
UNIT 5 **GANDHI IN SOUTH AFRICA**

Structure

- 5.1 Introduction
 - Aims and Objectives
- 5.2 Gandhi in South Africa
- 5.3 Indians in South Africa
- 5.4 Struggles against Racial Discrimination
- 5.5 Birth of Satyagraha
- 5.6 Lessons Learned
- 5.7 Summary
- 5.8 Terminal Questions

Suggested Readings

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, one of the greatest personalities in the history of man kind, and revered by millions all over the world, left an undying legacy of rare ethical insight through the experiences of his eventful life. The saga of his travails in South Africa began a career but ended up in giving India and the world one of the greatest leaders who practised nothing but truth and non-violence to achieve a formidable task of protecting the rights of Indian labour in the Dark Continent. In the eventful life of the Mahatma, the years ranging from 1893 to 1914 were very significant because they contributed immensely to his mental and spiritual growth, and his transformation into a leader of the masses. The South Africa phase in Gandhi's life is a crucial and fascinating one in that it helped him carve his own philosophy and techniques of a non-violent struggle that helped India achieve its goal of independence many a year later.

Aims and Objectives

After reading this Unit, you would be able to understand

- the background of the prevailing conditions of Indians in South Africa
- the significance of a non-violent struggle and Satyagraha
- Gandhi's evolution as a leader of the masses

5.2 GANDHI IN SOUTH AFRICA

Gandhi had come to South Africa in 1893 as a diffident youth of 24, who had attained his degree of Barrister of Law from the Inner Temple, England in 1891. On his return to India, he started his practice in his home state. By his own admission, he was painfully shy and could not utter a word in the court. He returned to Rajkot where he took to drafting applications for his brother's partner who had a settled practice. An offer from

Meman Firm (A Muslim Mercantile community mostly based in Bombay and Kathiawar), who were in search of a barrister to help their Firm resolve a lawsuit, made him set sail for South Africa in April 1893 and reached Durban, where he was received by his employer Abdullah Sheth, one of the most prosperous Indian businessmen in Natal. Thus, providence took the inexperienced youth to a land which was to be the testing ground for his moral resources, spiritual experiences and physical grit and determination in the face of various forms of racial discrimination and humiliations heaped upon him and his compatriots. The extraordinary series of events leading to the evolution and implementation of Satyagraha in South Africa may appear startling at present, but were a natural progression of circumstances leading to epic proportions of a nonviolent struggle, spread over two continents. The mass-movement led by Gandhi, generated on the basis of the power of truth and conviction, are unsurpassed in history till date.

Experiences of Racial Discrimination

When Gandhi arrived in South Africa on a one year contract to help a Firm involved in a law suit, he could not foresee that this land was to be his home for the next two decades and that his years of struggle in South Africa for the rights of Indians settled and working there, would give to the world the unfailing weapon of Satyagraha. The dreadful racist regime of South Africa was revealed to him through various humiliating incidents and made him resolute to stay back and fight for the restoration of human dignity of the Indians in South Africa. Besides attending to his legal work, he expanded his contacts and studied the problems which the Indian community was facing, even as his personal trials and tribulations continued in the forms of racial abuse, which he faced stoically and emerged victorious.

It is to be noted at the background that the Indians were brought to South Africa to further the economic interests of the British rulers, because without indentured labour they could not exploit the immense natural resources of the Natal Coast belt. The Indians arrived in hordes, worked in various capacities and brought prosperity to Natal, be it as indentured labourers or free businessmen. In due course of time, the Europeans began to feel threatened by the increasing number of Indians who were in many ways taking over some of their monopolised occupations. This resentment gave rise to colour prejudice and the Indians were considered (to quote Lord Milner's words) as "strangers forcing themselves upon a community reluctant to receive them."

This hatred was manifested through racial abuses, unjust laws and heaps of humiliations. This was brought home to the youthful Gandhi for the first time at the Pietermaritzburg Railway Station, where he was unceremoniously thrown out of the railway coach, in spite of holding a valid first class ticket. Left alone to shiver in the cold weather, this experience completely changed Gandhi's life, thoughts and deeds. Swinging between the dilemma whether to return to India or fight the discrimination, he eventually decided on the latter course of action. The racial abuse was also evident in the refusal of his entry to the hotels and lodges where Indians, called coolies, were prohibited from entering.

Another unfortunate incident occurred when he had to travel from Charlestown to Johannesburg by stage coach. Gandhi was made to sit with the coachman on the box outside by the conductor, who later ordered him to sit on the floor on a dirty sack cloth. On his refusal to do so, he was subjected to a violent physical assault by the conductor. A timely intervention from some of the white passengers, who protested at this brutality, saved Gandhi from further humiliation.

Similar other experiences helped Gandhi to strengthen his resolve to fight for justice, in a way unprecedented in the annals of history and marked the beginning of the civil disobedience. This method of non-violent but firm struggle against apartheid in South Africa saw him emerge as a “Skilled Lawyer”, a “Political leader of great maturity, flexibility and imagination,” and the “Mahatma, the great soul”. Gandhi gave the world the mighty unique weapon of Satyagraha, with the conviction of truth and power of non-violence. The veteran Gandhian, Dr. R. R. Diwakar, aptly defines Satyagraha as “a new way of life. Moral strength was the major resource of the non-violent mode of action. Moral purpose gave it an element of invincibility.” Further, Gandhi’s inherent humanity and sense of social justice had been aroused by the numerous personal experiences of indignities to which he and his countrymen were being subjected to.

5.3 INDIANS IN SOUTH AFRICA

Gandhi studied the situation thoroughly and discovered that there were three categories of Indians in South Africa:

- I. The indentured labourers had been brought to South Africa under a contract prepared in 1860 and comprised the largest sector of Indians in that country. Under the contract, the Indians were to be sent to Natal as workers, recruited by Indians under the supervision of emigrant agents appointed by the British Colonial Government. The five year contract agreement was conducted in the presence of the protector of emigrants appointed for the protection of the rights and interests of the recruited labourers. The indentured labourers were promised the provisions of free food, housing facility, clothes, and medical benefits besides their monthly wages. On completion of three years, they were allowed to be freed from the agreement for which they had to pay 5 Pounds for the remaining two years under a rule made in 1859. After Five years of indenture, they could work at other places on better wages. Upon completing 10 years, they were either given free passage to India or could get land equal to the value of the passage fare for their homeland. A majority of these labourers opted for settling down in South Africa, even after their agreements were over. The agreements promised better deals but the actual implementation of the same was far from satisfactory. The labourers were forced victims of ill-treatment resulting in severe hardships and suffering, even leading to deaths and suicides and often cheated by their so called protectors or agents. This system of indentured labour was almost akin to slavery for the poor labourers.
- II. The second group of Indians was that of the children born to the indentured Indian labourers who had settled down in South Africa after the completion of their indentured labourers’ agreement period.
- III. The third category of Indians settlers was the smallest but was in many ways more affluent than their fellow compatriots. They were called “Passengers” because they had come to South Africa at their own expense, looking for business opportunities; many among them went on to become successful businessmen due to their hard work and thrifty habits. The economic success of this group of Indians gave rise to jealousies among the Whites and they resorted to racial abuses and discriminations against the Indians to express their resentment.

5.4 STRUGGLES AGAINST RACIAL DISCRIMINATION

Having suffered painful experiences of arrogant racism himself, Gandhi could understand why his fellow Indians were neither shocked nor surprised at his having been thrown out of the first class train compartment or various similar insults meted out to him. He was informed as to how almost every Indian was subjected to a series of such indignities and insults but suffered silently because of livelihood compulsions.

The condition of Indians living in Transvaal was worse than those in Natal, where they were forced to pay a poll tax of 3 Pounds, live in ghetto like conditions, no right to vote, not allowed to walk on the roads or pavements and was not allowed to stay outdoors after 9 P.M. unless they had a special permit. Even Gandhi was no exemption and was once beaten up by a policeman on duty for walking out at night; he was saved in time by Mr. Coates, an English Quaker friend.

