

Civil Disobedience Movement and Round Table Conferences

In 1920-22, the main technique stressed for the achievement of 'Swaraj' (independence) was *non-cooperation* with the imperial system. The civil disobedience part of the 1921 programme was not put into practice. The legislative experiences of 1923-1927 were not satisfying for the realization of swaraj and, hence at the Madras congress of 1927, it was decided to boycott the Simon Commission.

The Simon Commission didn't win Indian confidence because it was an all white body and was opposed also by the Indian liberals. Although immediate provocation for the launch of Salt Satyagraha was Simon Commission. The phase of 1930-34 in the freedom movement, timing of Salt Satyagraha and Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) should be viewed in the backdrop of latent Indian grievances and unfulfilled expectations. These alongwith the following events coalesced to propel the struggle during this phase: nortment

- Appointment of Simon Commission.
- Nehru Report of 1928 demanded dominion status for India.
- Economic Depression of 1930's had its impact:
 - World economic depression affected Indian industry, commerce and labour.
 - Cotton prices crashed in world market affecting Indian cotton exports.
 - Rationalization in textile mills, rendering shunting of labour.
 - Large scale labour strikes in Bombay, Calcutta, and Jamshedpur during 1928-29.
 - Arrest of labour leaders and trial of Meerut Conspiracy Case in 1929.
- Youth unrest in India.
 - Formation of youth organization all over India.
 - Increase in revolutionary activities.
 - Arrest of Bhagat Singh and comrades and Lahore Conspiracy Case.
 - Death due to hunger strike in jail of political prisoners like Jatin Das in September 1929.
- Independence day pledge on 26 January, 1930 demanded: Indians' inalienable right to be free.
- **It protested against:**
 - *Economic exploitation by Britain:*
 - Excessive land revenue demand.
 - Destruction of Indian cotton industry.
 - Manipulation of customs and currency.
 - Extravagant administrative machinery.
 - Manipulation of exchange rate.
 - Drain of wealth from India.
 - *Political exploitation of India through:*
 - Fraud of constitutional reforms.
 - Denial of freedom of speech and association.
 - Denial of entry to Indians in higher services.
 - *Cultural exploitation through the slavish system of education*
 - Discontentment was also due to:
 - Disarmament of the Indian nation.
 - Stationing of British army of occupation in India.
 - Refusal to grant licences to citizens to keep arms.

Although the resolution affirming Complete Independence' as the goal by the Congress and moved by Gandhiji himself, was passed in 1929, the **Mahatma put forward before the Viceroy Lord Irwin**, on 30 January 1930, his 11 demands which were:

- Total prohibition.
- The rupee to be valued at 16 pence.
- At least 50% reduction in land revenue.
- Abolition of salt tax.
- Reduction of military expenditure to at least 50% to begin with.
- Reduction of government expenditure and salaries of government officials.
- Protective tariff on the foreign cloth.
- Indian strips to discharge the duty of coastal transport.
- Release of all political prisoners and elimination of section 124A from the Indian Penal Code.
- Doing away with the services of the C.I.D.
- Freedom to keep firearms.

On March 2 1930. Gandhiji wrote a letter to the Viceroy wherein he declared the British rule to be a curse which had to be combated by civil disobedience. The Viceroy refused to accept the demands put forward by Gandhiji and regretted the contemplated recourse to Satyagraha because there would be a violation of law. Gandhiji and the Congress decided to start a nationwide civil disobedience by breaking the salt law with his select band of 78 followers. Gandhiji marched on 12 March, 1930, from the Sabarmati Ashrama in Ahmedabad, to Dandi on the Sea-coast. Gandhiji prepared salt out of seawater on April 6 and a nation-wide breaking the salt law started.

Dharsana Salt Satyagraha

On May 21, with Sarojini Naidu, the first Indian woman to become President of the Congress, and Iman Saheb, Gandhiji's comrade of the South African struggle, at the helm, and Gandhiji's son, Manilal, in front ranks, a band of 2000 marched towards the police cordon that had sealed off the Dharasana salt works. As they came close, the police rushed forward with their steel-tipped lathis and set upon the *non-resisting Satyagrahis* till they fell down. The injured would be carried down. The injured would be carried away by their comrades on make-shift stretchers and another column would take their place, be beaten to pulp, and carried away. Column after column advanced in this way; after a while, instead of walking up to the cordon the men would sit down and wait for the police blows. Not an arm was raised in defence, and by 11 a.m., when the temperature in the shade was 116 degrees Fahrenheit, the toll was already 320 injured and two dead. Webb Miller, the American journalist, whose account of the Dharasana *Satyagraha* was to carry the flavour of Indian nationalism to many distant lands, and whose description of the resolute heroism of the *Satyagrahis* demonstrated effectively that nonviolent resistance was no meek affair, summed up his impressions in these words: *'In eighteen years of my reporting in twenty countries, during which I have witnessed innumerable civil disturbances, riots, street fights and rebellions, I have never witnessed such harrowing scenes as at Dharasana.* This new form of Salt Satyagraha was eagerly adopted by people in Wadala (Bombay), Karnataka (Sanikatta Salt Works), Andhra, Midnapore, Balasore, Puri and Cuttack.

