

Civil disobedience movement

Introduction:

- Civil disobedience is the active, professed refusal of a citizen to obey certain laws, demands, orders or commands of a government
- In India, Civil disobedience movement was a landmark event in the Indian Nationalist movement.
- In many ways, the civil disobedience movement is credited for paving the way for freedom in India

Background:

- The abrupt withdrawal of the Non-Cooperation Movement by Gandhi after the Chauri Chaura incident of February 1922, had a demoralising effect on many Congress leaders and led to a sharp decline in the national movement
- The Swarajist programme of wrecking dyarchy from within, petered out into council and municipal politicking.
- The 'No Changer' group which emphasised upon Gandhian Constructive Work in villages remained scattered and kept themselves aloof from the political developments.
- The remarkable Hindu-Muslim unity of the Non-Cooperation Khilafat days dissolved into widespread communal riots in the mid-1920s
- Negotiations with Jinnah over the Nehru Report plan for an alternative constitution broke down in 1927-28 largely because of Hindu Mahasabha opposition and Jinnah's obstinacy in relation to it
- Even though the Hindu-Muslim Unity were never regained, there were many signs of growth of anti-imperialist movement from 1928 onwards, as follows:
 - Demonstration and hartals in towns in the course of the boycott of the Simon Commission
 - Militant communist led workers movement in Bombay and Calcutta which alarmed Indian businessmen and British officials and capitalists alike

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- The revival of revolutionary groups in Bengal and Northern India (with Bhagat Singh's HSRA introducing a new secular and socialistic tone)
- Peasant movements in various regions, particularly the successful Bardoli Satyagraha led by Vallabhbhai Patel in Gujarat in 1928 against the enhancement of land revenue
- Also, during this period when the Congress Left was emerging, under Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhas Bose slogans of Purna Swaraj rather than of only Dominion Status were voiced.
- Further, there existed certain political and Economic tensions between British Domination and Indian interests; some of which are as follows:
- Contradictions were enormously sharpened by the impact of the World Depression which set in from late 1929. Business groups were not happy with the British tariff policy.
- Lancashire textile imports were going up again, and there were growing conflicts in Calcutta between the Birlas and British Jute interests, and in Bombay over coastal shipping.
- The workers facing large scale retrenchment started agitations with unprecedented militancy and organization.
- Rural tensions were sharpened by stagnation in agrarian production and by British efforts to enhance land revenue in Ryotwari areas in the late 1920s-till the Bardoli victory halted such endeavours permanently

Civil Disobedience Movement (1930-1931):

- The Lahore Congress (1929) left the choice of the precise methods of non-violent struggle for Purna Swaraj to Gandhi.
- It was resolved that a Manifesto or pledge of Independence would be taken all over India by as many people as possible on 26 January 1930.
- On this day Civil disobedience was supposed to commence and It was declared Independence Day.

Gandhi's Efforts:

- Gandhi was still not sure of his action.

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- Before launching the movement he once again tried for compromise Government.
- He placed ‘eleven points’ of administrative reform and stated that if Lord Irwin accepted them there would be no need for agitation.

The important demands were:

- The rupee-Sterling ratio should be reduced
- Land revenue should be reduced by half and made a subject of legislative control
- Salt tax should be abolished and also the government salt monopoly
- Salaries of the highest grade services should be reduced by half
- Military expenditure should be reduced by 50% to begin with
- Protection for Indian textiles and coastal shipping
- All Political prisoners should be discharged

Beginning of the Movement: Dandi March

- Gandhi took the decision to start the movement.
- On 12 March 1930 Gandhi started the Historic Salt March from his Sabarmati Ashram to Dandi beach accompanied by his 78 selected followers.
- There Gandhi and his followers broke the law by manufacturing salt from the sea. The Programme of the movement was as follows:
 - Salt law should be violated everywhere.
 - Students should leave colleges and government servants should resign from service.
 - Foreign clothes should be burnt.
 - No taxes should be paid to the government.
 - Women should stage a Dharna at liquor shops, etc.
- Thus, the historic march, marking the launch of the Civil Disobedience Movement, began on March 12, and Gandhi broke the salt law by picking up a lump of salt at Dandi on April 6

Spread of Movement:

