



Forgotten Heroes of Individual Satyagraha in Uttarakhand: Ispecial reference to Bhowali town of Nainital District

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Abstract: The independence movement of India was not only a set of campaigns that occurred across the whole nation but it was such a movement where a quantity or sum of localized struggles rooted in Gandhian ideals of non-violence and satyagraha. In present day Uttarakhand, there lies two ranges; that is Garhwal and Kumaon range. In Kumaon, these struggles took distinctive forms which includes Individual Satyagraha, resistance against exploitative colonial practices like Coolie-Beggar and grass roots organization through regional bodies such as the Kumaon Parishad. Despite their significance, many local participants remain underrepresented in mainstream historical narratives. This research paper addresses the historical neglect of local satyagrahis in Bhowali of district Nainital during Gandhi's 1940 Individual Satyagraha. It highlights five of such forgotten heroes of Individual and collective Satyagraha in Bhowali Town of Nainital district in Uttarakhand. It also examines their life history, contributions and contextualizes their actions within historical and political developments.

Keywords: Forgotten Heroes, Personal Satyagraha, Kumaon, Uttarakhand

Introduction

The philosophy of Satyagraha or non-violent civil resistance was popularized nationally under Mahatma Gandhi during key campaigns such as the non-cooperation movement (1920-22). Salt Satyagraha (1930) and Individual Satyagraha (1940) during World War II.¹ However, in regions like the Kumaon of Uttarakhand, the ethos of satyagraha manifested in local struggles, often independent in leadership and with unique socio-economic catalysts. These localized movements, driven by figures seldom highlighted in broad National histories, played vital roles in mobilizing the people of Kumaon against colonial authority.²

Kumaon, a hilly region in present-day Uttarakhand, had its own trajectory of political awakening. The Kumaon Parishad, founded in 1916 by young regional leaders, served as a vehicle for political consciousness, linking local grievances with the larger nationalist movement. Members combined social reform with political activism, forging a bridge between rural sentiments and the broader goals of Indian independence.³ The concept of Individual Satyagraha was launched nationally by Gandhi in 1940; it was a symbolic non-violent protest allowing select individuals to make a public stand against British war policy even as Gandhi negotiated complex politics with the colonial authorities. This phase sought to keep alive the spirit of resistance in the lead-up to broader actions like the Quit India Movement of 1942. Sources from the local historiography indicate that Har Govind Pant was credited with initiating the concept of individual Satyagraha in Kumaon around 1940, highlighting his role in adapting national strategies within the local context. His position in the Indian National Congress and longstanding activism in Kumaon likely facilitated this process. Despite the lack of extensive biographical documentation for many participants in this phase, Pant's involvement exemplifies how local leaders internalized and executed Gandhian tactics in their home region. Beyond the major personalities, numerous grassroots activists, village organizers, peasants and regional workers contributed to the culture of satyagraha in Kumaon. The success of movements like Coolie-Beggar was as much a product of collective action as it was of individual leadership. Scholarly analysis suggests that the role of broader village populations and lesser-known activists has been underplayed in conventional accounts.⁴



The historiography of India's freedom struggle prioritizes national leaders like Vinoba Bhave and Jawahar Lal Nehru, marginalizing regional figures in peripheral areas like Uttarakhand's Kumaon. Specifically, Bhowali- a key hill town in Nainital district- serves as a satyagraha hub due to its proximity to Almora and role in earlier movements, yet lacks dedicated studies on its "forgotten heroes" in Individual Satyagraha (1940-41).

Objective

This research paper deals with five Unsung heroes of Individual Satyagraha from Bhowali town in Nainital District located at Kumaon region of Uttarakhand. The present paper seeks to highlight the life story of such five unsung heroes and their contribution in the freedom struggle. The main aim is to analyze their participation and contribution. After this it will be documented and present it for the general public and the coming generations as they have lost somewhere in the pages of history.

