites in the area. The evidence so far gathered is very meagre just to provide an outline of the different phases of the historical growth of the district.

The earliest phase of the pre-history of the district is gathered from the discovery of Late Siswal Ware at Bani⁷ (near Haryana-Rajasthan border in Sirsa Tahsil). Late Siswal, the rural cultural pattern of the Harappan age in Haryana, is characterised by 'evolved types and austerity in shapes and designs' of the pottery painted in black or chocolate over red or pinkish

1. For details of explorations reference may be made to the following :—

- (i) A. Cunningham, *Archaeological Survey of India Report, XXIII, Indian Edition, Varanasi.*
- (ii) Suraj Bhan, *Pre-historical Archaeology of the Sarasvati and Drisadvati Vallies, Baroda University Ph.D. Dissertation, 1971, MS.*
Excavations at Mitathal (1968) and other Explorations in the Sutlej-Yamuna Divide, Kurukshetra, 1975.
- (iii) Silak Ram, *Archaeology of Rohtak and Hisar Districts, K.U. Ph.D. Dissertation, 1978, MS.*
- (iv) Breham Dutt, *Settlements of the Painted Grey Ware in Haryana, K.U. Ph. D, Dissertation, 1980, M.S.*

2. *ASIR*, op. cit., pp. 8-11.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 10.

4. Suraj Bhan, *Mitathal*, p. 123.

5. Silak Ram, *op. cit.*, pp. 83-88.

6. Breham Dutt, *op. cit.*, pp. 103—05.

7. Suraj Bhan, *op. cit.*

surface with linear designs¹ and is assignable to a time bracket of c. 2300—1700 B.C.² It has been further pointed out that the close affinities of the culture with north Rajasthan (Kalibangam-I) and its more evolved character in Haryana point to Rajasthan as the source of the culture. These early settlers were perhaps followed in course of time by the Late Harappans (1700—1500 B.C.) whose pottery has been discovered at Jodhkan⁴ (24 kilometres east of Sirsa). As only one site has so far been discovered, nothing tangible can be inferred except that these latter people, as is known from the evidence of a number of excavated sites in the adjoining districts, represented a degraded form of culture as gathered from their inferior pottery, rarity of art forms and in the conspicuous absence of script, seals, clay bangles, steatite and weights.⁵

With the advent of the Painted Grey Ware culture (generally associated with the Aryans) begins a new phase in the History of the district. The culture is so called after its typical fine grey pottery painted with black designs and discovered at a number of places in the district—Jodhkan, Rania, Himayun Khera, Nakora, Kariwali and Bani.⁶ The absence of structures and the dearth of household objects suggest simple life of these people.⁷ It has been suggested that 'the preponderance of the ware in the Sarasvati and the Drishadvati vallies, its chronological position in the first half of the first millennium B.C. and its occurrence at sites alluded to in the later Vedic and *Sutra* literature might indicate the association of the PGW culture with the later-Vedic and the *Sutra* age'.⁸

Sarasvati, the holiest of the rivers mentioned in the early Vedic literature passed through the district in its south-westerly course towards the deserts of Rajasthan. The *Brahmana* and the *Sutra* literature⁹ give us an idea of the religious rites performed on the holy banks of the Sarasvati between Vinashana where it disappeared (in Rajasthan) and Plakshaprasravana or the place where it originated (in the outer Himalayas). The distance between the two was covered according to *Panchavimsa Brahmana*¹⁰ in forty days on horse back. The pilgrimage which was thus performed passed through

1. Suraj Bhan op. cit., p. 108.

2. Suraj Bhan, opinion cited ; see also D.P. Agrawal, *The Copper Bronze Age in India*, New Delhi, 1971, pp. 116—18, for comparative view.

3. Suraj Bhan in *Sources of the History of India* (ed. S.P. Sen), II, Calcutta, 1978, p. 110.

4. Braham Dutt, op. cit., p. 103.

5. Suraj Bhan, *Mitathal*, p. 17 ; R.S. Bisht, Excavations at Banawali ; 1974-77, *Proceedings of the Seminar on Harappan Culture in Indo-Pak sub-continent*, Srinagar, 1978.

6. Suraj Bhan, *Mitathal*, p. 123, Braham Dutt, op. cit., pp. 103—05.

7. Suraj Bhan : op. cit (*Sources of the History of India II*, p. 113).

8. *Ibid*, p. 114.

9. *Panchavimsa Brahmana*, XXV, 10, 1, 15, 16, 21, 23. P.V. Kane, *History of Dharma sastra*, Poona, 1953. IV, pp. 557—58.

10. *Pan. Br. op. cit.*

Sarasvati's confluence with the Drishadvati (in Rajasthan)¹ and then proceeded onwards through the district. The area was included in the kingdom of the Pandavas for in the *Mahabharata* special mention is made of Sairishaka in course of Nakula's conquest of the western region.² It perhaps continued to be a part of the realm of the Parikshitas and thereafter had also to suffer devastation of the crops by locusts, droughts, famines and other natural calamities, resulting in migrations of people to other parts of the country.³ The town was perhaps known to Panini.⁴ Since according to the Puranas the Kuru *janapada* was included in the Nanda empire,⁵ the area covered by the district may also have formed a part of it. Although no Northern Black Polished Ware has so far been found in the district but the discovery⁶ of Asokan pillars from adjacent places like Fatehabad and Hisar, may possibly suggest its inclusion also in the Mauryan empire.

