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Original Research Article

Freedom struggle and cultural consciousness: A historical analysis of Haryana's contribution

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ABSTRACT

The Indian freedom struggle was not merely a political movement against colonial rule but also a profound cultural awakening that transformed social, religious, linguistic, and regional identities across the subcontinent. Haryana, though constituted as a separate state only in 1966, occupies a distinctive place in the history of India's nationalist movement. The region's geographical location, agrarian social structure, martial traditions, and cultural heritage enabled its people to participate actively in various phases of anti-colonial resistance. From the uprising of 1857 to the Non-Cooperation Movement, Civil Disobedience Movement, Quit India Movement, and revolutionary activities, Haryana contributed significantly to the struggle for national liberation. Simultaneously, cultural consciousness emerged through educational reforms, social movements, revival of indigenous traditions, promotion of Hindi literature, folk culture, and community-based resistance to colonial domination.

This paper examines the interrelationship between the freedom struggle and cultural consciousness in Haryana. It analyses how political resistance was shaped by local cultural traditions and how nationalist ideology fostered a renewed sense of regional identity. The study highlights the contributions of notable leaders, peasant communities, educational institutions, reform movements, and folk traditions in strengthening anti-colonial sentiments. It argues that Haryana's contribution to India's freedom movement cannot be understood solely through political events; rather, it must be viewed through the broader lens of cultural transformation and collective consciousness. The paper also explores the continuing relevance of this historical legacy in contemporary Haryana.

1. Introduction

The struggle for India's independence was one of the most significant anti-colonial movements in world history. It involved not only political mobilization but also social reform, cultural renaissance, and intellectual awakening. Every region of India contributed uniquely to this movement, drawing upon its own historical experiences, cultural traditions, and social structures. Haryana, located in northern India, played an important role in shaping nationalist consciousness and participating in the freedom struggle [1].

Historically, Haryana has been regarded as the land of warriors and farmers. The region witnessed several decisive battles that shaped Indian history, including the famous Battles of Panipat. Its strategic location between Delhi and Punjab made it an important center of political and military activity throughout different historical periods [2]. During British rule, Haryana experienced significant socio-economic transformations, including changes in land revenue systems, commercialization of agriculture, and administrative restructuring. These changes affected local communities and contributed to the growth of anti-colonial sentiments.

The emergence of cultural consciousness in Haryana was closely linked to broader developments occurring throughout India. Reform movements such as the Arya Samaj, educational initiatives promoting indigenous knowledge, and the revival of

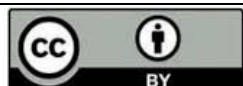
folk traditions contributed to the strengthening of regional and national identities [3]. Nationalist leaders recognized that political freedom required cultural self-respect and social reform. Consequently, cultural revival became an essential component of the freedom movement.

This paper seeks to explore the relationship between freedom struggle and cultural consciousness in Haryana. It examines how political resistance and cultural awakening reinforced one another and contributed to the development of nationalist sentiment. The study also highlights the role of peasants, students, reformers, women, and local leaders in shaping the region's contribution to India's independence movement.

2. Historical background of Haryana under British rule

The present-day state of Haryana formed part of the larger Punjab Province during British rule. Following the decline of the Mughal Empire and the rise of British political dominance, the region came under colonial administration. The British introduced new revenue systems, judicial structures, and administrative mechanisms that transformed traditional patterns of governance [4].

Agriculture constituted the backbone of Haryana's economy. Most of the population depended on farming, cattle rearing, and allied activities. Colonial land policies increased



pressure on rural communities through taxation and revenue demands. Although irrigation projects such as canals improved

agricultural productivity in some areas, the benefits were often unevenly distributed [5].