All this while, Gandhi worked on the lawsuit, studied the case thoroughly and arrived at the conclusion that his client had the stronger case, but litigation would cause nothing but ruin for both claimant and defendant. He requested for the appointment of an arbitrator and finally his client won the case. Gandhi also urged his client to reclaim the payment from the loser party in installments and achieved success through mediation.

Meanwhile, Gandhi felt that his compatriots in South Africa needed to be brought together to fight the injustice heaped upon them. After the preliminary survey, he called a meeting of the Indian community settled in Pretoria, and asked them to be truthful and honest in their business dealings and personal lives.

Having completed his work in Pretoria, Gandhi was to return to India; but, during the farewell dinner that was organised in his honour, Gandhi came across a news item in 'Natal Mercury' about the Natal Government's plan to introduce a bill to disfranchise Indians. Gandhi immediately realised the implications of this bill which, he said, 'would strike at the root of our self-respect.' Having realised the importance of his services, the Indian community requested him to stay on and guide them. As Gandhi tells us in his autobiography 'The farewell party was thus turned into a working committee.'

Gandhi enrolled as an advocate of the Natal Supreme Court and drafted a petition to the Natal Legislative assembly, which received good publicity in the local press. Though the bill was passed, Gandhi did not give up his efforts and started working on another petition to Lord Ripon, the secretary of state for Colonies. Within a month the petition had ten thousand signatures and was sent to Lord Ripon and a thousand copies were also printed for distribution. The justice for the Indian claim for franchise was also admitted in a large section of British Press.

Gandhi chose Durban to set up his law practice and was helped by Indian businessmen who gave him retainers. He acquired a high level of reputation among the Indians, Europeans and the judiciary as well for his truthful honesty, which was the basic foundation of his social and political work, all his life.

Within the first five years of his stay in South Africa, Gandhi had studied the prevailing condition thoroughly and felt that the Indian community needed to be awakened from the white regime's new and atrocious rules on the Indians through various Acts. A tax of 3 Pounds was imposed on the Indians for their stay in South Africa and was justified by the Attorney General of Natal who stated that the Indians "are not to form a part and

parcel of the South African Nation...The Indians are to come here, appreciated as labourers but not welcomed as settlers and competitors.” The tax was grossly unfair to the Indians and was initially not enforced strictly, but later when it was done so, it was great hardship on the basis of the very meagre wages of the indentured labourers (about ten Shillings per month).

The next step taken by the racist regime was the legal disenfranchisement of the Indians in 1894, which incidentally was the main reason for Gandhi’s extended stay in South Africa. The European community was afraid of possible Indian domination if they had the right to vote and therefore decided to deprive them of it. Further, the license authority was given absolute authority in 1897 to issue trading license at its own discretion and it was almost always the Indian trader whose request for a trading license was turned down.

In the same year, the entry of Indians, who were freed, was restricted into Natal and under the Immigration Restriction Act 1897, an education test in any European language was imposed upon the Indians. This caused serious problems for Indian immigration as it blocked the entry of those helping hands the Indian traders wanted for their business. Most Indians in South Africa were poor and illiterate and therefore could never pass any education test to enter Natal. Gandhi decided to counter these unfair practices and hardships in a legal and peaceful manner.

Gandhi faced this challenge bravely, although he was only an inexperienced young man leading the Indian settlers who were just beginning to be politically aware of their rights. Gandhi enabled them to bring into action all the possible and available forces to protest, awaken and strengthen them for a righteous conflict, which went on to become the great Satyagraha movement for the rights of all Indians in South Africa. Gandhi thus brought to the fore a peaceful and non-violent resistance to tyranny and oppression.

It was in South Africa that Gandhi discovered his own self. From a shy and timid young man, he matured into a successful practising lawyer, an able organiser of men, a great leader knitting together the Indians of South Africa, who came from diverse backgrounds and different parts of India, spoke different languages and practised different faiths. He organised the Natal Indian Congress as the forum to express the Indian point of view in an alien land.

In 1896, Gandhi visited India and in an attempt to arouse interest in the grievances of Indians in South Africa, he wrote a popular brochure called *The Green Pamphlet* citing the poor conditions of the Indian settlers in South Africa. It was a very dignified account of the Indian case, but was distorted by Reuters and sent through cable to South Africa. It created unnecessary misunderstanding in the white community resulting in unpleasant consequences later for Gandhi and other Indians. He also travelled extensively to various cities of the country, met various important people and editors of newspapers acquainting them with the unfortunate conditions of Indians in South Africa.

He met veteran Indian leaders like Badruddin Tyabji, Sir Pherozeshah Mehta, Surendranath Banerjee, Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Gopal Krishna Gokhale. He addressed a large public meeting in Bombay and was also scheduled to speak in Calcutta, but before that, he received an urgent telegram from the Indian community in Natal, asking him to return immediately. He sailed for Durban with his wife and children in November 1896.

On arrival in Durban, he was put into five days’ quarantine as the European community

was angry due to the false versions and interpretations of Gandhi's 'Green pamphlet'. They threatened the Indians, including Gandhi, with dire consequences if they landed in South Africa; however, while disembarking, Gandhi was brutally attacked by an angry mob. Following the news of this vehement and cowardly attack, Joseph Chamberlain, the British Secretary of State for the Colonies in England sent an order to Natal to prosecute the wild attackers of Gandhi. But Gandhi himself refused to take an action against them as he felt they were misled into attacking him. This gained him a lot of respect even among his opponents.

It was in the second phase of his life in South Africa that Gandhi's lifestyle underwent gradual changes. Though initially he preferred maintaining a lifestyle of an English barrister, he gradually realised the futility of affluence and veered towards a life of austere simplicity. He reduced his wants and expenses, "studied the art" of laundering (washing and ironing of clothes), and cleaned his own chamber pot and of his guests as well, volunteered his free service for two hours daily as a compounder in a charitable hospital, read books on nursing and midwifery and actually served as midwife during the birth of his fourth and last son.

Boer War

In 1899 the Boer War broke out and Gandhi advised the Indian Community to support the British cause as they claimed their rights as British subjects. He organised and trained, with the help of Dr. Booth, an Indian Ambulance Corps of 1,100 volunteers and offered its services to the Government. The Corps rendered valuable service in the Boer war and Gandhi as its leader felt immensely happy when he saw Indians of various castes and creeds coming together to work like brothers.

In 1901 Gandhi returned to India, promising the Indian community in South Africa to return if the Indian community needed him within a year. He attended the Indian National Congress Session at Calcutta where his resolution on South Africa was passed with acclaim. He was advised by Gokhale to tour India and chose to travel by the third class in order to know the people.

Just as he had set up his legal practice in Bombay, Gandhi received a cable from the Indian community in Natal, recalling him. As per his promise, he sailed for South Africa again and represented the Indian case to Joseph Chamberlain who was visiting South Africa. Gandhi discovered that the condition of Indians in Transvaal was going from bad to worse and therefore enrolled as an advocate of the Supreme Court and set up practice in Johannesburg. He revived the British Indian Association to act as the mouth-piece of the Indians settled in Transvaal. His stay in South Africa was specifically to challenge the European arrogance and fight injustice but it was a struggle where there was no hatred in his heart for his opponents. His respect for all religions and his willingness to learn and absorb all the good points from their teachings, made him realise the importance of basic principles of all religions that were commonly connected through truth, non-violence, compassion and love for all humanity. True to his principles, when the Zulu rebellion broke, he formed the Indian Ambulance Corps to help the government in nursing the dying Zulus unattended by the Europeans.

Service for Humanity

Gandhi was moved by the misery and the sorrow of people around him; he decided to offer his selfless services, aroused his ingrained compassion and strengthened his resolve

to work for the oppressed humanity all his life. The influence of religious scriptures like the *Bhagavad Gita* was profound; he adopted the *karmayoga* into his daily life in every possible way. The *ekadashavrata* of later years, propounded by him had its roots in the basic teachings of the sacred *Gita*.