What happened to the district after the Mauryas ? Who succeeded them in the area ? Was it included in the Gupta empire ? These questions cannot be precisely answered. On the basis of the slender numismatic and epigraphic evidence, few terracotta figurines and the discovery of Rangamahal ware of the Kushana period (1st—4th century A.D.) from a number of sites⁷—Bajeka, Bhaudin, Moju Khera, Sikanderpur, Sirsa and Suchan, it may safely be said that the region also came under the influence of the Kushanas, the Yaudheyas and the Guptas. The Kushana hold receives some support from the recovery of their copper coins⁸ and crude imitations of coin-types of Vasudeva-I⁹ as also figurine moulds¹⁰ of a lady and another of a seated male deity holding attributes in his four hands belonging to the same period. Among other numismatic finds are the copper coins of the Yaudheyas bearing the legend *Yaudheya Ganasya Jayah*. The coins were found at Sirsa in association with the Kushana suggesting thereby the latter's replacement by them.¹¹ The district perhaps came under the sway of the Guptas and the

1. P.V. Kane, *op. cit.*

2. *Mahabharata* (cr. ed), II, 29, verse 5.

3. H.C. Raychaudhuri, *Political History of Ancient India*, 6th ed., Calcutta, 1953, pp. 45-6.

4. V. S. Aggarwal, *Paninikalina Bhartvarsha*, Varanasi, V. S. 2012, P. 86.

5. H.C. Raychaudhuri, *op. cit.*, p. 233.

6. For details see—*Marg, Haryana Heritage*. : Sept. 1974, p. 23; C. Rodgers, *Archaeological Survey of India, Report of the Punjab Circle*, 1888-89, Calcutta, 1891, p. 43 ; B.C. Chhabra 'Asokan Pillar, at Hisar, *Vishveshvaranand Indological Journal*, Hoshiarpur II, Pt. ii. (Sept. 1964), pp. 319-22.

7. Silak Ram, *op. cit.*, pp. 83-88, *Indian Archaeology : A Review*. 1967-68, p. 22.

8. Four Kushana copper coins recovered from Sirsa are now preserved in Kurukshetra University Museum, Nos. 141-144.

9. Silak Ram, *op. cit.*, p. 261.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 233.

11. *Ibid.* p. 129.

Pushpabhutis of the Thanesar kingdom. A stone slab containing an inscription in Sanskrit verse assignable to about 5th/6th century A.D. was discovered at Sirsa. It contains a eulogy of a king whose name is entirely lost along with the major portion of the composition.¹ Yet another is an inscription on a miniature pot bearing only four letters in the northern group of alphabets, *savasapu* (*savaspu*) meaning 'full of steam or water'.²

During the ninth century the district came under the hold of the imperial Pratiharas of Kanauj. An inscription³ of the time of Bhoja (c. 836—890 A.D.) found at Sirsa, is of considerable importance for the religious history of the region. It records the construction of a brick temple of Shiva by Nilakantha, a Pasupata saint of Sirsa. Further it provides us information about last five generations of Pasupata Acharyas who lived at Sirsa during the 8th-9th centuries. Another inscription¹ of this period is from Jodhkan belonging to a temple containing twenty-five lines of Sanskrit verse in beautifully carved alphabets of the northern group.

The district lay on the route from Multan to the Ganga-Yamuna Doab and, therefore, had to bear the brunt of the frequent Muhammadan attacks.⁵ Sultan Mahmud's successor Masud is known to have himself marched to Sirsa where the surrounding area he found remarkable for the growth of sugarcane which were used by his forces to fill the mote in course of their attack on the fortress.⁶ Masud appointed his son Majdud as governor of the region from Hansi to Indus⁷ including of course the district of Sirsa which lay in between. Majdud, however, lost his life in the struggle against Maudud, the new ruler of Ghazni and consequently the district passed on to the new master.⁸

The struggle for succession after Maudud's death provided an opportunity to the Hindu rulers to assert their independence under the leadership of the Tomaras of Delhi.⁹ The Tomara hold over the district finds support in

1. Annual Progress Report of the Punjab Circle of the Archaeological Survey of India, 1919, p. 18 ; *Epigraphia Indica*, XXI, pp. 292 f ; Devendra Handa, Some Important Towns of Haryana, *Journal of Haryana Studies*, III, No. 2, pp. 4 and 8.
2. Silak Ram, *op. cit.*, pp. 231-32.
3. *Epigraphia Indica*, XXI, p. 295 f. Sirsa has also yielded a silver Adivaraha type of coin of Bhoja (Kurukshetra University Museum).
4. Silak Ram, *op. cit.*, pp. 247-48. The inscription unfortunately could not be read as soon after its discovery, it was taken over by L.K. Srinivasan, the then Superintending Archaeologist, Dehradun Circle of the Archaeological Survey of India (*Ibid*).
5. Devendra Handa, *op. cit.*, p. 5.
6. *Tarikh-i-Firishta*, Eng. tr. John. Briggs, Calcutta, 1910, pp. 63-64, Whitehead, R.B., *op. cit.*, Later at the time of Taimur's invasion mention is again made of the sugarcane jungles of Tohana. Both the towns of Sirsa and Tohana are situated on the Ghaggar (*Imperial Gazetteer of India*, *op. cit.*, pp. 53-4).
7. *Tarikh-i-Firishta*, *op. cit.*, p. 69.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 70.
9. *Ibid.*, pp. 71-72.