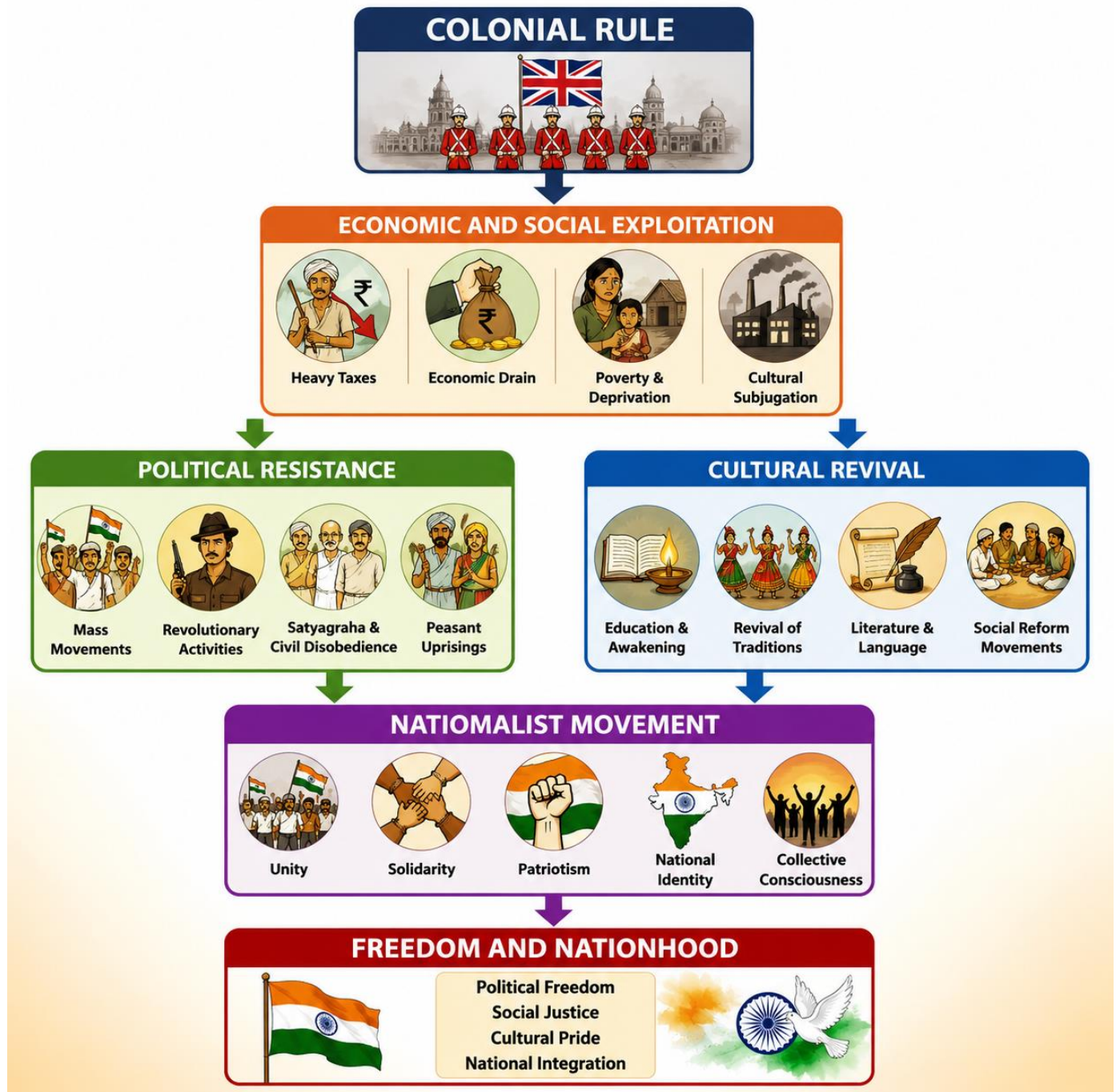


Figure 1: Conceptual relationship between freedom struggle and cultural consciousness.

The colonial economy encouraged commercialization of agriculture. Farmers increasingly cultivated cash crops to meet market demands, making them vulnerable to price fluctuations and indebtedness. Rural distress contributed to dissatisfaction with colonial rule and created conditions favorable for nationalist mobilization [6].

At the same time, the British administration recruited a large number of soldiers from Haryana into the colonial army. While military service provided employment opportunities, it also exposed local populations to broader political developments. Many soldiers later participated in nationalist activities and became carriers of anti-colonial ideas [7].

The social structure of Haryana was characterized by strong village communities, caste organizations, and kinship networks. These institutions played a significant role in mobilizing people during political movements. Village councils and community gatherings often became platforms for discussing nationalist issues [8].

3. Haryana and the revolt of 1857

The Revolt of 1857 marked the first major challenge to British rule in India and occupies a central place in the history of Haryana. Several districts of present-day Haryana emerged as important centers of resistance. The uprising reflected

widespread dissatisfaction among soldiers, peasants, landlords, and local rulers [9].

The rebellion spread rapidly across areas such as Rohtak, Hisar, Gurgaon, Rewari, Jhajjar, and Ambala. Local leaders mobilized people against colonial authorities and sought to restore indigenous political control. Among the most prominent figures associated with the revolt was Rao Tula Ram of Rewari, who became one of the leading military commanders resisting British forces [10].

Rao Tula Ram and Regional Resistance

Rao Tula Ram played a crucial role in organizing resistance against the British. He mobilized local resources, established alliances with neighboring rulers, and provided military leadership during the revolt. His efforts extended beyond Haryana, reflecting a broader vision of national liberation [11].

Rao Tula Ram's activities demonstrated how regional leadership contributed to the larger anti-colonial struggle. Although the rebellion was eventually suppressed, his legacy continued to inspire future generations of freedom fighters.

Role of Local Communities

Peasants and villagers actively participated in the revolt by attacking colonial establishments, disrupting communication networks, and supporting rebel forces. Community solidarity and local cultural values strengthened resistance efforts [12].

The suppression of the revolt was severe. Many leaders were executed, properties confiscated, and villages punished. However, memories of sacrifice became an enduring part of Haryana's cultural consciousness and later nationalist movements.