Forms of Civil Disobedience Movement

- Dandi March was organized to break the law by boiling sea water to manufacture salt on 6 April, 1930.

Bengal

- Reading seditious literature in public.
- Picketing of shops selling foreign cloth.
- Picketing of shops selling liquor.

Bihar

- A campaign was organized for refusal to pay chowkidari tax and a call was given for resignation of chowkidars and influential members of chowkidari panchayat who appointed these chowkidars.
- This campaign was particularly successful in Monghyr, Saran and Bhagalpur. The government retaliated with beatings, torture and confiscation of property.

Assam

- A powerful agitation was organized against the infamous '*Cunningham circular*' which forced parents, guardians and students to furnish assurances of good behaviour.

United Provinces

- A no-revenue campaign was organized; 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. Since most of the zamindars were loyalists, the campaign became virtually a no-rent campaign. The activity picked up speed in October 1930, especially in Agra and Rai Bareilly.

Manipur and Nagaland

- These areas took a brave part in the movement. At the young age of thirteen, Rani Gaidinliu of Nagaland raised the banner of revolt against foreign rule. She was captured in 1932 and sentenced to life imprisonment.

Central Province

- Defiance of forest laws by cutting timber.

Gujarat

- Defiance of law by non-payment of land revenue. N.W.F.P: Defiance of government laws by non-payment of taxes. Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan's educational and social reform work among the Pathans had politicized them. Gaffar Khan, also called Badshah Khan and Frontier Gandhi, had started the first Pushto political monthly Pukhtoon and had organized a volunteer brigade 'Khudai Khidmatgars', popularly known as the 'Red-Shirts', who were pledged to the freedom struggle and non-violence.
 - Congressmen resigned from the legislature.
 - Many government servants resigned.
 - Local officers tendered resignations.

Government Response

- Half a dozen ordinances.

- Press gagged.
- Congress declared illegal organization.
- Large-scale arrest of congressmen.
- Police and military resorted to firing, Lathi charges and beating of Satyagrahis.
- 75000 satyagrah is put in jails.

Civil Disobedience Movement and Peasant Movements

During 1901 to 1939, the agriculture production per head fell by 14%, while the per capita production of foodgrains by 24%. Growing taxation in a stagnant economy invariably carries with it the penalty of popular revolt. This was manifested during CDM in the states of Bihar, Bengal, UP and Gujarat. The great depression of early 1930s added fuel to the fire.

1. United Provinces: A non-revenue campaign by Zamindars against paying revenue to the government and a No-Rent Campaign by tenants against Zamindars.
2. UP Kisan Sabha under Swami Shahjananda and Bihar Kisan Sabha as a nucleus for All India Kisan activities were formed.
3. **Bihar:** Anti-Chowkidara tax campaign.
4. **Bengal:** Anti-Chowkidara tax and anti union board tax campaigns. 5.
- Gujarat:** No-tax movement was organized for refusal to pay land revenue.

The Gandhi-Irwin Pact

Mediations were taking place between Lord Irwin and Gandhiji. Gandhiji and the other members of congress working committee were released on 25 January 1931. From February 17, negotiations began between the Viceroy and the Congress and on March 5, 1931, the Gandhi-Irwin Pact was finally signed. According to this agreement all political prisoners were to be released, the ordinances were to be withdrawn, confiscated and forfeited property was to be restored to the owners and concessions to make salt in certain areas were to be provided. The detailed terms of the Gandhi-Irwin pact were:

- The people living near sea-shores were to prepare salt without paying any duty.
- The confiscated property of participants in the Salt-Satyagraha was to be restored to them.
- All political prisoners were to be released except those against whom there were criminal charges.
- All ordinances promulgated during the Satyagraha were to be withdrawn.
- Peaceful picketing of foreign cloth shops was permitted.
- The government was to be liberal in reinstating those who had resigned from service.
- The Congress agreed to suspend civil disobedience. Mahatma Gandhi agreed not to press his demand for an enquiry into police excess during the Satyagraha. The Congress also agreed to suspend boycott.

