

Course Name- B.A.L.L.B. IIInd Sem.

Subject- History

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Topic- Emergence of Mahatma Gandhi

## **Civil Disobedience Movement in India**

The Civil Disobedience Movement was one of the most significant movements launched by Mahatma Gandhi in the course of India's freedom struggle.

### **Causes of Civil Disobedience Movement**

There were three main causes of the civil disobedience movement:

- 1 Formation of the Simon Commission
2. Demand for Dominion Status
3. Protests against the arrest of social revolutionaries

### **Formation of the Simon Commission**

In November 1927 the British government in the UK constituted the Indian Statutory Commission, popularly known as the Simon Commission after the name of its Chairman to recommend further Constitutional reforms in India. However, no Indian was nominated as a member of the commission that resulted in outrage against the All-White commission in India since this action of the British government, which excluded Indians from the Simon Commission, implied that Indians were not fit to decide the next course of constitutional reforms. Consequently,

there were huge demonstrations and strikes in different cities of India wherever the commission visited.

## **Demand for Dominion Status**

In the Calcutta session of Indian National Congress (INC) of December 1928, a demand for dominion status (Swaraj) was raised and a period of one year was given to the British Indian government to accept the Congress demands failing which nothing short of complete Independence from foreign rule would become the primary objective of the Congress and a Civil Disobedience movement under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi would be launched to realise this objective.

## **Protests against the arrest of social revolutionaries**

On 8th April 1929, Bhagat Singh and Batukeshwar Dutt of Hindustan Socialist Republican Army (HSRA) threw harmless bombs in the Central Legislative Assembly and were arrested. In jail, the members of the HSRA went on a prolonged hunger strike demanding better treatment for political prisoners, and the death of one of them, Jatin Das, on the 64th day of the hunger strike led to some of the biggest demonstrations the country had ever witnessed.

However, very soon it became clear to the nationalist leaders that the British government was not sincere in meeting the demand for Dominion Status and therefore the INC met at an emergency session at Lahore in December 1929 under the Presidentship of Jawaharlal Nehru and declared Complete Independence or 'Purna Swaraj' as the Congress goal and also authorized Mahatma Gandhi to launch a comprehensive programme of civil disobedience at a time and place of his choosing.

### **Dandi March (Salt Satyagraha)**

Mahatma Gandhi was preparing for a mass movement on the lines of the Civil Disobedience Movement for a long time. He was looking for a symbol around which the entire movement could be centered and he hit upon the idea of salt as a tax on salt, in his opinion, was the most oppressive form of tax which humankind could devise since salt was a basic necessity of human existence, just like air and water.

Therefore breaking of salt laws would be the most suitable way to launch the Civil Disobedience Movement.

The Dandi March commenced on 12th March 1930 from Sabarmati Ashram in Gujarat towards the coastal village of Dandi which is about 390 km in distance. Gandhi along with 78 followers set out on foot towards

Dandi. They covered the distance between Sabarmati Ashram and Dandi in 25 days and reached the coast of Dandi on 6th April 1930 where by picking up a handful of salt, Gandhi broke the salt laws and launched the mass Civil Disobedience Movement. Sarojini Naidu was among the leaders who accompanied Mahatma Gandhi during the Dandi March

## **Spread and Methods of Civil Disobedience Movement**

With Gandhi's symbolic breaking of salt laws at Dandi, defiance of salt laws started all over the country. The places where defiance of salt laws took place and their respective leaders are highlighted below:

<b>Defiance of Salt Laws (Salt Satyagraha)</b>	<b>Leaders</b>
Tamil Nadu	C Rajagopalachari
Malabar	K Kelapam
Dharasana Salt Works (Gujarat)	Sarojini Naidu and Manilal Gandhi

The defiance of salt laws at Dharasana salt works deserves mention due to its sheer magnitude in which a band of 2000 volunteers offered non-violent resistance in the face of a strong police contingent armed with

steel-tipped lathis and set upon the non-resisting Satyagrahis (protestors) till they fell down.

**Apart from defiance of salt laws, the other forms of non-violent protests included the following:**

1. Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan raised the band of non-violent revolutionaries, the **Khudai Khidmatgars**, popularly known as the Red Shirts in the Peshawar region in the North West Frontier Province which played a crucial role in the Civil Disobedience Movement.
2. Women, young mothers, widowed and unmarried girls, played an important role in the picketing of liquor shops and opium dens and stores selling foreign cloth. They used non-violent and persuasive means to convince the buyers and sellers to change their ways. They were ably supported by the students and youth in the boycott of foreign cloth and liquor.
3. In Bihar, anti-Chowkidara tax campaign was initiated where villages refused to pay protection money to the local guards (chowkidars) who supplemented the meagre police forces in the rural areas. Rajendra Prasad took part in the anti-Chowkidara tax campaigns in Bihar.
4. In Gujarat, a no-tax movement took place against payment of land revenue. This was most visible in Kheda, Surat and Broach districts. Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel led the no-tax campaign in the Kheda district.