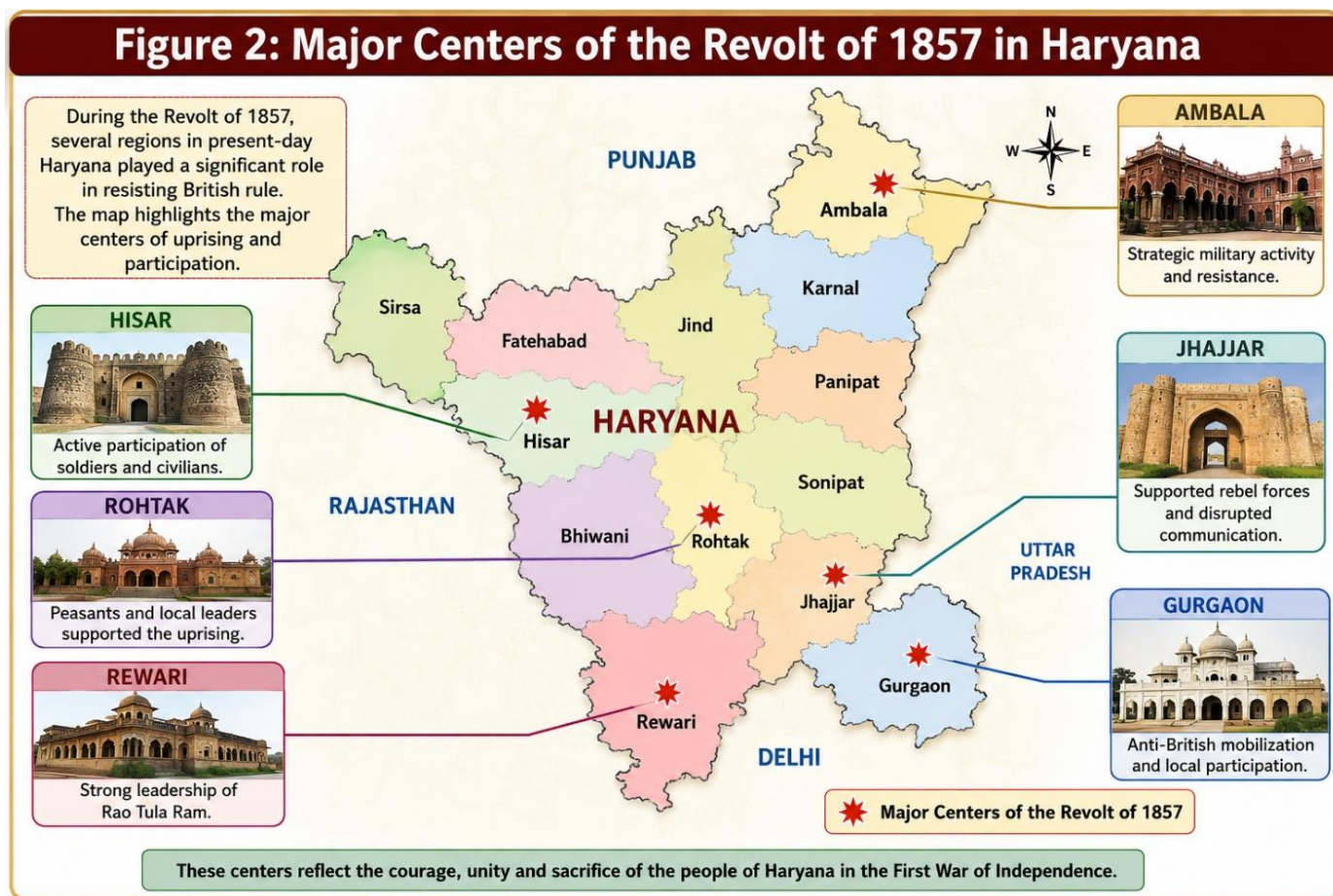


Figure 2: Major centers of the 1857 revolt in present-day Haryana.

4. Cultural consciousness and the Arya Samaj movement

The late nineteenth century witnessed the growth of socio-religious reform movements across India. In Haryana, the Arya Samaj emerged as one of the most influential organizations promoting cultural awakening and social reform [13].

Founded by Swami Dayanand Saraswati, the Arya Samaj advocated a return to Vedic principles while encouraging education, social equality, and national pride. Its activities had a profound impact on Haryana's society.

Arya Samaj institutions established schools and colleges that promoted indigenous values alongside modern education. These institutions became centers of nationalist thought and

produced many leaders who later participated in the freedom struggle [14].

The movement also challenged social evils such as caste discrimination, child marriage, and illiteracy. By encouraging social reform, it contributed to the creation of an informed and politically conscious society.

Region	Nature of participation
Rewari	Leadership of Rao Tula Ram
Rohtak	Peasant and local resistance
Jhajjar	Support to rebel forces
Gurgaon	Anti-British mobilization
Hisar	Military and civilian participation
Ambala	Strategic military activity

Promotion of Hindi and National Identity

Language played an important role in the development of cultural consciousness. Arya Samaj strongly supported the promotion of Hindi and Sanskrit, viewing them as symbols of national heritage [15].

The spread of Hindi literature and journalism facilitated communication of nationalist ideas among ordinary people. Newspapers, pamphlets, and public lectures became important instruments for political education and cultural revival.