the discovery of coins of their rulers¹ Sallaksanapala (A.D. 978—1008), Anangapala (A.D. 1049—1097) and Mahipala (A.D. 1103—1128) from Sirsa, suggesting their recapture of the district from the Ghaznavid occupation. This finds corroboration in inscriptions also. The Palam Baoli inscription (A.D. 1280) states that 'the land of Hariyanaka was first enjoyed by the Tomaras, and then by the Chahamanas',² while according to the Delhi Museum inscription (A.D. 1328) 'there is a country called Hariyana, a very heaven on earth. There lies the city called Dhillika (Delhi) built by the Tomaras'.³ The Tomaras soon lost their hold over Haryana to the Chahamanas of Rajasthan. The fragmentary Chahamana *prasasti* of Ajmer Museum makes a special mention of Arnoraja's carrying 'Chahamana arms up to the Sindhu and Sarasvati rivers and his expedition to Haritanaka'.⁴ In view of this, it may not be unreasonable to suppose that Arnoraja brought Haryana under his subjection which included also the area covered by the modern district of Sirsa. Vigraharaja IV, another ruler of the dynasty, by his capture of Delhi and Hansi not only continued Chahamana hold over the area but extended it as far as Ambala district as the discovery of Delhi-Siwalik inscription originally found there would suggest.⁵ The protection of the area from the Muslim onslaughts now became the sole responsibility of the Chahamanas, who under Prithviraja II took effective measures in this direction by appointing his maternal uncle Kilhana as guardian of the Hansi fort, who built there strong and high gateway in order to protect the region around from the Muslim incursions.⁶ The district along with Agroha, Hisar and Hansi, finally passed on to the Muslim rule after the defeat of Prithviraja III in the second battle of Taraori (A.D. 1192). According to Hasan Nizami, Prithviraja, who joined the battle late, tried to escape but was recognised, pursued and finally captured in the neighbourhood of Sarsuti (Sirsa).⁷

The district, in course of its historical growth made worthy contribution to the development of culture as well. The influence of Buddhism in the region is gathered from the Divyavadana⁸ while many Jaina sculptural pieces and architectural remains recovered from Sirsa and Sikanderpur⁹

1. Silak Ram, *op. cit.*, p. 268. The coins are exhibited in Gurukul Museum, Jhajjar.
2. *Epigraphia Indica*, V, Appendix, p. 34.
3. *Ibid.*, I. p. 93 f.
4. Ajmer Museum Inscription, line 15 ; Dasaratha Sharma, *Early Chauhan Dynasties*, p. 180.
5. For details see—*Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, LV., p. 41 f; *Epigraphia Indica*, XXVI, p. 104; Delhi Siwalik Inscription.
6. *Indian Antiquary*, XLI, p. 19.
7. Elliot and Dowson, *History of India as told by its own Historians*, II, p. 215. Some of the coins of Prithviraja found at Sirsa are preserved in the Gurukul Museum, Jhajjar (Silak Ram, *op. cit.* p. 268).
8. *Divyavadana*, as quoted by Devendra Handa, *op. cit.* pp. 4 and 8.
9. Now exhibited in the Kurukshetra University Museum.

testify to the growth of Jainism in the area. The finds include pedestal of images, heads of Tirthankaras, miniature, shrine containing Jaina figurines in white marble. Among other sculptures¹ representing gods and goddesses and suggesting influence of other traits of Hinduism mention may be made of Vishnu with *Kirtimukha* and partly preserved *prabhamandala* in grey stone, and another about four feet high, attended by two votaries ; an ably executed image of Indra in reddish sandstone, mounted on an elephant along with his consort ; four armed Surya in sandstone, head of a lady in blackish stone, Narasimha along with attendants, Yamuna on tortoise with panels consisting of designs and animal motifs and a copper image of Samaji (Samadeva) riding a horse (dated Sam. 1221 i.e. 1143 A.D.). The images may be placed in the period from 8th to 12th century A.D. That building of temples was considered an important cultural activity in the region can be gathered from the aforementioned Sirsa inscription² referring to a majestic temple of Yogisvara (Shiva) made of burnt bricks and thick slabs of stone with a golden *sikhara*, and adorned with images of Vishnu and Lakshmi, various other god and goddesses, *gandharvas*, *yakshas*, *kinnaras* and *siddhas*. It must have been indeed, a magnificent piece of architecture. Several other remains such as door frames decorated with floral and geometrical designs, elaborately carved columns, lintels, slabs, etc. further testify to the existence of numerous Brahmanical and Jaina temples all over the district.

MEDIEVAL PERIOD

Under the Delhi Sultans

After the demise of Shihab-ud-din Ghuri, one of his generals, Qutb-ud-din Aibak laid the foundation of the Turkish rule in India on July 24, 1206. The territory now comprising the Sirsa district became a part of his newly founded kingdom alongwith adjacent territories. Aibak is reported to have established a military outpost at Sirsa.³ Except for quelling uprisings and collecting land revenue, this agency did not seem to have interfered in the internal affairs of the people.

Aibak's death in 1210 brought chaos and confusion for a while. Nasir-ud-din Qubacha, the Governor of Punjab tried to fish in the troubled waters. He occupied the Sirsa district and began to rule over it independently. But his sway over the district proved short-lived : Taj-ud-din Yalduz, the ruler of Ghazni snatched the district from him alongwith other territories. But Yalduz's hold also proved very short : Iltutmish having measured sword with him at Taraori (Karnal) brought the entire region under his control. It seems that in this battle Qubacha helped Iltutmish, for after the battle of Taraori we find Sirsa being under Qubachas control.⁴

1. Ibid; *Archaeological Survey of India Report*, 1883-84, pp. 10-11; Silak Ram, *op. cit.* pp. 189-90, 207, 220-

2. *Epigraphia Indica*, XXI, p. 295 ff.

