



Origin and Development of the Civil Disobedience Movement in India

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Abstract: The Civil Disobedience Movement, initiated by M.K. Gandhi in 1930, had the goal of challenging the unjust governance of the British authorities through a strategy of non-violence and empowering Indians to govern their country. Methods including the infringement of the Salt Act, the boycott of British goods, and the refusal to pay taxes were utilized to demonstrate significant opposition to colonial rule. Gandhi gave Irwin a list of eleven demands, which included banning drugs, reduce rupee-sterling exchange rate, lowering land revenue, eliminating the salt tax, cutting back on military and civil administration spending, to protect Indian textile industry, adopting the Postal Conservation Bill, eliminating the CID department, releasing all political prisoners, reserving coastal shipping for Indians and granting citizens licenses to possess weapons. The British government did not fulfill his demands; consequently, he initiated the famous Dandi March, as he expressed in his words. Gandhi's eleven demands to the British government all aimed at uniting Indians across different socio-economic strata. The refusal of Lord Irwin to accept these demands ignited the Civil Disobedience Movement. This movement played a crucial role in fostering national unity, transcending religious, class, and racial divisions among the populace. It attracted worldwide focus on India's struggles, increased public awareness of British exploitation, and strengthened the ambitions of the Indian populace. Furthermore, the non-cooperation efforts diminished British revenue and influence, thereby undermining their control. The idea of nonviolent resistance deeply inspired the nation and Gandhi's method of peaceful protest received considerable acclaim. While this nonviolent movement did not result in immediate independence, it established vital groundwork for the eventual realization of freedom.

IndexTerms - Civil Disobedience Movement, Colonial rule, Dandi March, Salt Act.

INTRODUCTION

M. K. Gandhi led the Civil Disobedience Movement as a peaceful demonstration against British colonial authority. This movement surfaced roughly a decade after the Non-Cooperation Movement, signifying a fresh tactic to confront the violation of colonial laws. The crucial Dandi March, which began on March 12, 1930, from the Sabarmati Ashram under Gandhi's direction, aimed to violate the Salt Law and marked the formal initiation of the Civil Disobedience Movement. The act of sprinkling a small amount of salt instigated widespread defiance throughout the nation. The poorest segments of Indian society were particularly affected by the British government's control over salt production and taxes, which was viewed as an oppressive measure. Gandhi chose the salt tax as a collective emblem of resistance for Indians from diverse socio-economic backgrounds. This effort sought to challenge British power by deliberately breaking unjust laws. Gandhi started the historic Dandi March when Irwin denied his eleven pleas. He clearly stated that if the administration did not accept his eleven demands, the only option would be to violate the law. Thus, he initiated the Dandi March as a major campaign against British rule through non-cooperation, boycotts, and the defiance of colonial laws, especially the Salt Act. Along with Gandhi's eleven demands, a number of other factors also played a role in the rise of the Civil Disobedience Movement, including (1) the growing desire for complete independence from British colonial rule, (2) economic hardship, (3) the Simon Commission's establishment, which caused widespread dissatisfaction among Indians, (4) the rise of socialist and communist movements, together with the mobilization of workers' and peasants' movements.

The purpose of this research paper is to present a narrative of how the civil disobedience movement originated and developed in India.

DISCUSSION

After an eight-year period of non-cooperation, the civil disobedience movement commenced in 1930 and lasted for four years. During its session in Lahore on December 19, 1929, the Indian National Congress adopted a resolution declaring that its

primary aim was to achieve 'Purna Swaraj' or complete independence. Jawaharlal Nehru raised the Indian flag by the banks of the Ravi River in Lahore on December 31, 1929. The formal announcement of independence was made on January 26, 1930.

On January 31, 1930, M.K. Gandhi presented a memorandum to Viceroy Lord Irwani, outlining specific requests aimed at benefiting the largest number of people. The memorandum contained eleven demands: 1) Prohibition of alcohol 2) Reduction in the exchange rate 3) A 50% decrease in land revenue 4) Elimination of the salt tax 5) A 50% cut in military spending 6) A 50% reduction in the salaries of high-ranking officials 7) Implementation of a protective tariff on foreign textiles 8) Passage of a bill for coastal traffic reservation 9) Release of political detainees 10) Abolition of the C.I.D. 11) Issuance of licenses for firearm use for self-defense. Gandhi urged the Viceroy to address these demands, but the government chose not to respond. Consequently, there was no alternative but to initiate a movement.