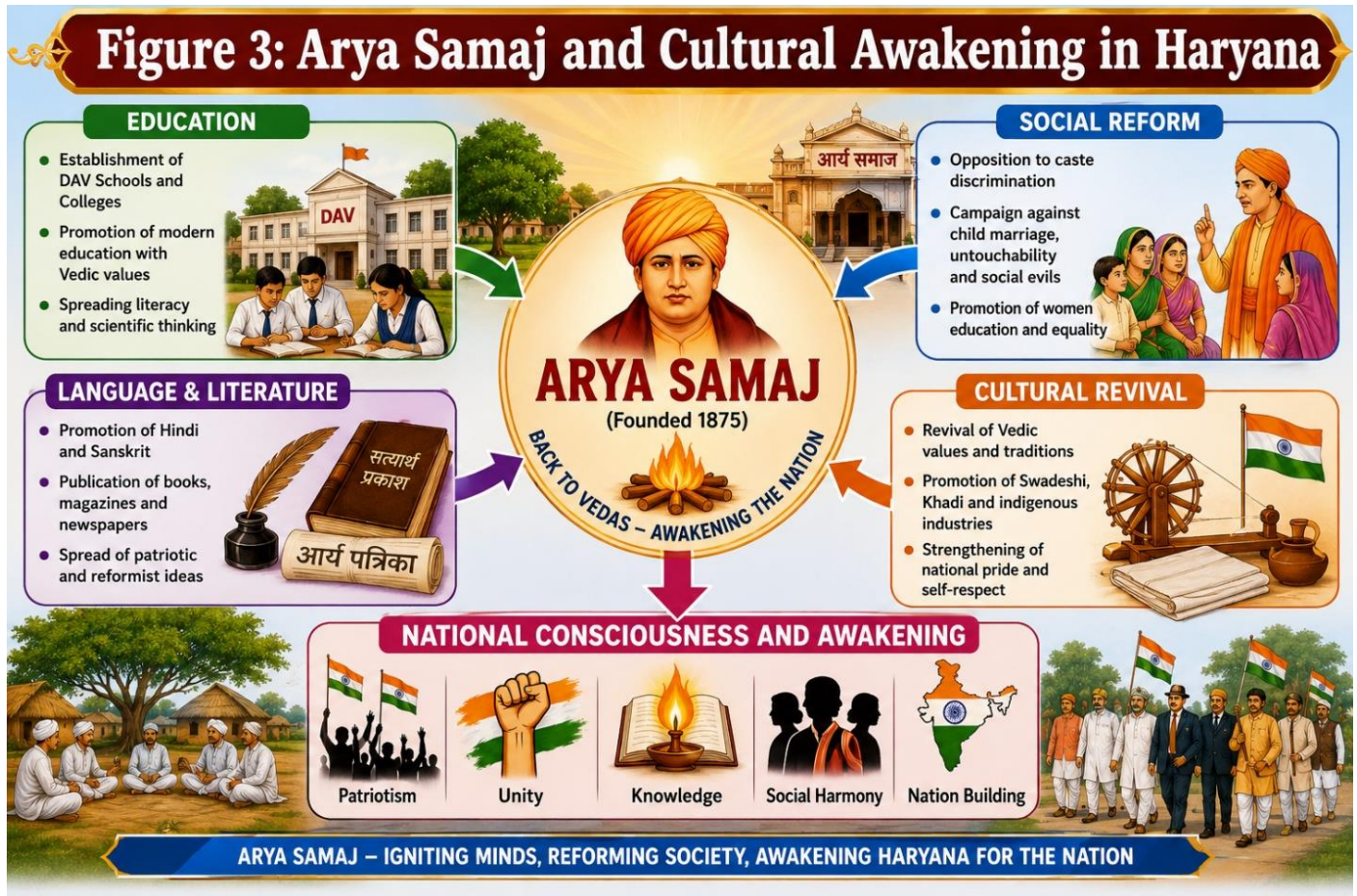


Figure 3: Arya Samaj and cultural awakening in Haryana.

5. Haryana in the non-cooperation movement (1920-22)

The launch of the Non-Cooperation Movement under Mahatma Gandhi marked a new phase in India's freedom struggle. Haryana responded enthusiastically to Gandhi's call for non-violent resistance [16].

Students boycotted government educational institutions, lawyers gave up legal practice, and citizens rejected foreign goods. Public meetings and processions were organized throughout the region to spread nationalist ideas.

Village communities played a crucial role in sustaining the movement. Traditional social networks facilitated communication and collective action. Khadi became a symbol of self-reliance and resistance to colonial economic domination [17].

The movement strengthened political awareness among peasants and rural populations. It also demonstrated the ability of cultural symbols to mobilize large sections of society in support of national objectives.

6. Participation in the civil disobedience movement

The Civil Disobedience Movement (1930-1934) represented another important phase in India's struggle for independence. Initiated by Mahatma Gandhi through the

historic Salt Satyagraha, the movement aimed to challenge the legitimacy of British authority through peaceful defiance of colonial laws [18]. Haryana, despite its predominantly rural character, actively participated in this nationwide campaign.

The movement found support among peasants, students, traders, and members of reform organizations. Public meetings were organized in towns such as Rohtak, Hisar, Gurgaon, Karnal, and Ambala. Nationalist leaders encouraged people to boycott foreign goods, refuse cooperation with colonial authorities, and promote indigenous industries.

One of the significant features of Haryana's participation was the increasing involvement of rural communities. Farmers who had long suffered from heavy taxation and exploitative revenue policies identified the nationalist movement with their own economic grievances. Consequently, political agitation became closely linked with social and economic demands [19].

The Civil Disobedience Movement also encouraged the expansion of constructive programmes. Volunteers promoted khadi, village industries, literacy campaigns, and social reform initiatives. These activities strengthened cultural self-confidence and contributed to the development of nationalist consciousness.