Review of Literature

This research paper is based on primary sources that are available in the Regional Archives, Nainital located in the Kumaon region of Uttarakhand and the Personal Diaries of some of these unsung heroes which are given by their descendant. Field visit is also done in order to locate these Unsung heroes. Interviews have been taken from the son, daughter, grandson and relatives of the chosen freedom fighters. We found some of the personal diaries of these freedom fighters and the author have used them as a primary literature in order to write this paper.

Methodology

In order to perform this study, analytical method is used. This study is based on the contribution of five such freedom fighters of Bhowali town in Nainital District who are forgotten freedom fighters in the freedom struggle of India.

Results and discussion

There is no denying that individuals like Pt. Govind Ballabh Pant, Har Govind Pant, Kalu Mahra, Badri Dutt Pandey, Indra Mani Badoni, Barrister Mukundi Lal, Sri Dev Suman and Gaura Devi have been frequently mentioned while discussing the freedom movement which occurred during British administration. However, there are some people who avoid the spotlight and are hardly ever talked about. In this paper five of the Unsung freedom fighters from Bhowali town of Nainital district will be discussed and the author will throw light on the life history of these martyrs who were ignored by the historians and academicians. These Unsung Heroes are as follows: -

1.Prem Singh Bisht

He was a leading freedom fighter of non-violent satyagraha and he was among the few early individuals in Kumaon chosen by Mahatma Gandhi for individual satyagraha. He was born in 1912 in Bhowali. His father's name was Kharak Singh Bisht. He lives in Bhowali town of Nainital district. He took up his education up to class VIII from Nainital. Once he left his education, he started working as a contractor. He gets married and his wife's name was Lakshmi Devi. He was a father of one son and six daughters. In the famous fairs held in Kumaon during the month of September, the idols of Devi Nanda and Sunanda were first crafted by him at the Devi temple located in Bhowali. In 1941, at the age of 31, he was chosen by Gandhi for the non-violent satyagraha movement. He informed the ADM about this through a letter dated 17th February 1941. On 19th February 1941, at around 1:30pm, he left his home to participate in the Satyagraha. On the way, he was arrested near Himmatpur Patti. Subsequently, a case was registered against him on 22 February 1941, and on the same day, the court delivered its judgement, sentencing him to one year of imprisonment along with a fine of twenty-five rupees. After the independence, he lived like a saint-like life for the rest of his years. He passed away in September 1977 in Bhowali at the age of sixty-five years.⁵



2. Bansidhar Consul

Bansidhar Consul was a fearless freedom fighter who practiced nonviolence and Satyagraha. He was also one of the few exceptional people chosen by Gandhi for Satyagraha. Bansidhar was born in 1916 in Nainital. His father's name was Babu Ram Consul and his mother's name was Katori Devi. He had two brothers, Om Prakash and Bhu Prakash. He lived with his family at the Ramlila Ground in Mallital, Nainital district, Uttarakhand. He studied up to class eight at CRST Nainital. His wife's name was Shakuntala Devi. He had four daughters and two sons from his wife. His father, Babu Ram Consul, was a freedom fighter. Inspired by his father's patriotism, he and his younger brother Bhu Prakash also took part in Gandhi's nonviolent Satyagraha. Since childhood he was determined to drive the British out of the country. When he was in class seven or eight at CRST school, he protested against the British at their own school by unfurling India's tricolour flag. Because of this he was expelled from school and his education was permanently stopped. After that he often did things intended to harm the British, actions that put his life at risk. For example, he sometimes vandalized post offices or cut communication wires to sever British connections. He had a very quick temper. Because of this habit, his father took him to Gandhi. Gandhi had come to Nainital and was soon to visit Bhowali. When Gandhi reached Bhowali, his father brought Bansidhar to meet him. Introducing him, his father said, "This is my son Bansidhar. He is devoted to freedom and has a very angry nature. That is why I have brought him to your service. Please tell me what I should do." Gandhi said, "Send him to my Wardha ashram. I am confident his nature will change." After that Bansidhar went with Gandhi to Wardha Ashram and stayed there for two years. Living there, Bansidhar began studying Gandhian teachings. Under their influence he learned to control his anger, and his dedication to the country grew. In 1942 Gandhi selected him for nonviolent Satyagraha. While taking part, he was arrested on 27 August 1942 and sentenced to fifteen months' imprisonment; he was released from prison on 6 November 1943. After independence he began working as a contractor. He died in Bhowali on 15 September 1978 at the age of 62.⁶