Gandhi chose to launch the independence movement with a specific issue that would resonate with the most people, selecting the salt tax because it had the potential to impact a large number of individuals. The salt commission of 1835 proposed a tax on Indian salt to facilitate imports and encourage the sale of imported English salt in India, leading to the establishment of the Salt Act, which granted the government complete control over salt production. Breaking the Salt Act was considered a serious offense and carried penalties. In 1858, S.A. Swaminatha Iyer brought up the salt tax at the inaugural session of the Indian National Congress in Bombay. Gandhi also referred to the salt tax as an 'inhuman tax' in an article published in "Young India." Every segment of the population faced oppression due to the enforced tax. According to Gandhi's assessment, this tax equated to nine annas per person annually, which was a significant burden for a poor individual who had to contribute his earnings from two weeks of work over the course of a year.

Gandhi was convinced that opposing the Salt Act was fully warranted, as he viewed the government's policy as profoundly unjust. Nevertheless, his main focus was on cultivating a moral atmosphere of non-violence before initiating any form of conflict. He aimed to implement this approach to address the issue, believing that the aspiration for an independent India could only be realized through peaceful means. The working group embraced Gandhi's proposal, and the resolution indicated that nonviolent activists would be responsible for initiating and overseeing civil disobedience.

Gandhi intended to initiate the movement with individuals who were closely associated with the Satyagraha Ashrama and adhered to its principles. Through the method of non-violence, Gandhi sought to enlighten the British about the injustices they were inflicting upon India. He viewed British governance as a burden, yet he had no desire to inflict harm upon any English individual. On March 12, 1930, Gandhi, accompanied by 78 Ashram members, embarked on the march to Dandi. The participants were informed that as this was a sacred pilgrimage, self-reflection and self-cleaning were vital. Their goal was to establish the groundwork for Swaraj. After a 24-day journey, the group arrived at the shore on April 6. Gandhi immersed himself in the ocean and, after collecting a handful of salt left by the waves, returned to the beach, thereby breaking the salt law. Gandhi urged the citizens to challenge the salt monopoly and break the salt law in three distinct ways: by producing salt, selling it, and purchasing it. Across the nation, leaders engaged in non-violent resistance after violating the salt law. Jawaharlal Nehru and several other leaders were taken into custody. In Karachi, two young activists lost their lives when police opened fire on the crowd. In a letter to the Viceroy, Gandhi outlined his plan to raid two salt depots in Gujarat and was arrested on the night of May 4. The following morning, news of his arrest triggered strikes and protests nationwide. In essence, the entire country was ablaze with unrest.

In reaction to the violent climate in Solapur, six police stations were set ablaze and numerous policemen were killed, prompting the Government to respond with even greater violence, resulting in the loss of many workers' lives. Although the initial outbreak of violence occurred in Peshawar, the red shirt volunteers maintained a stance of complete non-violence, only to be brutally attacked by military forces.

A remarkable instance of non-violent resistance was witnessed during the raid on salt pans at Dharsana, led by Manilal Gandhi, the second son of M.K. Gandhi. Sarojini Naidu called upon two thousand five hundred volunteers to act under M.K. Gandhi's guidance, ensuring they remained committed to non-violence. The Salt Satyagraha, a peaceful protest against the salt tax, lasted nearly a year and resulted in the imprisonment of sixty thousand Indians. Additionally, during this period, the civil disobedience movement expanded into several new areas. Peasants in Bardoli, Madras, Allahabad, and Midnapore refused to pay land revenue. By June 1930, the entire nation was engulfed in unrest, undermining the British Government's authority.