The British government responded with arrests, restrictions on public gatherings, and censorship of nationalist

publications. Despite repression, the movement succeeded in spreading political awareness throughout Haryana and deepening commitment to the cause of independence.

Impact on Rural Society

The participation of peasants was particularly significant because Haryana's social structure was overwhelmingly agrarian. Village communities became centers of political discussion and mobilization. Nationalist slogans were

incorporated into folk songs, local festivals, and community gatherings.

The Civil Disobedience Movement demonstrated that political resistance could not be separated from cultural identity. The defense of indigenous traditions and local autonomy became an integral part of anti-colonial activism [20].



Figure 4: Relationship between Agrarian Issues and Nationalist Mobilization in Haryana.

7. Revolutionary nationalism and Haryana

Although Haryana is often associated with Gandhian methods of resistance, revolutionary nationalism also influenced the region. The ideas of sacrifice, patriotism, and armed resistance attracted many young people who sought immediate action against colonial rule [21].

The proximity of Haryana to Punjab enabled the circulation of revolutionary literature and nationalist propaganda. Young activists came into contact with organizations inspired by revolutionary leaders such as Bhagat Singh, Chandrashekar Azad, and other anti-colonial activists.

Educational institutions played an important role in disseminating nationalist ideas. Students discussed political developments, read nationalist newspapers, and participated in demonstrations. The spread of print culture enhanced political communication and facilitated the formation of networks connecting Haryana with broader nationalist movements across northern India.

The revolutionary tradition contributed to cultural consciousness by emphasizing courage, sacrifice, and national

pride. Stories of revolutionary martyrs became part of popular memory and inspired future generations.

8. Role of educational institutions in national awakening

Education played a crucial role in shaping nationalist consciousness in Haryana. During the colonial period, schools and colleges became important sites for political socialization and cultural transformation.

Institutions influenced by nationalist and reformist ideologies promoted values of self-reliance, patriotism, and social responsibility. Arya Samaj educational institutions, in particular, emphasized indigenous cultural heritage while incorporating modern learning [22].

Students often participated actively in political campaigns. They attended public meetings, organized debates, distributed nationalist literature, and joined protest demonstrations. Educational institutions became centers where ideas about freedom, democracy, and social reform were discussed and debated.

The promotion of literacy facilitated the dissemination of nationalist writings. Newspapers and journals in Hindi reached wider audiences and contributed to the development of a politically informed public sphere.

Growth of Vernacular Literature

The expansion of vernacular education encouraged literary activity in Hindi and regional dialects. Writers used literature as a medium for expressing nationalist aspirations and criticizing colonial policies.

Poetry, essays, plays, and folk narratives conveyed messages of patriotism and collective identity. Literary works celebrated historical heroes, glorified sacrifice, and emphasized the importance of national unity [23].

9. Folk culture as a medium of national consciousness

One of the most remarkable aspects of Haryana's contribution to the freedom struggle was the role of folk culture in spreading nationalist ideas. Since a large proportion of the population lived in rural areas, folk traditions served as effective means of communication.

Folk songs, ballads, oral narratives, and traditional performances reflected contemporary political developments.

Nationalist themes were incorporated into cultural expressions, enabling people to connect local experiences with broader national objectives [24].

Folk Songs and Patriotism

Patriotic songs celebrated freedom fighters, criticized colonial oppression, and encouraged participation in nationalist movements. These songs were performed during community gatherings, fairs, festivals, and social events.

The oral nature of folk culture allowed nationalist messages to reach even those who lacked formal education. As a result, political awareness spread beyond urban centers into villages and remote rural areas.

Folk Theatre and Public Awareness

Traditional theatrical forms also played an important role in shaping public opinion. Performances depicting historical heroes, social reformers, and freedom fighters generated enthusiasm for the nationalist cause.

The use of local language and familiar cultural symbols enhanced the effectiveness of these performances. Cultural expression thus became a powerful instrument of political mobilization [25].

Figure 5: Folk Culture and Nationalist Communication



Figure 5: Folk Culture and Nationalist Communication.

Cultural form	Contribution to freedom struggle
Folk Songs	Spread patriotic sentiments
Ballads	Glorified freedom fighters
Folk Theatre	Political awareness
Community Gatherings	Public mobilization
Oral Traditions	Preservation of nationalist memory

10. Women and the freedom struggle in Haryana

The participation of women represented an important dimension of Haryana's contribution to the nationalist movement. Although traditional social norms often restricted women's public activities, the freedom struggle created opportunities for greater involvement in political and social affairs [26].

Women participated in demonstrations, picketing campaigns, educational initiatives, and constructive programmes. They supported the boycott of foreign goods, promoted khadi, and contributed to fundraising efforts for nationalist organizations.

The influence of reform movements such as Arya Samaj encouraged female education and social reform, thereby creating conditions for women's increased participation in public life. Women emerged as symbols of sacrifice, resilience, and patriotic commitment.

Cultural Transformation and Women's Agency

The freedom movement challenged conventional assumptions regarding gender roles. Participation in nationalist activities enabled women to assert greater agency and contribute directly to public affairs.

This transformation reflected broader changes in cultural consciousness. The struggle for national freedom became linked with aspirations for social equality and women's empowerment [27].