John Ruskin's 'Unto this last' deeply influenced Gandhi and the concept of 'Sarvodaya' upliftment of all arose out of this. This led to the beginning of another spiritual journey of self-sacrifice and devotion to the service of mankind and brought to him the essential beauty of community living on the basis of equality and the inherent dignity of manual labour. Gandhi was inspired to set up an Ashram where he could practice this Philosophy and marked the beginning of the Phoenix Settlement, fourteen miles distance from Durban. The writings of Thoreau and Tolstoy also affected him greatly and his entire way of living underwent a spiritual transformation. In 1904 he had started a weekly journal 'Indian Opinion' as a communication medium with the Indians as well as Europeans, in which 'week after week, he poured out his soul in its columns'. This also marked the beginning of Gandhi's future lifelong friendship with Mr. Henry S. L. Polak, with whom he shared similar views on the essential things of life. In 1904 the 'Indian Opinion' and his family shifted to Phoenix Ashram. In 1906 he took the vows of celibacy and voluntary poverty. He founded the Tolstoy Farm near Johannesburg. Gandhi inculcated spartan simplicity and strict discipline and laid great emphasis on moral and physical hygiene as the basic rules of these settlements. In the process of continuous evolution of his life and philosophy, the Sarvodaya experiments were conducted through his constructive programme factors like community living, communal harmony, basic education, emancipation of women, removal of untouchability, cottage industries, trusteeship etc. The Phoenix Settlement and Tolstoy Farm were living examples of his spiritual search for human growth and development.

5.5 BIRTH OF SATYAGRAHA

In Gandhi's great eventful life, the year 1906 was a significant landmark as it saw the first practical application of Satyagraha on the soil of South Africa, giving an undying hope of life to tortured humanity. Gandhi could sense the simmering discontent among the Indian community as one oppressive Act followed another, and realised that this kind of brutal tyranny could only be defeated by spiritual strength arising out of the twin principles of truth and non-violence. He understood the necessity to expand individual resistance to an organised mass movement and create a moral equivalent to war. The concept was clear in his mind but needed a name and the great man tells us himself:

"None of us knew what name to give to our movement, I then used the term 'passive resistance' in describing it. I did not quite understand the implications of 'passive resistance' as I called it. I only knew that some new principles had come into being. As the struggle advanced, the phrase 'passive resistance' gave rise to confusion and it appeared shameful to permit this great struggle to be known only by an English name. Again, that foreign phrase could hardly pass a current coin among the community. A small prize was therefore announced in Indian Opinion to be awarded to the reader who invented the best designation for our struggle. We thus received a number of suggestions. The meaning of the struggle had been then fully discussed in Indian Opinion and the competitors for the prize had fairly sufficient material to serve as a basis for their exploration. Shri Maganlal Gandhi was one of the competitors and he suggested the word 'Sadagraha,' meaning 'firmness in a good cause.' I liked the word, but it did not fully represent the whole idea I wished it to connote. I therefore corrected it to 'Satyagraha.'

Truth (satya) implies love, and firmness (agraha) engenders and therefore serves as a synonym for force. I thus began to call the Indian movement 'Satyagraha', that is to say, the force which is born of Truth, Love and Non-violence, and gave up the use of the phrase 'passive resistance' in connection with it, so much so that even in English writing we often avoided it and used instead the word 'Satyagraha' itself or some other equivalent English phrase. This then was the genesis of the movement which came to be known as Satyagraha, and of the word used as a designation for it."

The racist regime of South Africa had issued an ordinance to be imposed upon the Indian immigrants requiring all Indians over the age of eight, to register with the Authorities, submit to finger printing and accept a certificate which they had to carry with them always. Any Indian who failed to do so could be imprisoned, fined, lose the right of residence and even be deported, even if he owned valuable property or engaged in important commercial transactions. The Indians, under Gandhi's leadership, decided to resist it.

Gandhi was certain that if this ordinance was adopted it would mean "absolute ruin for the Indians of South Africa". Gandhi appraised and explained the Indians the complications of the Black Act and held a public meeting to refuse to submit to this indignity and to court imprisonment by defying the obnoxious law. The meeting held on September 11, 1906 was a historic moment in the struggle of South Africa and gave to the world the unique tool of civil defiance of Satyagraha. In Gandhi's own words, "The old Empire Theatre in Johannesburg was packed from floor to ceiling. I could read in every face the expectations of something to be done or to happen..... The most important among the resolutions passed by the meeting was the famous Fourth Resolution, by which the Indians solemnly determined not to submit to the Ordinance in the event of its becoming a law... and to suffer all the penalties attaching to such non-submission." Gandhi explained in the meeting that "it is a very grave resolution we are making, as our existence in South Africa depends upon our fully observing it.... A few words now as to the consequences. Hoping for the best, we may say that if a majority of the Indians pledge themselves to resistance and if all who take the pledge prove true to themselves, the Ordinance may not even be passed and, if passed, may soon be repealed."

Satyagraha, according to Gandhi, is "the vindication of truth not by infliction of suffering on the opponent but on oneself". Gandhi applied the principle of self-restraint and self-sacrifice and had the courage and conviction to inspire the Indian community to rise as one against injustice. In January 1908, he was arrested for protesting against the Black Act and had the singular privilege of being the first **Satyagrahi** in the world to court imprisonment for upholding human rights. He proved by example that a Satyagrahi "works not with the strength of the brute but with the strength of the spark of God".

The agitation against the injustice continued unabated under his leadership and before Gandhi's first prison term of two months was over, General Smuts sent him an emissary proposing to repeal the Act if the Indians voluntarily registered themselves. Gandhi agreed to it but drew the wrath of many Indians. He was even attacked by some of the pathans while going for his registration but he forgave them; eventually they apologised publicly for attacking him, and became his staunch followers.

As General Smuts went back on his promise, the Indians burnt their registration certificates in protest and even defied the ban on immigration to Transvaal. This was the final and the most organised phase of the great Satyagraha movement in South Africa led by Gandhi. The years 1906 to 1914 were the years of the ultimate evolution and success

of non-violence resistance to tyranny, a struggle which through self-suffering purified the participants, won over the opponents and naturally drew worldwide attention.

As the struggle by Indians continued, Gandhi was arrested in September 1908 and again in February 1909 and was sentenced to two months rigorous imprisonment and 3 months hard labour respectively. He is quoted as saying that “the real road to ultimate happiness lies in going to jail and undergoing suffering and privations there in the interest of one’s own country and religion.”

In the year 1911 Gandhi suspended the struggle as a provisional settlement of the Asiatic issues in the Transvaal was proposed by the Colonial Government that assured to repeal the Black Act, to remove the racial bar from the unfair immigration law and to abolish the 3 Pounds tax on Indians, but Gandhi was wary of these promises as there had been precedents of their being broken. This time again it was no different and the Union Government did back out on its promises. Further, the Supreme Court gave a judgment declaring that only Christian marriages were valid in South Africa, thus making all the Indian marriages illegal and the children born out of these marriages illegitimate. This provoked the Indian community so much that even the shy Indian housewives came out in the streets protesting against this humiliating law. Kasturba Gandhi was in the forefront leading the Indian women.

Gandhi re-started Satyagraha campaign in 1913 in his usual non-violent manner. He gave the South African regime plenty of time to deal with the strikes and law and order situation in Johannesburg and was very tolerant about pursuing the issues related to the Indian community. But the colonial government failed to understand the concerns and continued to neglect the Indian question. This naturally led to resumption of Satyagraha in October 1913. The government came down with a heavy hand to crush it but could not break its spirit.