3. See K. C. Yadav, *Haryana Ka Itihas*, Vol. II p. 32.

4. Ibid.

Qubacha enhanced his power very rapidly, so much so that in 1220 he declared his independence. Iltutmish launched a fierce attack on him. In the fight that ensued, Iltutmish defeated Qubacha and brought the district under his control.¹ After clearing his way of his enemies, Iltutmish is reported to have made some serious changes which had great impact on the administration. He divided his kingdom into several *iqtas*.² The present district constituted the *iqta* of Sirsa.³ An officer called *mukta* controlled the affairs of the *iqta* under the direct supervision and control of the Sultan.⁴

This arrangement continued upto 1290 when after the deposition of the last of the Mamluk rulers, Shams-ud-din, the district came under the control of the Khaljis. The new masters exercised greater and far more strict control over the district than their predecessors. Their economic hold was coercive to the extent that they bled the people white. As a result, the suffering people grew restive. But the strong hand of the rulers made them ineffective. The situation changed, however, after Ala-ud-din Khalji's death (1316). The people raised their heads against the oppressive rule. There was some relief for sometime. The district was, however, again brought under the same type of rule by the Tughlaqs who replaced the Khaljis.

During the reign of Muhammad Tughlaq (1325—51), Ibn Batuta, the famous traveller from Tangiers travelled through the district (1341). He has given a very interesting description of Sirsa. "It is large", says he "and abounds with rice which they carry hence to Delhi".⁵ Unfortunately, there is no reference to other places, but it is summarised that the district was not in as bad a shape as it came to be during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Firuz Shah who succeeded Muhammad Tughlaq took very keen interest in the district. He visited the district quite frequently and took great delight in going on hunting expeditions in the jungles over there. He founded the town of Firozabad near Rania in 1360 and had drawn a canal from the Ghaggar, passing by the walls of Sarsuti (Sirsa) to this city.⁶ A pertinent question is often posed : Why did Firuz develop such a fancy for this otherwise arid tract ? The reason for this is not far to seek ; Firuz's mother belonged to this district⁷ and he is believed to have spent a part of his early childhood here.

1- See K. C. Yadav, *Haryana Ka Itihas*, Vol. II, p. 32.

2. An *iqta* was roughly speaking, a present day commissioner like administrative division.

3. K. C. Yadav, *Haryana Ka Itihas*, Vol. II, p. 33.

4. For administration of an *iqta* see *ibid*, pp. 40-41.

5. J. Wilson, *Final Settlement of the Sirsa District* (hereafter S.R. Sirsa), 1879—83, pp. 25—29.

6. *Ibid*.

7. Barkat Ali, *Tarikh Bhattian*, p. 49.

After Firuz's death, the district felt the full force of those intensive discords which ruined the Delhi kingdom. The situation worsened further when Timur, the Amir of Samarkand, launched a fierce attack on India in 1398. After crossing the Indus in September, and traversing through [the plains of Punjab and Rajasthan in the succeeding two months, he entered the Sirsa district in November. Timur made a halt for sometime at Kinar-i-Hauz, probably the Annakai Chhamb, a lake near Rania. Having relaxed here, he resumed his march with speed. His first attack was on Firozabad¹ where he met little opposition. Emboldened by this, he attacked Sirsa. Here, too, the story of Firozabad was repeated.² The powers did nothing to stop the blood bath and destruction brought by the invaders. In consequences, the people suffered a great loss in men, money and material.³

After Timur's attack, the Tughlaqs lost their hold over the district. The people of the area accepted no body's command and lived in freedom. The Sayeds, who succeeded the Tughlaqs, tried to bring them under their control. But they seem to have achieved little success. However, in 1450, Bahlol Lodhi, the then Governor of Punjab, capitalized on the situation and brought them under his sway which lasted under him and his successors for a little over 76 years (1450—1526).

Under the Mughals

In 1526, Babur, the Mughal invader from Central Asia, wrested the district alongwith other territories from the last of the Lodhis—Ibrahim. Babur brought the district under his effective control by placing it under the *sarkar* of Hisar. Humayun, who succeeded Babur in 1530 seems to have made no change in the existing arrangement. But Humayun's rule proved short-lived: he was thrown out by an Afghan noble, Sher Shah Suri in 1540. We get a reference to the district in the annals of this time. Rao Kalian Singh, the ruler of Bikaner was driven out of his state by the Chief of Jodhpur. The displaced Rao occupied the district, made Sirsa his headquarters for a time until the defeat of his enemy at Ajmer by Sher Shah enabled him to return to Bikaner.⁴

Sher Shah was an administrative genius. He divided his whole kingdom into sixty-six *sarkars*. Sirsa came like the earlier time, under the *sarkar* of

1. It is Firozabad Harni Khera.

2. Timur, *Malfuzat*—vide Elliot and Dowson, *History of India as told by its own Historians*, Vol. III, pp. 428-29.

3. For details see. K.C. Yadav, *Haryana Ka Itihas*, Vol. II, pp. 57-59.

4. J. Wilson, *S.R. Sirsa*, pp. 25—29.

Hisar whose administration was carried out by two officials, namely *shiqdar-i-shiqdaran* and *munsif-i-munsifan*. The *sarkar* was further divided into parganas. Unfortunately, there is no direct evidence to give the exact number of parganas into which the district was then divided. The parganas were controlled by *shiqdars*, *munsifs* and junior officials like *qanungos*, *khajanchis*, etc. The smallest unit of administration was village which was administered by the *muqadams* and panchayat, *patwaris* and *chaukidars* helped them in discharging their work.¹

Sher Shah ruled for only five years (1540—45). There was peace, prosperity and tranquillity everywhere during his rule. But not after him. He was succeeded by pigmies who brought chaos and confusion. The Mughal Emperor Humayun took advantage of the new situation, and wrested his lost kingdom from them. In consequence, this district again came under the Mughal sway (1555). But as the ill-luck would have it, the very next year Humayun was no more on the scene, and once again there was chaos and confusion all around. However, in 1556, his illustrious son Akbar controlled the situation and brought the district under his tight control.