11. Haryana and the quit India movement

The Quit India Movement of 1942 represented the final mass struggle against British rule. Launched by Mahatma Gandhi with the slogan "Do or Die," the movement called for immediate independence and complete withdrawal of colonial authority [28].

In Haryana, nationalist activists organized protests, demonstrations, and acts of civil resistance. Although British authorities imposed severe restrictions and arrested many leaders, popular support for the movement remained strong.

The participation of students, peasants, and local activists reflected the growing maturity of nationalist consciousness. By this stage, anti-colonial sentiments had become deeply rooted in society.

The Quit India Movement demonstrated the culmination of decades of political and cultural mobilization. It revealed the extent to which nationalist ideals had penetrated rural and urban communities alike.

Repression and Resistance

The colonial administration responded with widespread arrests, censorship, and surveillance. Nevertheless, underground networks continued to operate and maintain communication among activists.

The sacrifices made during this period became an enduring source of inspiration and contributed to the collective memory of resistance in Haryana [29].

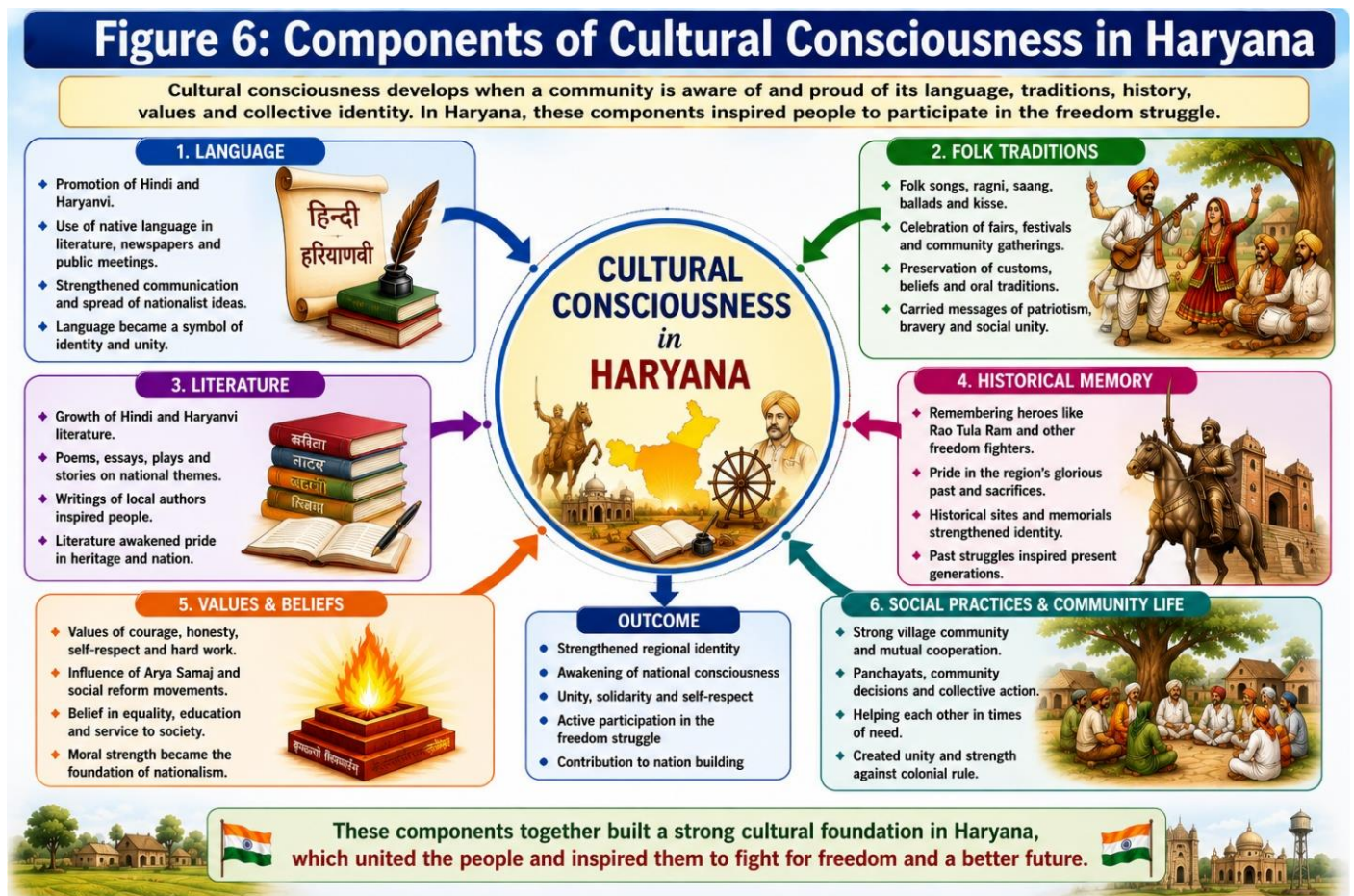


Figure 6: Components of cultural consciousness in Haryana.

12. Cultural symbols and national identity

Nationalist movements often rely upon symbols capable of inspiring collective action. In Haryana, cultural symbols played a significant role in strengthening national identity.