The Indian women, led by Kasturba, fearlessly crossed the border between Transvaal and Natal without permits, headed to Newcastle and persuaded the indentured Indian miners there to strike. They succeeded and were arrested, and as a result the strike of the miners spread like wildfire. Thousands of indentured miners and other Indians prepared under Gandhi’s leadership, marched to the Transvaal border as a symbol of non-violent defiance. Gandhi made strict rules to be followed by the Satyagrahis asking them to submit patiently and unhesitatingly to insult, floggings and arrest. Before beginning the march, Gandhi made one last attempt to persuade General Smuts to accommodate the Indian demands but was refused curtly. Gandhi’s indomitable spirit becomes evident even as he writes, “I did not weaken in the face of his incivility. The straight and narrow path I had to tread was before me. The next day (6th November 1913) at the appointed stroke of the hour (6:30) we offered prayers and commenced the march in the name of God. The Pilgrim band was composed of 2037 men, 127 women and 57 children.” The great march was unique in its strength and though Gandhi was arrested and sentenced, the Satyagraha spread rapidly. There were almost fifty thousand indentured labourers on strike and several thousand Indians arrested and put in jails. The government tried to crush the movement with brute force, mistreating the Satyagrahis in prison, trying to force the labourers to go back to work but to no avail. The more there was repression, the more determined were the Satyagrahis, whose spirits remained unbroken even in the face of bullets.

Gandhi’s associates continued to lead the Satyagrahis and some of them deliberately

avoided arrest so that they could communicate with India and England. The brutalities unleashed by the South African government on peaceful marchers and protestors had horrified both the countries. The Viceroy Lord Hardinge openly supported the Indian movement and the Imperial Government of Britain was admonished by public leaders in London, to stop the atrocities in South Africa. The increasing pressure on the government of South Africa led to approving to Indian demands. Gandhi was released from prison on December 18, 1913, and General Smuts appointed the Solomon Commission to redress the grievances of the Indian community. General Smuts and Gandhi reached an agreement on June 30, 1914. An American biographer of Gandhi has very aptly summed up the situation thus, “In the end, General Smuts did what every Government that ever opposed Gandhi had to do-he yielded.” This agreement/ Act that came into effect from July 1914 made all non-Christian marriages legal, abolished the three-pound tax on Indian indentured labourers, banned the importation of indentured labourers from India after 1920, and also allowed Indians born in South Africa to enter the Cape Colony.

In his humble and modest way Gandhi did not claim any credit for himself but attributed it to the visionary statesmanship of General Botha and General Smuts. As the agreement was finalised, Gandhi announced his decision to sail back home to India, as his work in South Africa had practically come to a logical conclusion. Gandhi was given a series of emotionally charged farewell receptions, and in the mass meetings and rallies, people from all walks of life applauded his “saintly life,” “non-violent struggle,” “dedication to the cause”, his “experiments with truth and his abiding sense of public duty” with total disregard for personal safety, comfort and self-interest. Rev. John Howard described his life as a “living commentary on the principles of the New Testament”. Gandhi advised his countrymen in South Africa to nurse the settlement and with the cooperation of their European friends ensure that what was promised was fulfilled. A meeting of the Transvaal Indian Women’s Association was organised on 15th July 1914 in the Ebenzer Church Hall to bid Gandhi farewell. Thanking his compatriots and the people of South Africa regarding the Indian Relief Bill, Gandhi termed it as a morale boosting victory; disclaiming any credit, he acknowledged ‘the women children and young people,... who have died for the cause and to those who quickened the conscience of South Africa’. His message to the Indians was that ‘Satyagraha’ was pure and simple, an infinitely finer and more effective weapon than all the guns put together. To the European friends in South Africa, he appealed to consider the indentured and ex-indentured labourers as sensitive human beings, not as mere cattle.

The most important achievement of Gandhi in South Africa was the fact that during the Satyagraha struggle, when he defied the law, crossed provincial boundaries without registering fingerprints, going to prison and out of it, he was actually perfecting the creed of self-sacrifice and learning its immense power and effectiveness as a weapon. Even his staunch adversary in South Africa, General Smuts wrote years later, “It was my fate to be the antagonist of a man for whom even then I had the highest respect”. Thus we discover the truth in Gandhi’s own words that “it was in South Africa, that God forsaken dark continent, where I found my God.. It was only when I had learnt to reduce myself to zero that I was able to evolve the power of Satyagraha in South Africa”.

5.6 Lessons Learned

The successful end of Satyagraha and the amicable settlement of the Indian question placed Gandhi on the “pedestal of national and international glory.” Satyagraha, under his

leadership, had given South Africa a great chapter in its history where the strength of the spirit emerged victorious in the face of brutal tyranny.

Gandhi's life in South Africa was an example in itself where all his unique revolutionary ideas acquired shape and form. He came across various philosophical ideas which helped mould his socio-economic ideas. John Ruskins's "Unto this Last", Tolstoy's "The Kingdom of God is within you", Thoreau's writings on 'civil disobedience' and various other works inspired him greatly and enlightened his thinking. The Phoenix and Tolstoy Settlements set formidable examples of community living, peaceful co-existence, equality of all and the dignity of labour.

It was South Africa which saw him present a clear perspective and strategy for his homeland's regeneration in the form of "Hind Swaraj" or the "Indian Home Rule", a seminal work. Gandhi felt that the ill-effects of the contemporary civilisation needed to be purified with a spiritual perspective of development. The genesis and evolution of this great work written in 1909 is explained by Gandhi thus: "It was first published in the columns of the Indian Opinion of South Africa. It was written in 1908 during my return voyage from London to South Africa in answer to the Indian School of violence and its prototype in South Africa. I came in contact with every known Indian anarchist in London. Their bravery impressed me, but I felt that their zeal was misguided. I felt that violence was no remedy for India's ills, and that her civilization required the use of a different and higher weapon for self-protection. The Satyagraha of South Africa was still an infant hardly two years old. But it had developed sufficiently to permit me to write of it with some degree of confidence. I thought that it was due to my English friends that they should know its contents. It teaches the gospel of love in place of that of hate. It replaces violence with self-sacrifice. It pits soul force against brute force. I commend it to those who would care to read it. The booklet is a severe condemnation of 'modern civilization.' I feel that if India will discard 'modern civilization' she can only gain by doing so."

It was during the struggle in South Africa when he endured prison terms that he realised the inner strength of women through Kasturba and used the potential of "Stri-Shakti" (Women power) in the Satyagraha. Satyagraha and Sarvodaya, based on the twin pillars of truth and non-violence, were given concrete shape and form in both theory and practice by him.

5.7 SUMMARY

This unit comprehensively summarises Gandhi's troubles and travails in South Africa and how he adopted the crucial weapon of Satyagraha to achieve the goal of Indian indentured labour rights. The South Africa episode is an eye-opener to those who believed in the brute force and who failed to achieve their ends in a suppressive manner. It is significant to note the spiritual and moral upliftment that Gandhi went through these testing years and to which he remained committed all his life. South Africa proved to be an effective laboratory where Gandhi successfully tried his experiments with truth and non-violence.

5.8 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

1. Briefly examine the conditions of Indians living in South Africa at the time of Gandhi's arrival.

2. Discuss Gandhi's fight against racial discrimination and procuring the rights for Indian labour.
3. Examine at length the birth and significance of Satyagraha.
4. Write a short note on the Boer War.

SUGGESTED READINGS

1. Gandhi, M.K., Satyagraha in South Africa, Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 1928.
2. Homer, A Jack., (ed), Gandhi Reader, Grove Press, New York, 1994.
3. Nayar, Sushila., Mahatma Gandhi: Satyagraha at Work, Vol.IV, Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 1989.
4. Kripalani, Krishna., Gandhi – A Life Revisited, Mehta Publication, New Delhi, 1983.
5. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan., (ed), Mahatma Gandhi: Essays and Reflections on His Life and Work, Jaico Book House, New Delhi, 2007 edition.
6. Singh, Savita., Satyagraha, Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, New Delhi, 2007.