- Once the way was cleared by Gandhi's ritual at Dandi, defiance of the salt laws started all over the country
- Gandhi's arrest came on May 4, 1930 when he had announced that he would lead a raid on Dharasana Salt Works on the west coast
- The onset of Monsoon made the salt manufacture difficult and the Congress switched to other forms of mass struggle, all characterised by a similar pattern of careful choice of social issues, followed by their broadening and radicalisation through a variety of populist initiatives, such as:
 - non-payment of revenue in ryotwari areas;
 - no-chowkidara-tax campaign in zamindari areas; and
 - violation of forest laws in the Central Provinces.
- Social boycott of Police and lower level administrative officials led to many resignations

Response at Different Places:

Tamil Nadu:

- In April 1930, C. Rajagopalachari organised a march from Thiruchirapalli to Vedaranniyam on the Tanjore (or Thanjavur) coast to break the salt law.
- The event was followed by widespread picketing of foreign cloth shops and anti-liquor campaign

Malabar:

- Kelappan, a Nair Congress leader famed for the Vaikom Satyagraha, organised salt marches
- Andhra Region
- District salt marches were organised in east and west Godavari, Krishna and Guntur. A number of sibirams (military style camps) were set up to serve as the headquarters of the Salt Satyagraha.

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Bengal:

- Bengal provided the largest number of arrests as well as the highest amount of violence.
- Midnapur, Arambagh and several rural pockets witnessed powerful movements developed around salt satyagraha and chaukidari tax.
- During the same period, Surya Sen's Chittagong revolt group carried out a raid on two armouries and declared the establishment of a provisional government

Bihar:

- Champaran and Saran were the first two districts to start salt satyagraha
- However, very soon, a very powerful non-chaukidari tax agitation replaced the salt satyagraha (owing to physical constraints in making salt)

Peshawar:

- Here, Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan's educational and social reform work among the Pathans had politicised them.
- Gaffar Khan, also called Badshah Khan and Frontier Gandhi, had started the first Pushto political monthly Pukhtoon and had organised a volunteer brigade 'KhudaiKhidmatgars', popularly known as the 'Red-Shirts', who were pledged to the freedom struggle and non-violence

Dharasana:

- On May 21, 1930, Sarojini Naidu, Imam Sahib and Manilal (Gandhi's son) took up the unfinished task of leading a raid on the Dharasana Salt Works.
- The unarmed and peaceful crowd was met with a brutal lathicharge

United Provinces:

- A no-revenue campaign was organised; a call was given to zamindars to refuse to pay revenue to the government.
- Under a no-rent campaign, a call was given to tenants against zamindars

Response of different Sections:

- The Militant urban educated youth tended to be attracted more by Revolutionary Terrorism in Bengal, and in North Indian towns because of Bhagat Singh's popularity
- The most weakest point of Nationalism during this point was the Muslim participation, which remained low
- Still, some areas such as the NWFP saw an overwhelming participation. Middle class Muslim participation was quite significant in Senhatta, Tripura, Gaibandha, Bagura and Noakhali.
- In Dacca, Muslim leaders, shopkeepers, lower class people and upper class women were active
- Such lags were largely made up by the massive peasant mobilization and considerable support from business groups
- Traders' associations and commercial bodies were active in implementing the boycott, especially in Tamil Nadu and Punjab
- A novel and remarkable feature of the Movement was the widespread participation of women
- The handful of postgraduate women students in 1930s still went to class escorted by their teachers, and yet there were women from far more socially conservative professional, business or peasant families, picketing shops, facing lathis, and going to jail

Government Attitude:

- The British Government followed a policy of repression to suppress the movement.
- Even before the movement was actually started, thousands of Congress workers were arrested and put in jails
- On 23 August 1930, the Bengal ordinance was promulgated and the life of freedom fighters was made very hard.
- The Press Act of 1910 was strictly enforced and many restrictions was put on the newspapers.
- Many newspapers and magazines stopped their publications.
- Civilian property was destroyed.

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- Innocent men and women were beaten up. Prisoners were starved and suffocated.
- Hundreds of men and women were killed as a result of police firing.

Efforts for truce:

- The government's attitude throughout 1930 was ambivalent as it was puzzled and perplexed
- In July 1930 the viceroy, Lord Irwin, suggested a round table conference and reiterated the goal of dominion status.
- He also accepted the suggestion that Tej Bahadur Sapru and M.R. Jayakar be allowed to explore the possibility of peace between the Congress and the government
- Further, In August 1930 Motilal and Jawaharlal Nehru were taken to Yeravada Jail to meet Gandhi and discuss the possibility of a settlement. Here, Nehru and Gandhi unequivocally reiterated the demands of:
 - right of secession from Britain;
 - complete national government with control over defence and finance; and
 - An independent tribunal to settle Britain's financial claims.