Akbar, like Sher Shah, was a great administrator. He divided his Empire into several provinces (*subas*), provinces into *sarkars* and *sarkars* into *mahals*. The villages were, like the earlier times, the smallest units of administration. The administrative picture of the district based on the *Ain-i-Akbari* was as given in table below :

Administrative division of Sirsa district in Akbar's time

	Suba	Sarkar	Mahal	Area (bighas)	Revenue (dams)
Sirsa District	Dehli	Hisar	Sirsa	2,58,355	43,61,368

The *Ain* does not give the number of villages. The administrative machinery that controlled the villages, the *mahals* and the *sarkar* was almost of the same type as was found in this region in the time of Sher Shah. This administrative set-up remained intact during the reigns of Akbar's successors—Jehangir (1606—1627), Shahjahan (1627—1658), and Aurangzeb (1658—1707). There was peace and tranquillity all around.

After Aurangzeb's death (1707), the position changed drastically. The mountebanks and imbeciles who sat on the Mughal throne after Aurangzeb, failed to check the forces of chaos and confusion that were let loose at that time. In consequence, the people became disorderly all around, and refused to pay revenue to their masters. Their villages, which were nothing short of fortresses, surrounded by mud walls could only be reduced by artillery and

1. See Abul Fazl, *Ain-i-Akbari*, Eng. Tr. H.S. Jarret, Vol. II, pp. 291—310.

huge force which the local authority could not always muster. The situation worsened further when Nadir Shah, a Turkoman free-booter, who after assuming the throne of Iran in 1736, launched a fierce attack on India in 1739.

In the troubled times, after Nadir's retreat, a local tribe of the Bhattis who had settled in the district in the eighth century¹ came to have some political control : their chief Mohammad Hasan Khan occupied Rania, Sirsa and Fatehabad.² The Bhattis led a pastoral and predatory life driving about their cattle in search of pasture and carrying off their neighbours cattle when they had a chance. Their hand was against every man and every man's against them.³ The chiefs of Bikaner were engaged in 'incessant struggle with the Bhattis' for the possession of the district. The annals of Patiala are also 'full of raids and counter-raids between the Sikhs and their hereditary foes, the Bhattis'. Ala Singh, the founder of the Patiala state kept the flame of struggle against the Bhatti chief Muhammad Khan, burning throughout his life. Ala's son and successor Amar Singh followed his illustrious father in this regard. In 1774, he succeeded in taking the district from Amin Khan.⁴

In 1783, there befell another great calamity—the great *Chalisa* famine (of 1840 Vikrama Samvat) that laid the whole country waste. The great heads of cattle which roamed over the prairie died of thirst and starvation, and numbers of the population must also have died of famine. The survivors fled to more favoured retreats.⁵ Amar Singh and his troops also left the district: 'some ten or twelve of the larger villages held out, and for a time almost the whole of the Sirsa district must have been a desert'.⁶

The moment Sikhs left the district, Muhammad Amin Khan reoccupied it. He did his best to rehabilitate the deserted tract. Unfortunately, he died in 1790. His successor Qamar-ud-din devoted most of his time fulfilling the incomplete mission of his father. But he does not seem to have succeeded to any appreciable extent.⁷

In 1799, the Irish adventurer George Thomas, whose head quarters was at Hansi in the Hisar district, after having established some authority over the Ghaggar Valley's 'allied with the Bhattis'. There ensued a deadly strife between them and the Rajputs of Rajasthan and the Sikhs of Punjab. The struggle had continued hardly for a year when Nawab Qamar-ud-din died. He was succeeded by Zabita Khan who decided not to disturb the alliance formed by his successor. The struggle came to an end, however, in 1802, after the

1. Barkat Ali, *Tarikh Bhattian*, p. 32.

2. Ibid. p. 72.

3. J. Wilson, *SR. Sirsa*, pp. 25—29.

4. Ibid. 25—29.

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid.