UNIT 6 RETURN OF GANDHI

Structure

- 6.1 Introduction
 - Aims and Objectives
 - 6.2 Beginning of Public Life
 - 6.3 Champaran Satyagraha, 1917-1918
 - 6.4 Ahmedabad Textile Mill Labour Satyagraha: February – March 1918
 - 6.5 Kheda Satyagraha
 - 6.6 The Rowlatt Satyagraha
 - 6.7 Summary
 - 6.8 Terminal Questions
- Suggested Readings

6.1 INTRODUCTION

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi left the shores of South Africa at the age of forty-five, a fully formed personality, with no personal property and with only one ambition, of serving his country and people. Though the Indian political leaders were aware of his work in South Africa, he was not much known to the Indians in general. To most Indians, he was “the great Gandhi” who had guided the Indians in South Africa towards self-respect and justice through Satyagraha. Gandhi was a full-fledged Satyagrahi by the time he returned with a keen sense of self-discipline, which he ardently followed althrough his life.

On his return, Gandhi found himself in a country he scarcely knew, for he was away from his motherland for almost twenty eight years. He sought to understand the undercurrents of those times and searching for his roots, he was tentative and cautious in those early years in India. His political mentor, Gopal Krishna Gokhale, advised him to travel through various part of India for a year so he could learn about his land and people, with “his ears open but his mouth shut.” He was convinced that the British rule was harming India, but India also needed to remove the evils prevalent in its society and system before she was fit for self-governance.

Aims and Objectives

After reading this Unit, you would be able to understand:

- The significance of Satyagraha as a potential tool of solving problems
- Gandhi’s Satyagraha in Champaran, Kheda and Ahmedabad mill cases
- The struggle against the Rowlatt Bill
- The importance of non-violent struggle

6.2 BEGINNING OF PUBLIC LIFE

Sabarmati (Satyagraha) Ashram-1915

By May 1915, Gandhi established the first ashram in India at Kochrab, near Ahmedabad. An Ashram is usually a community living retreat and in India there has been an ancient tradition of many spiritual leaders establishing such ashrams to spread their spiritual and philosophical ideas. As the Kochrab village was affected with plague and the obstinate villagers refused to let him organise the sanitation, Gandhi decided to move his ashram on the banks of the river Sabarmati, popularly known as Sabarmati Ashram, founded on May 25, 1915. Beginning with twenty-five inmates, who vowed to a life of chastity, truth, non-violence, non-stealing, non-possession, control of palate, shramdan, swadeshi, religious harmony, fearlessness and removal of untouchability, the Ashram was dedicated to the service of humanity in every possible way. Mahatma Gandhi had laid down certain rules and regulations, **“Maxims of life” “laid down by our scriptures”**, for spiritual guidance.

The ashram was a living example of Gandhi's ideology applied practically in day to day life. Soon, an untouchable family of three sought permission to live there and Gandhi willingly accepted the family, who consented to follow the ashram rules and regulations. Their admission created a flutter and led to stoppage of all monetary help but later, with help from an anonymous visitor, finances were stabilised. The admission of this family proved a valuable lesson to the Ashram inmates, training them to countenance untouchability. Subsequently, as the storm over their entry subsided, Gandhi received support from all quarters in his ashram work. The Ashram functioned like an organised community, where the Charkha became the focal point of Gram Swaraj and the sounds of the spinning wheel became the anthem of the masses toiling for freedom. The Khadi movement had begun in earnest. It remained the headquarters for the next fifteen years and it was here that Gandhi met his devoted disciples and staunch followers like Mahadev Desai and Sardar Patel. This ashram was Gandhi's abode till 1933 and was later turned into a centre for the removal of untouchability. The Ashram was a glorious symbol of Gandhi's dedication to the service of mankind that continues to play an inspiring role till date.

Speech at the Banaras Hindu University, February 1916

Gandhi delivered his first public speech in India on 4th February 1916, on the occasion of the opening ceremony of the Banaras Hindu University, attended by many distinguished visitors like the Viceroy, Lord Hardinge, Mrs. Annie Besant and many members from India's erstwhile royal families. Gandhi, speaking in English, expressed his **“deep humiliation and shame”** at being compelled **“to address my own countrymen in a language that is foreign to me.”** He emphasised upon the need to make Hindustan and the vernacular languages as the basic medium of education in the country, so that precious years of students' lives are not wasted in trying to master a foreign language like English. Gandhi's hard hitting speech succeeded in “turning the searchlight” inwards. In all his public and private speeches he made it clear **“I feel and I have felt during the whole of my public life that we need, what any nation need now, is nothing else and nothing less than Character building.”** In this hard hitting speech he, in his gentle, modest way, offered a criticism of India. He referred to the splendour of the princely class, the overpowering influence of English as the medium of communication instead of Hindustani and vernaculars, the dirt, poverty, illiteracy as the degrading factors of Indian life. The Indian masses were instantly taken by it, as it came from a man who lived like the millions of

them, speaking for the poor and the downtrodden. The echoes of his words reverberated through out the country, even in those pre-radio days by a word of mouth.

6.3 CHAMPARAN SATYAGRAHA, 1917-18

The uncertainty over his actions in his homeland took a concrete shape in the Champaran movement in Bihar. The indigo fields of Champaran in Bihar provided him the first opportunity of using the powerful tool of Satyagraha in solving a long-standing dispute. It was during the Indian National Congress Session at Lucknow in December 1916 that an obscure peasant from Bihar, Rajkumar Shukla, decided to acquaint his fellow countrymen with the plight of the indigo farmers.

In its early years the East India Company had discovered that the cultivation of the indigo plant was immensely profitable. The plant, a delicate one, needed marshy land for growth and armies of peasants were recruited forcibly to cultivate it. They were paid very low wages and were forced by Law to plant three twentieths of their holdings with indigo, and the harvest was handed over to the factory owners in part payment of rent. For long oppressive years of tyranny the factory ruled, indigo was the king and the poor peasantry was at the mercy of the landowners. Destiny chose upon an earnest peasant in the farm of Rajkumar Shukla from Champaran who would simply not take no for an answer. He wanted the Mahatma to visit his district and see for himself the condition of the indigo cultivators.

Gandhi went to Champaran undertaking a term of action, distinctively his own. It was the predecessor of the psychological pattern he applied to all his activities. He started with Patna where he met many lawyers, Congress members and people from various sections of society, and asked them to accompany him to Champaran and help the sharecroppers in any possible way they could. He made it quite clear to those volunteers that they must be prepared for all eventualities, even going to prison and they must pledge themselves unconditionally to help the cause of the indigo farmers. The system was new to Indians but gradually the nation learnt the way their leader wanted to get it organised into action. It was during the Champaran movement that he befriended some great future national leaders and lifelong associates like Dr. Rajendra Prasad and Acharya J. B. Kripalani among others. Gandhi's presence had electrified the people and it was felt that at long last something would be done for the peasants not through court action, but in an entirely new and unexpected way.

Gandhi explained his work plan to a convened committee of lawyers and teachers where he said the time for legal action had passed and now the need of the hour was a careful examination of the facts through interviews with the farmers and careful reports. The lawyers and teachers, although very well educated, had to work like clerks in collecting the reports and compiling them. There would be no agitation, just a quiet accumulation of thousands of reports on the grievances of the indigo farmers. These activities were to be undertaken in full view of the police and government officials. There was to be no violence at all.

Gandhi was on a new testing ground where except for the farmer Rajkumar Shukla, he knew nothing about the lives of the indigo sharecroppers, knew very little about the existing complicated system of land-tenure and was unfamiliar with the local dialect as well. He was convinced by the lawyers and teachers that the situation as explained by Rajkumar Shukla indeed required urgent attention as well as action. In his methodical

way, Gandhi warned the opponent- the head of the indigo planters' association and Government District Commissioner that he intended to investigate the grievances. Their responses clearly indicated their non-cooperative attitude and he knew that in all probability he would be imprisoned. But inspite of everything, he proceeded to collect depositions from indigo sharecroppers of the region.