5. Defiance of forest laws took place on a large scale in Maharashtra, Karnataka and the Central Provinces, especially in areas with large tribal populations.
6. In Assam, a powerful agitation led by students was launched against the '**Cunningham circular**' which forced students and their guardians to furnish assurances of good behaviour.
7. In U.P, a no-revenue, no-rent campaign was organized against the government which soon turned into a no-rent campaign against the zamindars. Jawaharlal Nehru played an important role in organizing the no-revenue, no-rent campaign and the districts of Agra and Rae Bareilly were the important centers of this campaign. The movement also popularized a variety of forms of mobilization like Prabhat Pheris, Patrikas, and Magic Lanterns.

## **Government Response and End of the Civil Disobedience Movement**

The civil disobedience movement reached its peak by the end first half of 1930. The government's attitude was marked by ambivalence. Since the movement remained largely non-violent, the government fell into the trap of "damned if you do, damned if you don't". Either way, it led to the erosion of the hegemony of the British government. After a lot of vacillation, the government finally ordered Mahatma Gandhi's arrest on May 4, 1930, when he announced his resolve to lead the raids on Dharasana Salt Works.

In a conciliatory gesture, the Viceroy Lord Irwin in July 1930 suggested a Round Table Conference and reiterated the goal of Dominion Status. This marked the beginning of the end of the Civil Disobedience Movement. However, the actual **movement ended in two stages** as we shall see.

## **Gandhi-Irwin Pact**

In order to lay the groundwork for the Round Table Conference to be held in England, Mahatma Gandhi entered into fortnight-long discussions with the Viceroy Lord Irwin which culminated on 5th March 1931 in the **Gandhi-Irwin Pact** signed by Gandhi on behalf of the Congress and by Lord Irwin on behalf of the British India government.

### **The main agreements of the Gandhi-Irwin Pact included:**

1. Immediate release of all political prisoners not convicted for violence
2. Return of confiscated lands not yet sold to third parties
3. Lenient treatment for those government employees who had resigned
4. Right to make salt for consumption to villages along the coast
5. Right to peaceful and non-aggressive picketing

However, the following two demands of Gandhi and Congress were turned down:

1. Demand for a public inquiry into police excesses
2. Commutation of the death sentences of Bhagat Singh, Rajguru, Sukhdev and other political prisoners

The Congress, on its part, agreed to discontinue the Civil Disobedience Movement and also participate in the 2nd Round Table Conference to be held in London.

The Gandhi-Irwin pact is significant since it, for the first time, placed the Congress and the Government on an equal footing and the government had to recognize Gandhi as the representative of the Congress and the leader of masses who had orchestrated a non-violent mass movement which the government was unable to halt in spite of its massive resources.

With these developments, **the first phase of the Civil Disobedience Movement came to an end.**

In August 1931 Mahatma Gandhi set sail for London to attend the 2nd Round Table Conference (RTC).

Meanwhile, in India, Lord Irwin was replaced by the reactionary Lord Willingdon as the Viceroy. The Indian delegates at the 2nd RTC were hand-picked loyalists of the British crown who claimed that the Congress did not represent the interests of all Indians and neutralized Gandhi's efforts to confront the imperialist rulers on the moot question of India's freedom, for which the Civil Disobedience Movement had been launched.

The British government refused to entertain Gandhi's basic question of India's freedom and the 2nd Round Table Conference ended in failure from the Congress viewpoint and Mahatma Gandhi returned to India at the end of December 1931.

The Congress Working Committee met at Bombay on 29th December 1931, the next day of the Mahatma's return from London, and decided to resume Civil Disobedience.

However, this time the government was in no mood to engage with the Congress and Mahatma Gandhi and it launched a pre-emptive strike against the national movement by arresting Gandhi, promulgating ordinances, suspending civil liberties and, in fact, a state of Civil Martial Law existed throughout the country. All the leading Congressmen were arrested within a week. Non-violent civil disobedience was crushed with utmost ruthlessness. Protests, demonstrations, peaceful picketing of shops were declared illegal.

The government plan was to not allow Gandhi and the Congress to build up the momentum of the Civil Disobedience Movement as it did in 1930 and it worked. The movement was effectively crushed within a few months. The movement continued to linger in a non-effective manner till early **April 1934** when

Mahatma Gandhi announced his decision to withdraw the Civil Disobedience Movement.

With these developments, **the second phase of the Civil Disobedience Movement came to an end.**

### **Significance and Impact of the Civil Disobedience Movement**

Even though the Civil Disobedience Movement did not succeed in attaining its main objective of independence from British Rule or even manage to obtain the concession of Dominion Status from the government, it had a significant impact for the following reasons:

1. The number of participants was much more in the Civil Disobedience Movement as compared to the Non-Cooperation Movement. More than three times the number of Satyagrahis went to jail.
2. Foreign import of cloth and cigarettes fell by half. Government income from land revenue and liquor excise also took a hit.
3. The movement saw the participation of poor and illiterate people on a large scale who also unhesitatingly went to jail for the just cause.
4. Women and students participated in the movement on a large scale and it was a liberating experience for Indian women who entered the public space in such large numbers for the first time.
5. Muslims participated actively in the North-West Frontier Province and Bengal. The Muslim weaving

community in Bihar, Delhi, and Lucknow was also effectively mobilized.