3. Dev Singh Bhakuni

Dev Singh Bhakuni was a leading freedom fighter of nonviolent Satyagraha and one of the early persons chosen by Gandhi for personal Satyagraha in Kumaon. Dev Singh was born in Shail-Chananda, Almora. His father's name was Laccham Singh Bhakuni and his mother's name was Ganga Devi. He had three brothers — Gopal Singh, Ganga Singh, Uttam Singh — and one sister, Vishnuli Devi.

He lived with his family in Shail-Chananda, Almora district. He studied up to class five. His wife's name was Panuli Devi. From her he had four sons: Puran Singh, Madan Singh, Harish Singh, and Indra Singh. After some time, he moved to Bhowali and settled there. In Bhowali he became a worker at the Gandhi Ashram and opened a shop. In 1942 he took part in the Satyagraha. While protesting he damaged government property, for which he was arrested and sentenced to five years' imprisonment on 26 November; for failing to pay a fine of two hundred rupees he received an additional six months' imprisonment. After independence he lived an ordinary life with his family. He died in Bhowali, Nainital, on 1 January 1975 due to illness.⁷

4. Veer Singh Sugahara

"Veer Singh Sunghara, who played an important role in India's freedom struggle, was a leading freedom fighter from Kumaon. He was also among the early individuals selected by Gandhi to participate in the non-violent Satyagraha movement." His father's name was Karam Singh, and he supported the family by running a small business. Veer Singh was born in Far Sauli village, near Bhowali, in Nainital district, where he also received his primary education. After completing his early education, he became actively involved in the Indian freedom movement. In 1941, Mahatma Gandhi selected him to participate in the non-violent Satyagraha campaign. Veer Singh informed the Additional District Magistrate (ADM) of Nainital about his intention to participate. On the same day, at around 2:00 pm at noon, he organized a Satyagraha in Far Sauli village, raising slogans against the British government and expressing his opposition to colonial rule.



He continued to play an active role in the freedom movement during 1941–1942. During this period, he participated in another Satyagraha at Kanchula Patti, Talla Lakhampur, where he again raised slogans against the British government. Following this protest, he was arrested at the spot and a case was registered against him. In 1941, under the court's judgment, he was sentenced to one year of imprisonment and fined ₹40 as a penalty.

Veer Singh remained an active participant in India's struggle for independence and continued to work for social welfare by following the path of Mahatma Gandhi. He passed away in Far Sauli village. In recognition of his contribution to the freedom struggle, the Government of India awarded him a Tamra Patra (Copper Plaque of Honour).⁸

5. Pitambar Pandey

Pitambar Pandey who played an important role in India's freedom struggle, was a leading freedom fighter from Kumaon. He was also among the early individuals selected by Gandhi to participate in the non-violent Satyagraha movement. He was born in 1906 in Far Sauli village at Bhowali. His Father name was Prem Ballabh Pandey. He lives with his family in Far Sauli village at Bhowali. He obtained education up to class three. He was married to Leelavati Pandey. He was a father of one son and two daughters. He participated in Gandhi's Satyagraha. He was arrested in the year 1930 while doing Satyagraha. After this, a case was filed against him. On 8th November 1930 he was given a punishment of 13 months of imprisonment at Kanpur Jail. On 13th November 1930 he was transferred to Bareilly Jail. On 7th February, 1931 he was free from the imprisonment. He also participated in Personal Satyagraha led by Gandhi in 1940. As a result, he was imposed a penalty of rupees three hundred. But he was unable to pay such a huge amount as a penalty. As a result of this, he was forced to an imprisonment of six months. In the year 1942, he re-participated in the freedom struggle movement.⁹

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