It was a new kind of defiance to the British Government, one to which it was yet to grow accustomed. Gandhi attracted the downtrodden farmers so powerfully that they flocked in thousands to be where he was, to see him, to hear him and to narrate their woes to him. In order to save the situation the British authorities decided to order him to leave the district stating that his object was "likely to be agitation rather than a genuine search for knowledge." He replied to the local commissioner that he desired only to conduct a genuine search for knowledge and rejecting outrightly the order of expulsion he made it quite clear to the authorities that "Out of a sense of public responsibility, I feel it to be my duty to say that I am unable to leave this district, but if it so pleases the authorities, I shall submit to the order by suffering the penalty of disobedience." He sent telegrams to the Indian leaders working with him and wrote a letter to the secretary of the Viceroy that the peasants in the district were living "under a reign of terror and their property, their persons and their minds are all under the planters' heels." He returned to the Viceroy the *Kaiser-I-Hind* Gold Medal, awarded to him for humanitarian work since it was clear that his humanitarian motives were being questioned. Gandhi was greatly assisted by his friend, C. F. Andrews in his work. He also prepared a set of rules for his co-workers to follow, in case of his arrest, that the inquiry into the peasants' grievances was to continue under the direction of Sh. Brijkishore Prasad, a man with a sharp legal mind with immense talents.

Gandhi appeared for trial and pleaded guilty and declared his decision to pursue the inquiry, and even if failed he would resume it the moment he was released. Sensing unrest and tension, the local judge Mr. Heycock, in consultation with his superiors, dismissed the case against Gandhi and the Lt. Governor ordered that the local officials should assist him in the inquiry. After this unexpected victory in his first confrontation with the British rulers, he proceeded with his depositions. Simultaneously, he was also organising his recruits, in this case affluent professionals from the state, into men dedicated to the quest for truth. By now Gandhi and his co-workers had collected thousands of depositions from the farmers, much more than needed to prepare their report but Gandhi had another purpose in his mind. It was evident to him that these poor farmers were accustomed to centuries of oppression, exploitation, starvation and flogging. What they needed was to be **"free from fear"** as he said.

Gandhi sent for volunteers to teach the ignorant, illiterate villagers the basic concepts of hygiene and the value of education and himself took up the task of scavenging, washing, sweeping, and started six schools to impart basic education. The reformer in him always taught by his own example. He always felt that obligations need to be fulfilled if we are striving to attain our rights. Though the government was growing wary of Gandhi's presence in Champaran, he made it quite clear that he would leave the region only when the grievances of the exploited sharecroppers were recognised and redressal started. The government instituted the Champaran Agrarian Committee with Gandhi as a member and after a series of deliberations of the committee, the Champaran Agrarian Act was passed on April 26, 1918. This ended the infamous **"Teen Kathia"** tradition. The government was forced to return the revenue collected unlawfully.

The Champaran experience is the first triumph of Satyagraha in India. Gandhi had gained a humanitarian objective by his own distinctive means of truth, self-control and non-violence. Champaran was, practically, the introduction of Satyagraha to India where Gandhi told the British firmly and politely **“that they could not order him around in his own country.”** A young British civil servant of that time was among the first few who witnessed and recognised Gandhi’s transformation from a man to the Mahatma. He writes on April 29, 1917, after his first meeting with Gandhi “we may look Mr. Gandhi as an idealist, a fanatic, or a revolutionary according to our particular notions. But to the raiyats he is their liberator and they credit him with extraordinary powers. He moves about the villages asking them to lay their grievances before him, and he is transfiguring the imagination of the masses of ignorant men.”

The Champaran movement was the country’s first direct object lesson in civil disobedience and its introduction to the leader who was destined to lead the nation to freedom through Satyagraha. In the Champaran movement, Gandhi combined the socio-political awakening amongst the farmers along with intensive constructive programmes which included education, health, sanitation etc.

6.4 AHMEDABAD TEXTILE MILL LABOUR SATYAGRAHA: February – March 1918

While Gandhi was about to conclude his work in Champaran he received an urgent appeal from the textile mill workers of Ahmedabad. The dispute arose between the textile labourers and the textile mill owners of Ahmedabad. It began basically over the dearness allowance payment to be made to the workers by the owners. Earlier during a plague epidemic, the workers had been granted a special bonus, so that they would continue working during the epidemic period and the bonus had continued even after the danger from the disease had subsided. But in January 1918, the mill owners decided to withdraw the same and in reply the workers asked for a 50 percent raise in their wages. Gandhi, upon being informed of the situation, was asked to intervene, first by one of the mill owners. He went to Ahmedabad and started investigating the matter thoroughly. After having studied the cost of living and workers’ conditions, he concluded that an increase of 35 percent was appropriate. He felt that the mill workers’ grievances were genuine and the mill owners were unrelenting to redress those grievances.

Both sides agreed to submit the dispute to arbitration on behalf of the workers. In a surprising move the mill owners declared that they would not abide by the arbitration and threatened to dismiss all those workers who were not ready to accept a 20 percent increase in the living allowance.

Gandhi advised the workers to demand no more and no less than a 35 percent increase as their living allowance. Conflict followed the rejection of this demand by the mill owners and Gandhi found himself leading the struggle of the mill-hands and advised them to go on strike but by taking recourse to non-violence and self-support through other work to sustain themselves (many of them helped in setting up a weaving school in Gandhi’s Ashram) and not surrender until the raise of 35 percent was secured, and not to indulge in quarrels, theft and destruction of mill owners’ property. Gandhi’s organised non-violent struggle paid off with the use of Satyagraha as the technique to achieve a constructive solution to a problem.

‘Ek Tek’ (United resolve) was the slogan of the workers and Gandhi continuously guided them towards peaceful agitation. Upon witnessing signs of cracking under pressure within the ranks of strikers, he declared his intention to fast till the settlement is reached. Fasting for a specific purpose was another characteristic of the Mahatma’s genius, which India had witnessed in its use and effect for the first time during the Ahmedabad Satyagraha. The general nature of every fast of Gandhi was that of a prayer for peace and sanity. For Gandhi it had become a permanent element of his existence and during the course of the independence movement led by him, the terrifying power of his fasting was unleashed on the unsuspecting in such a way that almost the entire nation came to a standstill, in remorse for its failings. In the Ahmedabad Satyagraha his fast resulted in the settlement in favour of the striking mill workers amicably.

The Ahmedabad Labour Satyagraha established the strength of dealing with any kind of conflict, where fasting proved to be a greatly effective weapon of non-violence with its coercive character. The next important factor here was the ‘truth factor’, the justification behind the demand of the self-suffering was present in the workers’ attitude. The workers also received training in various forms of labour during the strike period, which included carrying heavy loads of brick for a building at the Ashram, as well as weaving and other ashram activities. The Satyagraha was effectively publicised through peace marches, slogans of “Ek tek” and distribution of leaflets by the Satyagrahis. Throughout the peaceful struggle, the initiative was with the Satyagrahis. This movement also highlights the role of arbitration in disputes as to how it can help conclude a Satyagraha by a peaceful solution to the conflict. The most tangible evidence of the success of the Ahmedabad Labour Satyagraha is the development of the Ahmedabad Textile Labour Association during this struggle in 1946, it was said that it was “the most powerful labour union in the country with a membership of 55,000”; and it was recognised as outstanding for its “indigenous character..... and its system of joint arbitration and conciliation fostered by the influence of Gandhi”. The union is remarkable for its adherence to Gandhian principles of non-violence for self-sustenance in cases of lockout, strike, loss of employment etc. These trainings are also in keeping with the basics of Satyagraha and proved to be a practical lesson in Gandhian principle of employee – employer relationship and constructive programme-based approach for improving the conditions of workers.

6.5 KHEDA SATYAGRAHA, March 22nd to June 6th 1918

In 1918, large parts of Gujarat were affected by a severe famine and Kheda was the worst hit district. The agrarian economy was devastated but the British Government of the Bombay Presidency was least concerned about the plight of the poor farmers. It insisted that the farmers not only pay full taxes but also that 23 percent increase effective from that year was to be paid.