Most importantly, as mentioned above, it was for the first time that the government negotiated with Mahatma Gandhi and the Congress as an equal which had not happened earlier in the freedom struggle.

## **Non-Cooperation Movement**

The non-cooperation movement was launched on 1<sup>st</sup> August 1920 by the Indian National Congress (INC) under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. It signified a new chapter in the history of Indian freedom struggle

### **Non-Cooperation Movement and Mahatma Gandhi**

Mahatma Gandhi was the main force behind the non-cooperation movement. In March 1920, he issued a manifesto declaring a doctrine of the non-violent non-cooperation movement. Gandhi, through this manifesto, wanted people to:

1. Adopt swadeshi principles
2. Adopt swadeshi habits including hand spinning & weaving
3. Work for the eradication of untouchability from society

Gandhi travelled across the nation in 1921 explaining the tenets of the movement.

### **Features of the Non-Cooperation Movement**

- The movement was essentially a peaceful and non-violent protest against the British government in India.

- Indians were asked to relinquish their titles and resign from nominated seats in the local bodies as a mark of protest.
- People were asked to resign from their government jobs.
- People were asked to withdraw their children from government-controlled or aided schools and colleges.
- People were asked to boycott foreign goods and use only Indian-made goods.
- People were asked to boycott the elections to the legislative councils.
- People were asked not to serve in the British army.
- It was also planned that if the above steps did not bring results, people would refuse to pay their taxes.
- The INC also demanded Swarajya or self-government.
- Only completely non-violent means would be employed to get the demands fulfilled.
- The non-cooperation movement was a decisive step in the independence movement because, for the first time, the INC was ready to forego constitutional means to achieve self-rule.

- Gandhiji had assured that Swaraj would be achieved in a year if this movement was continued to completion.

## **Causes of Non-Cooperation Movement**

- **Resentment at the British after the war:** Indians thought that in return for the extensive support of manpower and resources they had provided to Britain during the First World War, they would be rewarded by autonomy at the end of the war. But the Government of India Act 1919 was dissatisfactory. In addition, the British also passed repressive acts like the Rowlatt Act which further angered many Indians who felt betrayed by the rulers despite their wartime support.
- **Home Rule Movement:** The Home Rule Movement started by Annie Besant and Bal Gangadhar Tilak set the stage for the non-cooperation movement. The extremists and the moderates of the INC were united and the Lucknow Pact also saw solidarity between the Muslim League and the Congress Party. The return of the extremists gave the INC a militant character.
- **Economic hardships due to World War I:** India's indirect participation in the war

caused a lot of economic hardships to the people. Prices of goods began to soar which affected the common man. Peasants also suffered because the prices of agricultural products did not increase. All this led to resentment against the government.

- **The Rowlatt Act and the Jallianwala Bagh massacre:** The repressive Rowlatt Act and the brutal massacre at Jallianwala Bagh, Amritsar had a profound effect on the Indian leaders and the people. Their faith in the British system of justice was broken and the whole country rallied behind its leaders who were pitching for a more aggressive and firm stance against the government.
- **The Khilafat Movement:** During the First World War, Turkey, which was a German ally, had fought against the British. After Turkey's defeat, the Ottoman caliphate was proposed to be dissolved. The Khilafat movement was launched by Muslims in India to persuade the British government not to abolish the caliphate. The leaders of this movement accepted the non-cooperation movement of Gandhiji and led a joint protest against the British.

## **Why was the Non-Cooperation Movement suspended?**

- Gandhiji called off the movement in February 1922 in the wake of the Chauri Chaura incident.
- In Chauri Chaura, Uttar Pradesh, a violent mob set fire to a police station killing 22 policemen during a clash between the police and protesters of the movement.
- Gandhiji called off the movement saying people were not ready for revolt against the government through ahimsa. A lot of leaders like Motilal Nehru and C R Das were against the suspension of the movement only due to sporadic incidents of violence.

## **Significance of Non-Cooperation Movement**

- Swaraj was not achieved in one year as Gandhiji had told.
- However, it was a truly mass movement where lakhs of Indians participated in the open protest against the government through peaceful means.
- It shook the British government who were stumped by the extent of the movement.
- It saw participation from both Hindus and Muslims thereby showcasing communal harmony in the country.

- This movement established the popularity of the Congress Party among the people.
- As a result of this movement, people became conscious of their political rights. They were not afraid of the government.
- Hordes of people thronged to jails willingly.
- The Indian merchants and mill owners enjoyed good profits during this period as a result of the boycott of British goods. Khadi was promoted.
- The import of sugar from Britain reduced considerably during this period.
- This movement also established Gandhiji as a leader of the masses.





