Khadi and Self-Reliance

Khadi represented economic independence and resistance to colonial exploitation. The promotion of spinning and weaving encouraged self-sufficiency and challenged the dominance of imported goods.

Historical Memory

The remembrance of historical heroes such as Rao Tula Ram and other regional leaders provided examples of courage and sacrifice. Their stories linked contemporary struggles with earlier traditions of resistance.

Language and Literature

Hindi emerged as a powerful medium for expressing nationalist aspirations. Literary works promoted patriotism, social reform, and cultural pride. Newspapers and journals facilitated communication among diverse social groups and strengthened national integration [30].

13. Socio-economic dimensions of nationalism

The development of nationalist consciousness in Haryana was influenced by socio-economic conditions. Colonial policies affected agriculture, trade, and rural livelihoods. Economic grievances often provided the foundation for political mobilization.

Peasant dissatisfaction with revenue demands and indebtedness contributed to support for nationalist movements. At the same time, educational expansion and social reform initiatives encouraged political awareness.

Nationalism thus emerged as a multidimensional phenomenon involving economic interests, cultural identity, and political aspirations. The interaction of these factors explains the broad participation of Haryana's population in the freedom struggle [31].

14. Legacy of the freedom struggle in contemporary Haryana

The legacy of the freedom movement continues to shape Haryana's cultural and political identity. Memorials, educational institutions, public commemorations, and local histories preserve the memory of those who contributed to the struggle for independence.

The values associated with the freedom movement—patriotism, self-reliance, social reform, and cultural pride—remain important components of public discourse. Educational curricula frequently emphasize the sacrifices of freedom fighters and the significance of national unity.

Contemporary Haryana also reflects the influence of cultural awakening initiated during the colonial period. The promotion of education, preservation of folk traditions, and celebration of regional heritage demonstrate the enduring impact of historical experiences.

The freedom struggle contributed not only to political independence but also to the formation of a confident cultural identity capable of adapting to modern challenges while preserving historical continuity [32].

15. Discussion

The historical experience of Haryana demonstrates that the freedom struggle in India was far more than a political campaign against colonial domination. It represented a comprehensive process of social transformation, cultural awakening, and identity formation. The participation of Haryana in this process reflected the region's unique socio-economic structure, historical traditions, and cultural resources.

One of the most significant observations emerging from this study is the close relationship between political resistance and cultural consciousness. Nationalist leaders recognized that political independence could not be achieved without cultural self-confidence. Consequently, movements promoting indigenous education, vernacular languages, social reform, and folk traditions became essential components of anti-colonial mobilization. Haryana provides an excellent example of this phenomenon because cultural revival and political activism developed simultaneously and reinforced one another.

The legacy of the Revolt of 1857 occupied a particularly important place in regional memory. Although the uprising failed militarily, its symbolic significance endured for decades. The sacrifices of leaders such as Rao Tula Ram inspired later generations and contributed to the development of collective resistance against colonial rule. Historical memory thus functioned as a powerful source of cultural consciousness and nationalist sentiment.

Another important feature of Haryana's contribution was the role of rural society. Unlike some regions where nationalism initially remained confined to urban elites, Haryana witnessed substantial participation from peasants and village communities. The agrarian character of the region ensured that economic grievances were closely linked to political demands. Colonial revenue policies, indebtedness, and agricultural challenges encouraged rural populations to support nationalist movements.

The influence of the Arya Samaj deserves particular attention. The organization contributed significantly to educational development, social reform, and cultural revival. By promoting Vedic values, indigenous education, and the Hindi language, Arya Samaj strengthened cultural confidence and facilitated the spread of nationalist ideas. Many leaders associated with the freedom movement were influenced by the reformist ideals propagated by the organization.

The role of folk culture further illustrates the depth of nationalist consciousness in Haryana. Folk songs, oral narratives, ballads, and theatrical performances transmitted political messages to largely rural audiences. Since literacy levels remained relatively low in many areas, cultural forms served as effective instruments of political communication. The incorporation of nationalist themes into traditional cultural expressions enabled the movement to reach broader sections of society.

Women also emerged as important participants in the freedom struggle. Their involvement reflected changing social attitudes and demonstrated the transformative impact of nationalist politics. Participation in public activities, educational initiatives, and political campaigns contributed to greater recognition of women's role in society. This development highlighted the broader social dimensions of the freedom movement.