The peasants of Kheda wanted the revenue assessment for the year to be suspended on account of crop failure due to the famine, but the government turned a deaf ear to their plea. The peasants turned to Gandhi for help since petitions to the government and press statements failed to have any effect. Gandhi felt that civil disobedience on a massive scale was required to force the government into reasonableness and reduce the taxes. Gandhi travelled through the affected villages and found that the plights of the farmers were genuine and he advised them to refuse to pay undue taxes and also advised them to remain non-violent in their protest.

A Satyagraha sabha was formed under his guidance to set up at Nadiad orphanage and marked the beginning of his association with stalwarts like Vallabhbhai Patel and Mahadev Desai. Among other followers were Anusuyaben, Shankarlal Banker, and Indulal Yajnik who took the Satyagraha pledge and actively participated in the movement. Vallabhbhai Patel emerged as the chief organiser of the Satyagraha who, giving up on his western lifestyles of a well established barrister, became one with the poor peasants, walking from village to village giving strength to the farmers to remain firm on their demands.

The methods applied for Satyagraha were peaceful protest meetings, negotiations, assessment of facts by public enquiry, formation of political associations, no-tax campaign, courting arrest, printing and distribution of pamphlets, prayer for self-purification etc. The refusal to revenue payment made the government resort to police action and intimidation squads to seize property, cattle as well as whole farms. These officers even attached the standing crops of the farmers. An official had attached a crop of onions and Gandhi felt it was permissible for a good Satyagrahi to go out at night and remove the onions because the attachment was unfairly made. 'The onion thief' Mohanlal Pandya, a lawyer Satyagrahi was arrested for this crime and given ten days simple imprisonment. Thousands of farmers and Satyagraha activists were arrested but there was no violent incident on the part of the protesters. The revolt evoked great sympathy all over the country, and finally the Government relented and suspended the payment of revenue for the poor farmers.

This Satyagraha, though not as categorically clear cut as the other movements, taught the peasants to fight for their rights by shedding their lethargy as well as the lesson of self-reliance and self-confidence. The power of mass action was once again pitted against the might and emerged victorious.

6.6 THE ROWLATT SATYAGRAHA (1st March to 18th April 1919)

The infamous Rowlatt Bill was the outcome of the recommendation made by the Sedition Committee presided over by Sir Rowlatt in 1918, and was prepared to strengthen the hand of the government in the control of crime and sedition. The Rowlatt Act (Govt. of India Act No XI of 1919) "was formed to enable an archical offences to be tried expeditiously before a strong court, consisting of three High Court Judges, with no right to appeal." It also provided powers of preventive detention - the arrest and confinement of persons suspected of acts threatening public safety, and also the power to ask such people to furnish security, reside in a particular place or to abstain from any specified act. The Act also provided the authorities to detain "dangerous" persons.

The Rowlatt Bill totally denied civil liberties to Indians and was also responsible for bringing Gandhi into active Indian politics. The report of the Rowlatt Committee recommended an extension into peacetime of all the wartime rules in suppression of free speech, freedom of the press and the right of assembly. Gandhi called the passing of the Rowlatt Act as a "farce of legal formality."

This was the turning point in Gandhi's life as a strong political force in India as well as the entire world and became instrumental in bringing him to the mainstream politics of the country. Faced with a political situation of grave importance, he realised that the time might have arrived for the application of the principles of Satyagraha on a national level. He travelled through the country to prepare people for a mass movement against the

Rowlatt Bill. In spite of official and unofficial appeals, the Viceroy signed the bill on March 18, 1919 and the Rowlatt Act became law.

To Gandhi, the repressive Rowlatt Bills were a direct breach of faith and betrayal of trust. Continued British audacities, the Jallianwala Bagh massacre at Amritsar and the rousing discontent simmering in the country were instrumental in bringing Gandhi into the forefront of national leadership leading India to its logical historical destiny through a series of mass movements. Gandhi drafted and circulated a pledge of resistance to the Rowlatt Bill: 'In the event of these Bills becoming law and until they are withdrawn we shall refuse civilly to obey these laws and such other laws as a committee to be hereafter appointed may think fit, and further affirm that in this struggle we shall faithfully follow truth and refrain from violence to life, person and property' (cit in BR Nanda, p.109).

The idea of *Hartal* to protest against the Rowlatt Act on 6th April 1919 was unique and the response to this call was widespread. Gandhi writes in his Autobiography the beginning of the Rowlatt Satyagraha in this context thus: "The idea came to me last night ...that we should call upon the country to observe a general hartal. Satyagraha is a process of self-purification, and ours is a sacred fight, and it seems to me to be in the fitness of things that it should be commenced with an act of self-purification. Let all the people of India, therefore, suspend their business on that day and observe the day as one of fasting and prayer. The Musalmans may not fast for more than one day; so the duration of the fast should be 24 hours. It is very difficult to say whatever all the provinces would respond to this appeal of ours or not, but I feel fairly sure of Bombay, Madras, Bihar and Sindh. I think we should have every reason to feel satisfied even if all these places observe the hartal fittingly." Accordingly, the entire country, barring a few exceptions went on massive strike. In the big cities people did not go to work, banks could not operate, ships were neither loaded or unloaded, public transportation stood still, post offices were not working. That there was an astonishing non-activity in almost every sphere of life proved beyond doubt that a new active force was in operation. The bewildered British authorities tried to treat it as "sedition" but realised that it was something much more powerful and effective than mere "Sedition".

The immediate objective of this Satyagraha was the withdrawal of the enacted Bill which was passed to "cope with Anarchical and Revolutionary Crime" and the prevention of the passage of the second Bill; and the long-term objective of the entire movement was to mobilise support and intensify political awareness. In a way, it heralded a new era in the nationalist struggle for freedom. The movement saw the massive participation of "millions" of Indians across the country led by Gandhi and the nationalist leaders. The official British report of the movement makes mention of the "unprecedented fraternization between Hindus and Muslims, "women and children also came out of homes to take part in the Satyagraha". The Satyagraha pledge emphasising adherence to truth and non-violence was taken by the protesters and the mass participation was initiated by a day of "humiliation and prayer" with Satyagrahis taking up a 24 hour fast to strengthen themselves for offering civil disobedience. Thousands of volunteers sold copies of the books 'Swaraj' and 'Sarvodaya' on the streets. The government was jolted out of its complacency to see the war time "recruiting sergeant" of the Empire turning into a rebel.

The enthusiasm generated by his appeal for hartal gradually escalated towards violence when the news of Gandhi's arrest spread like wildfire. Following a widespread violence across India, Gandhi appealed to people to adhere to truth and non-violence, but soon realised that people were too excited to listen to his voice of sanity. As a result he

suspended the Satyagraha movement and undertook a three-day fast as penance for the violence committed by the people.

On 13th April 1919 when Gandhi had announced his three-day fast decision in Ahmedabad, a horrifying massacre of innocent citizens took place in the city of Amritsar. A peaceful gathering of people had assembled at the Jallianwala Bagh to celebrate Baisakhi and also discuss the participation in anti-Rowlatt agitations. Brigadier General Reginald Dyer, who had been given the task of maintaining peace and order in the area, learnt about the meeting at Jallianwala Bagh and regarded it as a deliberate defiance of prohibitory orders regarding public meetings. He sent troops and ordered indiscriminate firing upon the crowd till all ammunition was expended, with no forewarning. In this gruesome display of British atrocity, the official count registered 400 dead and one to two thousand injured but the unofficial inquiry conducted by Gandhi himself estimated 1200 dead and 3600 wounded.