7. Barkat Ali, *Tarikh Bhattian*, p. 81.

defeat of George by the Marathas. In consequence, the whole of the tract including the Sirsa district came under the control of the Marathas. But the Maratha hold proved to be very short-lived: after the defeat in the Second Anglo-Maratha War their chief Daulat Rao Sindhia gave the district along with the Delhi territory to the British vide the treaty of Surjiarjan Gaon, December 30, 1803.¹

MODERN PERIOD

Under the East India Company

Although the Marathas surrendered the district to the British East India Company on December 30, 1803, Nawab Zabita Khan did not accept the sway of the new masters. Mirza Ilias Beg who was placed as *nazim* to look after George Thomas' territory with headquarters at Hansi, was assigned the job of controlling the Bhattis. He proved a failure. In consequence, reinforcements were sent from Delhi. In the struggle that ensued the Bhattis proved their worth. They killed Mirza Ilias Beg and shattered his forces. The British sent their own force under Col. Browning. But, he too got, a befitting reply at Sirsa. The British lost a number of their soldiers in the battle, the Colonel being one of them. The British troops had to retreat leaving Bhattis as they were.²

After this the Bhattis organised regular predatory incursions inside the British territory, and despite their best efforts, the British could not stop them till 1810.³ In this year, however, the British launched a fierce attack on Sirsa and Rania on December 19 and 21 respectively. Col. Adam, the British commander found his work very easy as the Nawab chose to surrender without fighting.⁴

The British treated the defeated Bhatti Chief sympathetically. He was allowed to keep the jagir of Sirsa and Rania as before. This situation changed after seven years. The Nawab kept on sending plundering expeditions to the British territory quite frequently. In 1817, William Frazer, the Resident at Delhi, took a serious note of the whole affair. He sent a message to the Nawab to give up his jagir in return for a pension or face serious consequence. The threat worked. The nawab accepted to surrender his jagir. In consequence, he was given a pension of Rs. 1200 per month and a small jagir comprising 5 to 6 villages and the town of Rania.⁵

The Uprising of 1857

The British rule of about half a century from 1803 to 1857 produced a great deal of discontent and disaffection among almost every section of the

1. Aitchison, *Treaties, Engagements and Sandas*, Vol. IV, pp. 42—46.

2. Foreign Political Consultation, No. 70, Sept. 2, 1818.

3. Foreign Political Consultation, No. 70, Sept. 2, 1818, No. 94, Dec. 28, 1810, No. 20 Jan., 7, 1811.

4. Ibid. No. 57—60, July, 19, 1811.

5. Barkat Ali, *Tarikh Bhattian*, p. 92.

people throughout Haryana. The Sirsa district was not exception, to this : right from the chiefs to the lowest man over here was unhappy with the 'new order' created by the 'Sahib Logs'. In other words, the ground for a general uprising against the British lay prepared in the district. It only required to spark for the bursting forth of a conflagration. This was provided by the sepoys on May 10, 1857 at Ambala and Meerut.

On hearing the news of the happenings at two places and Delhi, the people of the district rose up in revolt. At Sirsa, a sizeable number of sepoys were stationed. They, too, rose in open mutiny. But the news of the uprising and murdering of Europeans at Hansi and Hisar somehow reached the European residents at Sirsa well in time. In consequence, they fled before they could be overtaken. Capt. Roberts, the Superintendent of Bhattiana, and his family moved to Ferozepur via Dabwali and Bathinda. Other Europeans, about 17 in all, went to Sahuwala with Donald, the Assistant Superintendent, and took shelter in the Patiala state. Hillard, Officer Commanding of the contingent, and Fell, Assistant Patrol proved a little less intelligent : they went into the barracks of the sepoys who did not listen to them at all and asked them to leave at once. They left to die. The sepoys obliterated all the vestiges of the British rule from Sirsa. They occupied the tahsil treasury and seized Rs. 8,000 from there. Having done this, they went to Hansi, where all the rebel troops of the district had assembled. After staying there for sometime they made their way to Delhi via Rohtak.¹ By the 1st week of June the entire district had slipped off the British hold.

This situation did not last for long. After a short while, General. Van Courtlandt, the Deputy Commissioner of Ferozepur, attacked the district on instructions from John Lawrence, the Chief Commissioner of Punjab. His forces consisted of 670 men and two guns. Captain Robertson acted as a political officer under him. The General started his operation with the pargana of Sirsa where he encountered opposition from Nur Samad Khan, the Nawab of Rania. A pitched battle was fought at Odhan, a small village near Rania on June 17. The Nawab's men fought but the British firearms played a vital role in the contest. As many as 530 of the Nawab's men fell fighting as the victory went to Van Courtland. The Nawab effected his escape but he was caught while passing through the Ludhiana district and condemned to death by hanging at Ferozepur Cantt.² Nawab's tomb still stands here.³

On June 18, the village of Chhatrian, where Capt. Hillard and his brother-in-law were killed, was attacked. The assault came so suddenly that the villagers could neither come out to fight nor flee away to save their lives. They were ruthlessly butchered and their houses were burnt to ashes. Next

1. For details see, K.C. Yadav, *Revolt of 1857 in Haryana*, pp. 66-67.

2. Ibid. Barkat Ali, *Tarikh Bhattian*, p. 104.

3. Ibid.

day, the British attacked Kharian. Unlike the residents of Chhatrian, the villagers here were on guard and offered a tough battle to the enemy. But ultimately the British superiority in number and firearms again decided the fate of the battle. As many as 300 villagers died fighting. Overjoyed with the victory, Van Courtlandt went to Sirsa on June 20. About 800 men and two guns of the Raja of Bikaner joined him there. The General sent the Bikaner contingent under Capt. Pearse to Hisar via Bhadra, whereas he himself stayed back to reduce the pargana of Sirsa. This took the General a little more than a fortnight. On July 8, the General also left Sirsa for Hisar. On the way, he met with stiff opposition at the hands of the inmates of the villages through which he passed. However, he subdued them easily.¹

The rebellious element thus crushed, General Van Courtlandt established order throughout the district. The work of persecution also went side by side. The proprietary rights of seven villages—Mangala, Jamalpur, Hajimpur, Odhan, Chhatrian, Kharian, and Jodhkan were forfeited while heavy fines were levied on scores of other villages. He hanged nearly 133 persons and confiscated their properties. The Nawab's family was the worst sufferer. Besides Samad Khan, his cousin Gauhar Ali was arrested and hanged at Sirsa on August 18, 1857. His relatives and allies, Nawab Wazir Khan, Amir Ali Khan, Suba Khan and Umrao Ali Khan were hanged at Hisar. Ali Khan cousin of Nur Samad was given life sentence. Fearing ill fate hundred of persons ran away to distant places.²

For quite some time after the Uprising, the people of Sirsa suffered a great deal. Obviously, the spirit of vengeance on the part of the victors was working there. They were denied almost all the benefits of the Raj as a consequence of which they became backward in all respects.