In light of the shortcomings of the Simon Report, the inaugural Round Table Conference took place from 12 November 1930 to 19 January 1931, presided over by British Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald, and ultimately ended in failure. Mr. MacDonald was optimistic that Gandhi and the Congress would participate in the subsequent session. Subsequently, on 26 January, Viceroy Lord Irwin released Gandhi and Nehru without any conditions, along with other Congress leaders. As a result, civil disobedience came to a halt with the signing of an agreement known as the Gandhi-Irwin pact or Delhi pact. In accordance with this agreement, Gandhi represented the Indian National Congress at the Second Round Table Conference, which occurred in London from 7 September 1931 to 1 December 1931. During this conference, Gandhi realized that the Government was not prioritizing the transfer of power to Indians but was instead focused on addressing the concerns of minorities. In fact, Gandhi was thoroughly convinced that British rule was exacerbating divisions among religions and social classes in India. In protest of the British decision to grant a separate electorate to the untouchables in 1932, he initiated his 'fast unto death.' By 1933, the Satyagraha Ashram had transformed into a hub for the campaign against untouchability.

In fact, in addition to the eleven demands put forth by Gandhi several other factors contributed to the emergence of the Civil Disobedience Movement are: (1) The exports of India, which were a driving force in the colonial economy, experienced significant decline during the Great Depression of 1929, exacerbating the economic difficulties faced by traders, labours, and

farmers. Heavy taxes and unjust trade practices were viewed as harmful to India's economy. Public discontent was further fueled by the increasing cost of necessities. (2) The establishment of the Simon Commission also generated widespread discontent among the Indian populace. Chaired by Sir John Simon, this commission was tasked with evaluating constitutional reforms in India, specifically the Government of India Act of 1919, which lacked any Indian representation. The all-white composition of the Simon Commission incited anger among Indians, leading to extensive protests, as it was viewed as a direct insult to their aspirations for self-governance. (3) The late 1920s witnessed the rise of socialist and communist movements, alongside the mobilization of workers' and peasants' movements, which contributed to the development of the Civil Disobedience Movement. This movement evolved into a revitalized revolutionary effort, characterized by secular and socialist ideals that invigorated the anti-imperialist struggle. (4) In 1929, the Indian National Congress, under the leadership of figures such as Subhash Chandra Bose and Jawaharlal Nehru, officially proclaimed "Purna Swaraj" (complete independence) as its objective. This declaration inspired individuals from various backgrounds, paving the way for a more extensive and radical Civil Disobedience Movement.

It can be said that the civil disobedience movement of 1932–1934 began when the government completely abolished civil freedoms in addition to considering ordinary political acts to be unlawful. Picketing in clothing and liquor stores, market closures, boycotts of white and loyalist companies, raising the symbolic Congress flag, holding unlawful Congress sessions, salt satyagraha, failing to pay the chowkidari tax, failing to pay rent, failing to distribute revenue, and breaking forest laws were all examples of disobedience. However, the Congress occasionally engaged in violent acts. That is why, in October 1940, Gandhi considered launching a new Satyagraha campaign after realizing that not everyone was qualified to be a satyagrahi due to factors like enthusiasm, temperament, inclination, etc. Then, only trained satyagrahis could participate in campaigns, and Vinoba Bhave was chosen as the first leader. The individual civil disobedience movement was started in response to the British government's refusal to let Indians voice their opinions about World War II. The Satyagraha movement was very popular at the time.

CONCLUSIONS

The Civil Disobedience Movement played a crucial role in mobilizing the masses during the Indian struggle for freedom. This movement fostered unity among Indians, transcending barriers of class, caste, and religion. It also garnered international attention for India, raising global awareness regarding British exploitation and the aspirations of the Indian populace. Furthermore, the movement undermined British authority, as the non-cooperation efforts resulted in decreased British revenue and diminished control. The public's trust in the British government was damaged by this movement. It rekindled the populace's determination to contest elections. It strengthened the independence struggle for social foundations. This movement made women equal partners in the fight for freedom by bringing them out of the house and allowing them to engage in politics. Indeed, The Civil Disobedience Movement was essential in rallying the populace during India's fight for independence. The nation was powerfully inspired by the tenets of nonviolent resistance and Gandhi's method of peaceful protest was widely acknowledged. Although this non-violent movement did not lead to immediate independence, it established a significant foundation for the eventual attainment of freedom.

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