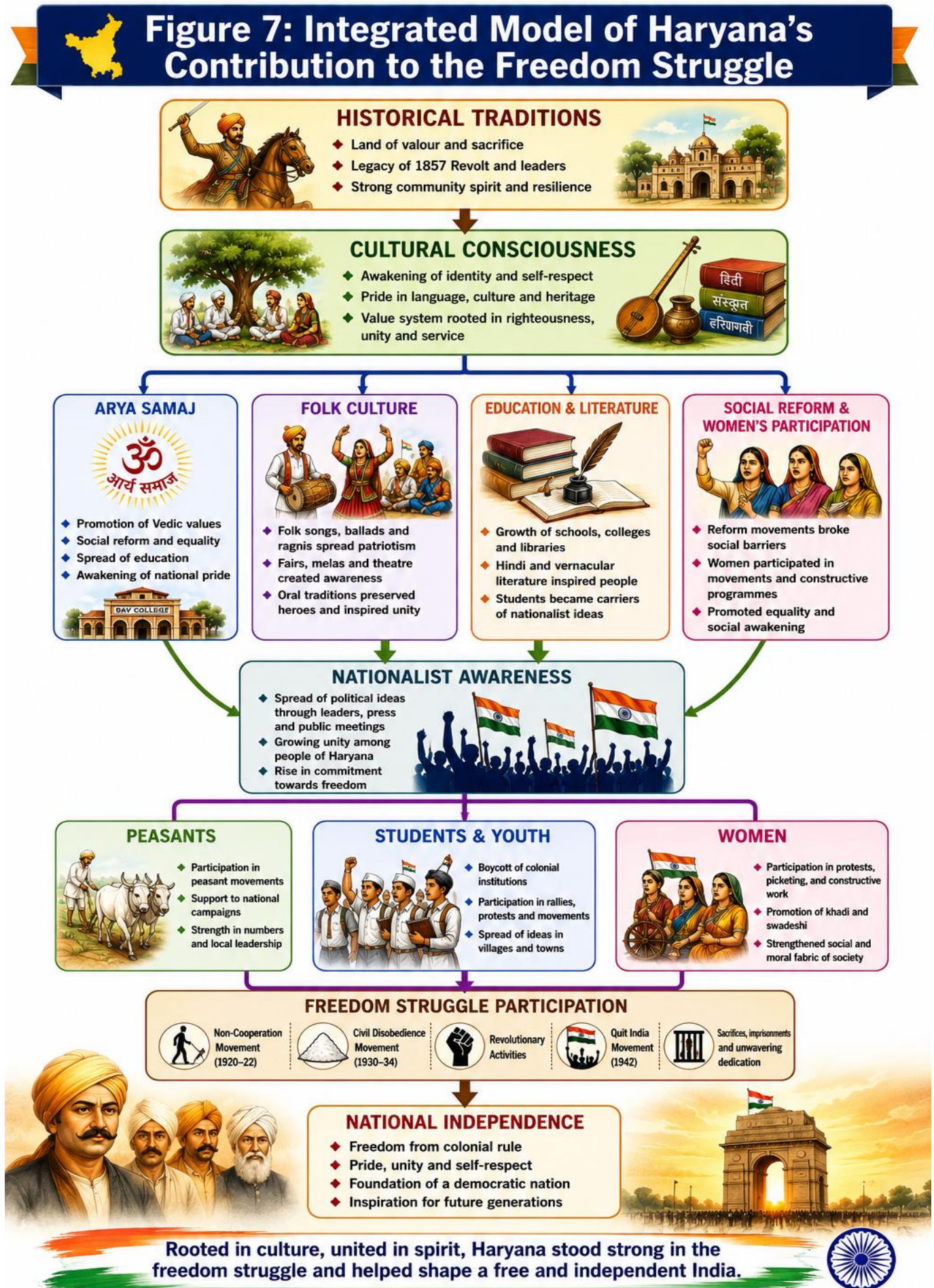


Figure 7: Integrated model of Haryana's contribution to the freedom struggle.

16. Conclusion

The freedom struggle in Haryana represents an important chapter in the broader history of India's independence movement. Although the region was not a separate administrative unit during the colonial period, its people played a significant role in resisting British rule and promoting nationalist ideals. From the Revolt of 1857 to the Quit India Movement, Haryana consistently contributed to the development and expansion of anti-colonial resistance.

The historical analysis presented in this study demonstrates that political mobilization in Haryana was deeply connected with cultural consciousness. The emergence of nationalist sentiment was facilitated by educational reforms, social movements, vernacular literature, folk traditions, and historical memory. These cultural processes created a foundation upon which political activism could flourish.

The Revolt of 1857, particularly the leadership of Rao Tula Ram, provided an enduring symbol of resistance and patriotism. Subsequent nationalist movements built upon this legacy and expanded political participation among diverse social groups. Peasants, students, reformers, intellectuals, and women all contributed to the growth of anti-colonial consciousness.

The Arya Samaj played a pivotal role in promoting social reform, education, and cultural revival. Its emphasis on indigenous values and national pride strengthened resistance to colonial domination and encouraged participation in the freedom movement. Similarly, folk culture served as an effective medium for spreading nationalist ideas among rural populations and preserving collective memories of struggle and sacrifice.

The study also highlights the importance of understanding nationalism as a multidimensional phenomenon. Economic grievances, social reforms, cultural revival, and political activism were closely interconnected. The freedom struggle in Haryana cannot be reduced to a sequence of political events; it must be viewed as a broader process of societal transformation and identity formation.

The legacy of this historical experience continues to influence contemporary Haryana. Public commemorations, educational initiatives, and cultural practices preserve the memory of those who contributed to India's independence. The values of patriotism, self-reliance, social responsibility, and cultural pride remain integral to the region's identity.

In conclusion, Haryana's contribution to India's freedom struggle was substantial and multifaceted. The region not only participated actively in political movements but also played a significant role in fostering cultural consciousness and national identity. By examining these interconnected processes, the present study contributes to a deeper understanding of both regional history and the broader dynamics of India's struggle for independence.

Author contributions

The author solely conceived the study, reviewed the literature, analyzed the available evidence, interpreted the findings, and prepared the manuscript.

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Conflict of interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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