Political Awakening and Freedom Struggle

This condition was not to remain for long, however, in the last decade of the preceding century, as elsewhere, the winds of changes began to blow here also. With the spread of western education, urbanization and techno-economic changes, the people especially the town-dwelling middle classes were influenced. Institutions—building efforts were also made by the people; the attempts of Arya Samajis were most significant in this direction. The main credit for this goes to Lala Lajpat Rai and Dr. Ramji Lal who propagated the ideals of the Samaj among the people. As a result, the first Arya Samaj was established at Sirsa in 1892.³ Other towns and big villages followed suit soon after.

The Arya Samajists brought political awakening to the people of the district. As a result, they started taking interest in public life. Some people

1. K.C. Yadav, *Revolt of 1857 in Haryana*, pp. 108—111.

2. Ibid. Barkat Ali, *Tarikh Bhattian*, pp. 104-105.

3. K.C. Yadav, *Haryana Ka Itihas*, Vol. III, p. 123.

also joined the Indian National Congress. It may, however, be pointed out here that the Congress activities here were restricted to a limited number of people belonging to the urban middle classes only. To the villages the 'new wind' was yet to go.¹

In 1914, came the First World War which was by all means a big event. The people of Sirsa, as those of other districts in Haryana, came to the help of the government in its war efforts by men, money and material. Young men from villages enlisted themselves in the Army. The rich contributed liberally to the War Fund and the War Loan as the following Table shows :—

Contribution to War Loan by the people of Sirsa²

Name	Amount	Position in the whole of Punjab
	Rs.	
Seth Sukh Lal	12,00,000	First
Family of Ram Sukh Das	1,06,000	..
Mrs. Sukh Lal	1,00,000	First among women
K. S. Khan Yakin-ud-din	66,000	..

What was the reward for all this ? A few rich town dwellers and big zamindars from the villages received jagirs and other benefits for their War Services,³ but not others. The village youths, hundred of them who had offered their blood during the war were discharged from army after the conclusion of the war. The working classes and poor people residing in the towns and villages suffered on account of economic depression and sufferings that came after the war. In consequence, there was discontent and disaffection all around, Gandhiji found a great opportunity in this, and launched an all-India agitation when the government wanted to pass the Rowlatt Bill in 1919.

1. K. C. Yadav, *Haryana Ka Itihas*, Vol.III, p.123.

2. M.S. Leigh, *The Punjab and the War*, p. 123.

3. The rewards were given as follows.—

Name	Place	Reward
1. M. Ajit Singh	Kalanwali	Kaisar-i-Hind Medal
2. Baba Bashanda Nand	Rori	Seat in Provincial Darbar
3. R.S. Ram Gopal	Sirsa	M.B.E. and Jagir (Rs. 500)
4. Seth Sukh Lal	Sirsa	O.B.E., Rai Bahadur
5. Khan Yakin-ud-din	Sirsa	Khan Sahib and Square land

The discontented and disaffected masses of the Sirsa area took part in the Rowlatt Bill agitation. Protest meetings were held at Sirsa in which resolutions were passed against the bill. The government took notice of the protests and passed in March 1919, one of the bills called the Criminal Law Emergency Powers Act. This infuriated the people all over the district, especially the townsmen who opposed the Act by every conceivable method. After the arrest of the Mahatma Gandhi at Palwal (April 10) and then Jallianwala Bagh tragedy (April 13), the movement reached a high pitch. The government's tried to create a rift among the people. For instance, on April, 27 they got hold of some Muslims at Sirsa who took a vow to remain faithful to the government. Their number was, however, very small.¹

After August 1, 1920, when Gandhiji launched the Non Cooperation Movement the struggle became still more intense. The Congress Committee was organised at Sirsa with Prabhu Dayal as its President, and Jai Narain as its General Secretary, Laxmi Narain Padiwal who financed the organization in a big way was its treasurer. Inspired by the newly-started Committee, several persons offered themselves for Satyagraha. Many students left schools and some lawyers boycotted courts. The Swadeshi Movement also gained momentum. The shopkeepers of Sirsa took a vow not to buy or sell foreign cloth.²

On the whole, the Movement progressed well. But it must be conceded that compared to what one met with in Rohtak or Hisar and even in Ambala or Karnal, the movement was weak. The reason for this is not far to seek : the Congress Organisation was weak here and hence weakness in the Movement. Even in its present form, on February 12, 1922, when Gandhiji withdrew the Movement after violence at Chauri-Chaura (Bihar), it came to a grinding halt here also.