The Karachi Congress-1931

The Congress adopted a resolution appreciating the courage and self sacrifice of Bhagat Singh, Rajguru and Sukhdeva on March 29, 1931. Congress under the presidentship of Vallabhbhai Patel accepted the Gandhi Irwin pact but it repeated its commitment to the complete independence ideal. Gandhiji was chosen as the sole representative on behalf of the congress at the coming second round table conference. This congress session is also important because it accepted a resolution moved by Gandhiji

on the fundamental rights of equality, freedom of speech, press, association and conscience. Total non-discrimination, the right to move of dwelling apartment and the right to bear arms in accordance with law, were to be guaranteed. The fundamental rights contain also important economic categories like a living wage for workers and children and the right to form unions.

The Round Table-Conferences

First Round Table Conference

Since 1921, the Congress leaders and the Swaraj Party were unsuccessfully demanding the holding Round Table Conference to settle India's political and constitutional problems. When the fervour of nationalism

rose high, the government did agree to hold the Round Table Conference. The First round table conference met from 12.11.1930 to 19.01.1931 but it could not achieve any solid success because the Congress was not represented in it. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad and Muhammad Ali Jinnah had attended it.

Second Round Table Conference

Gandhiji attended the second round table conference along with Madan Mohan Malaviya, Sarojini Naidu and B.R. Ambedkar, but no agreed solution could be reached on the communal and national problems. Gandhi was in favour of unicameralism. He pleaded that fundamental rights should be guaranteed in the constitution and there should be judicial remedies for their enforcement. He also demanded full control over the army and foreign affairs. Gandhiji was all the time insistent on getting the substance of Swaraj. Once this fundamental goal was realized the details could be settled subsequently. Ramsay Macdonald, the British Prime Minister wanted that all members should agree to accept the verdict on the question of minorities. But Gandhi was of the firm view that the glow of the sun of independence alone would serve to melt the iceberg of communalism. The declaration of Macdonald at the plenary session of the conference was immensely dissatisfying because it contained no reference to the grant of Dominion Status to India.

There was no assurance for the establishment of responsible government in the provinces and at the centre. The question of responsible government at the centre was so linked with the establishment of the federal pattern at the centre that without the consent of the native states no progress could be achieved in realization of the cherished goal of responsible government. Moreover, there was no assurance regarding fundamental rights. The proposed constitutional reforms as outlined by the British Prime Minister in December 1931 totally reserved defence and military affairs for control by the British Parliament and the Viceroy. Gandhiji could not agree to such proposals specially in the context of the Complete Independence resolution of 1929.

Third Round Table Conference

The third round table conference was held from November 17 to December 24, 1932, but it couldn't make any progress towards swaraj. However, the deliberations at the third round table conference formed the basis on which the draft of the government of India Act of 1935 was prepared.

Civil Disobedience Movement (1932-34)

On December 28, 1931, Gandhiji reached Bombay on his way back from the London round table conference. In a letter to Viceroy, Lord Willingdon he protested against the reign of oppression, in N.W. frontier province, Bengal and Uttar Pradesh. In the context of the veiled threat of the resumption of civil disobedience, the viceroy refused to meet Gandhiji. On April 17, 1931 Lord Willingdon who had earlier been the Governor of Bombay and Madras had been chosen the successor of Lord Irwin who left India on April 18. With the failure of the second round table conference, a tougher policy was being persuaded by the government. In the United Provinces, leaders who were persuading the peasants for non-payment of taxes were arrested while on way to meeting Gandhiji at Bombay on his return from London. Even Gandhiji was not spared and on January 4, 1932, he and Vallabhbhai Patel were arrested. Soon oppression was let loose on the political prisoners lodged in different parts of the country. The government took the offensive in 1932. However the movement continued to linger until early April 1934 when the inevitable decision to withdraw it was taken by Gandhiji at Patna.

Achievements of CDM

- Congress successfully defied government laws and could do it again and again.
- British government felt compelled to consult Congress in constitutional discussions.
- Willingdon's boast to end Congress in six weeks exposed.
- Congress really became a mass movement.
 - Women participated in freedom struggle.
 - Youth and students offered Satyagraha.
 - Peasants and zamindars alike joined the struggle.
 - Workers and Mill-owners plunged into the movement.
 - Children and old persons also joined.
- Indian freedom became a question of time.