As elsewhere, the withdrawal of the Non-cooperation Movement gave a sort of set-back to the national movement in the district. The Congressmen were divided into two camps : (i) Swarajists who wanted to give up Non-cooperation (also called Pro-changers) ; and (ii) Non-cooperationists. In the Sirsa area the former were in greater majority. The former took part in elections of 1923, 1925, 1926 and 1930. But they did not fare well. The Unionists defeated them almost in every village constituency, in the district.³ Some youngmen tried to improve the position by forming Naujawan Bharat Sabha (1927-28), but in that atmosphere they, too, could not succeed much.⁴

1. K.C. Yadav, *Haryana Ka Itihas*, Vol. III, p. 156.

2. K.C. Yadav, *Haryana Ka Itihas*, Vol. III, p. 163, The first Swadeshi Khaddar Bhandar was opened by Laxmi Narain Padiwal at Sirsa in 1925. (Pat Ram Verma, *Amar Gatha*, p. 2).

3. For details about elections see. K.C. Yadav, *Elections in Punjab, 1920—47*.

4. Pat Ram Verma, *Amar Gatha*, p. 2.

In 1930, yet another all-India movement, the Civil Disobedience Movement was launched by Gandhiji. The movement bestirred the nation, and the Sirsa area was no exception. Satyagraha Sabhas were formed and volunteers were recruited who went to jail after breaking salt laws. The movement was launched on April 6, 1930 when the Sirsa Congress Committee organised a large meeting and made salt openly. From May 11 to 16, 1930 the 'Mutiny (1857) Week' was celebrated. The government arrested activists like Laxmi Narain, Nager Mal, Chanan Mal, Atma Ram, Ram Kumar, Ganpat Ram, Badri Prasad, Bhagwad Swarup, Desh Raj, etc. to crush the Movement. There were indiscriminate lathi charges at a number of places, especially on picketers of liquor shops. The Congress Organisation was declared unlawful. Despite all this, however, the struggle went on unabated (except for a brief halt in 1931), thanks to the efforts of some youngmen like Fateh Chand, Neki Ram Taula, Devi Lal, Ganpat Rai, Kundan Lal, Rameshwar Lohia, etc. In 1933, Gandhiji withdrew it and turned it into an Individual Satyagraha. The new mode of struggle did not make any impressive impact. After sometime even this was withdrawn. As elsewhere, the withdrawal of the Civil Disobedience Movement gave a set-back to the nationalist effort in the district.¹

These were bad days for the Congress, as also for the national movement. After sometime the situation improved. In 1939, there came the World War II. As elsewhere, the Congressmen in the area opposed the war efforts of the government. They started at a low key. There was no big show by the district in the Individual Satyagraha Movement, 1940-41. About two dozen people went to jail, prominent among whom were Murlji Manohar, Sahib Ram, Pat Ram Verma, Madan Mohan, Bishan Singh, Har Chand, Ghenu Lal, Jan Muhammad, Hardwari Lal, Ram Lal and Paramnand. Situation changed by 1942, however, everything warmed up, when the Britishers were asked to quit India at once. The government action was equally strong. As elsewhere, where the Congress Organisation was declared unlawful here, too, and its activists were arrested. Yet the people came out to fight; several of them offered Satyagraha, prominent being Ramdayal, Hakam Chand, Madangopal, Sahib Ram, Devi Lal, Lekh Ram, Chanan Mal, Tilok Chand, Jan Muhammad, Arjan Singh, Ladu Ram, Pat Ram Verma, Suraj Prakash, Gaya Ram and Ramswarup.² As a result of the arrest of leaders and repressive measures adopted by the government, the Movement failed. By 1944, it was 'as dead as a door mail'.³

As at home, the people of the district made sacrifices to the cause of national freedom outside India also. A good number of soldiers from here

1. Based on an interview with Pt. Shri Ram Sharma, Rohtak, 1st October, 1983: Pat Ram Verma, *Amar Gatha*, pp. 2-3.

2. Pat Ram Verma, *Amar Gatha*, pp. 13-14.

3. For details of the 1942 Movement see Jagdish Chandra, *Freedom Struggle in Haryana* pp. 110-111, K.C. Yadav, *Haryana Ka Itihas*, Vol. III pp. 190-91.

joined the Indian National Army (INA) and fought against the British forces under the leadership of Subhash Chandra Bose. Though the INA lost the war, its soldiers, when came to the villages after their release, gave great boost to the Congress activities and the national movement. As a result, the social base of the freedom struggle increased a great deal and there came Independence on August 15, 1947.

The district remained a part of Punjab until November 1, 1966 when it became a part of the newly created state of Haryana. In 1968, Sirsa tahsil was bifurcated into Sirsa and Dabwali tahsils. On September 1, 1975 Sirsa and Dabwali tahsils were constituted into a separate district with headquarters at Sirsa. The subsequent chapters will throw light on what developments have been made in different spheres of activity after Independence. However, after the formation of Haryana on November 1, 1966, the following ministries have existed under the leadership of the Chief Ministers whose names are given below :—

Name	From	To
<i>S/Shri—</i>		
Bhagwat Dayal Sharma	November 1, 1966	March 24, 1967 (Forenoon)
Birender Singh	March 24, 1967	December 21, 1967 (Forenoon)
Bansi Lal	May 21, 1968	November 30, 1975
Banarsi Dass Gupta	December 1, 1975	April 4, 1977
Devi Lal	June 21, 1977	June 28, 1979
Bhajan Lal	June 29, 1979	June 4, 1986
Bansi Lal	June 5, 1986	June 20, 1987 (Forenoon)
Devi Lal	June 20, 1987 (Afternoon)	Continuing

The state remained also under the President's rule from November 21, 1967 to May 21, 1968 and again from April 30, 1977 to June 20, 1977.