The atrocities continued which included public stripping and flogging of Indians and General Dyer's infamous "Crawling orders" on a particular street in Amritsar where a mob had beaten up an English woman. Indians were made to crawl on all fours on this street as punishment. The British Government appointed the Hunter Committee to look into the Punjab atrocities but Gandhi and other national leaders boycotted it and constituted a parallel enquiry committee on behalf of the congress to look into the matter. It comprised of Sh. Motilal Nehru, Sh. C. R. Das, Abbas Tyabji, Mr. Jayakar and Gandhi, and its findings were not disproved at all.

This tragic incident proved beyond doubt that there was no hope in the British Government. The British officials, suffering pangs of guilt and with a desire to do better for India in future, brought in the same year, 1919 the Montague Chelmsford Reforms offering Indians a constitution and a share in the Government but it was more an eyewash than a genuine offer. Gandhi advised the leaders of the Indian National Congress to 'make a success of the new instalment of reforms granted by the British Government and thus prepare for a fuller measure of responsibility' (BR Nanda, p.112).

6.7 SUMMARY

Undoubtedly the non-cooperation movements as initiated by Gandhi helped the common man gain strength, confidence and courage to raise his voice against injustice and violation of his natural rights. The leaders of the Congress shed their elitist attitudes and became one with the masses of the country, serving them and providing leadership to them, as the movements were unprecedented revolts against the British rule in India. Prisons became like a pilgrimage for the freedom fighters, Swadeshi feeling gripped the nation with great fervour and the nation hummed to the lyrical chants of the Charkha. The educational institutions of the country became the training grounds of the patriotic national movement for freedom. From Champaran to Non-cooperation movement and to last, Gandhi's methods ensured non-violent struggles and an indomitable spirit.

6.8 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

1. 'Champaran was the beginning of Gandhi's Satyagraha in India'. Discuss it at length.
2. Examine the Satyagraha struggles in Ahmedabad textile mills and Kheda and their relevance.
3. Discuss at length the Rowlatt Satyagraha.

SUGGESTED READINGS

1. Homer, A Jack., (ed) Gandhi Reader I, Indiana University Press, USA, 1961
2. Gandhi, M.K., My Experiments with Truth, Navajivan Publishing House, 1961 edition
3. Anand, Y.P., Mahatma Gandhi and Satyagraha – A Compendium, National Gandhi Museum, New Delhi, 2006
4. Sheean, Vincent., Mahatma Gandhi- A Great Life in Brief, Publications Division, 2005
5. Bondurant, Joan V., Conquest of Violence – The Gandhian Philosophy of Conflict, Oxford University Press, 1959
6. Kripalani, Krishna., Gandhi- a Life Revisited, Mehta Publications, New Delhi, 1983
7. Payne, Robert., Life and Death of Mahatma Gandhi, Rupa & Co, New Delhi, 1969 (reprint, New Delhi, 2008)
8. Nanda, B.R., Mahatma Gandhi-A Biography, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2004 edition.



ignou
THE PEOPLE'S
UNIVERSITY

UNIT 7 KHILAFAT AND NON-COOPERATION MOVEMENTS

Structure

- 7.1 Introduction
 - Aims and Objectives
- 7.2 Beginnings of the Khilafat Movement
- 7.3 Background to the Non-Cooperation Movement
- 7.4 Convergence of the Two Movements under Gandhi's Leadership
- 7.5 Main Phases, 1920-22
- 7.6 Role of the Movements in the Anti-Imperialist Struggles
- 7.7 Summary
- 7.8 Terminal Questions

Suggested Readings

7.1 INTRODUCTION

Khilafat and Non-cooperation movements were important milestones in the history of modern India. Both these movements ushered in a new era of mass mobilisation and shaped the future of Indian polity in important ways. In a way, the non-cooperation movement emerged out of the Khilafat and anti-Rowlatt movements. In fact, it was the Khilafat Conference which earlier adopted the non-cooperation programme. However, it could become a full-fledged movement only after the Congress decided to adopt it. Moreover, when Mahatma Gandhi withdrew it and the Congress ratified the withdrawal, the non-cooperation movement ended, whereas the Khilafat movement continued beyond this. Thus, the Khilafat movement had originated earlier and lasted longer than the non-cooperation movement. Although their trajectories were somewhat different, both were anti-imperialist movements and were brought together during 1920-22, under the leadership of Gandhi. In fact, in the absence of Gandhi, it might not be possible to imagine a successful convergence of these two anti-imperialist streams.

Aims and Objectives

After reading this Unit, you would be able to:

- Discuss the causes for the emergence of the Khilafat and non-cooperation movements.
- Outline the course they adopted,
- Point out the significance of Mahatma Gandhi's leadership for both the movements, and
- Describe their impact on the Indian people and the colonial state.

7.2 BEGINNINGS OF THE KHILAFAT MOVEMENT

The Khilafat movement in India arose out of the sentiments of the Indian Muslims to protect the institution of the Khalifa in Turkey. The Khalifa in Islamic tradition was considered as the successor to the Prophet Muhammad, the commander of the believers and the custodian and protector of the Muslim holy places. In the nineteenth century, the Ottoman Empire was the only Islamic empire and, therefore, the Sultan of Turkey was held in great esteem by the Muslims as the Khalifa. As Turkey was defeated in the First World War and it was certain that the victorious Allies would impose strict terms on it, the Muslims in India launched the Khilafat movement to pressurise the British government to be lenient and preserve the territorial integrity of the Ottoman Empire and the institution of Khalifa.

The ideological origins of the Khilafat movement have been explained in two ways. On the one hand, scholars have located it in the pan-Islamic sentiments and movements across the world and its outward nature. On the other hand, some historians have emphasised its inward character and its efforts to use pan-Islamic symbols to build a pan-Indian Muslim identity and to bring it in sync with Indian nationalism. In fact, both these trends were not contradictory. The Khilafat may be seen as the attempt on the part of the Indian Muslim leadership to bring their pan-Islamic and Indian nationalist sentiments together. It was this synthesis that brought about the major mass mobilisation in 1919 and thereafter.

This quest for the unity of the Indian Muslims found a religious centre in the office of the Khalifa and in the person of Turkey's Sultan. Since the late nineteenth century, there was a widespread acknowledgement among the Indian Sunni Muslims of the Turkey's Sultan as Khalifa who would protect the Muslim holy places. Thus, pan-Islamic sentiments surged among the Indian Muslim leaders whenever Turkey was involved in hostilities, for example, during the Russo-Turkish war of 1877-78 and the Greco-Turkish war of 1897. During 1911-13, a series of Balkan wars created fears in the minds of Muslim leaders that the Christian powers were attempting to crush the Ottoman Empire and the Khalifa.

During and after the First World War, these sentiments again came to the fore. Turkey was part of the Axis powers along with Germany and Austria which fought against Britain and its allies. After its victory in the War, the British government removed the Khalifa from power in Turkey. There were also talks about imposition of a harsh peace treaty on Turkey which would deprive it of territories and influence. Under these circumstances, a widespread movement among the Indian Muslims developed which demanded that the Khalifa must retain control over the Muslim holy places and that sufficient territories must be left with the Khalifa to enable him to defend such territories. This movement, known as the Khilafat movement, quickly spread among the elite as well as among the urban popular classes and the ulama (lit. Muslim religious scholars). The British government was declared an enemy; Khilafat funds were flooded with money and ornaments; the Khilafat meetings were attended by thousands of people, and thousands from the border areas migrated from the land of enemy (*Dar al-Harb*) to the land of Islam (*Dar al-Islam*).

The movement derived its leadership from two streams, both involved in educational reforms for the Muslims in the wake of the colonial rule. One was the Aligarh-based Westernising intelligentsia which advocated English education and canvassed for employment in government services. The other was ulama, or Muslim religious scholars, who attempted to strengthen the traditional Islamic system of education, based on Madrasas and were

opposed to the English education and Western manners. The presence of these two types of leadership created a variation in the movement. While the Western-educated leadership generally sought moderation, the ulama provided a radical edge to the movement. However, both these streams, at that moment of time, were united in their anti-British stance and in their support for a pan-Islamic cause.

In order to properly organise the movement, the leadership established two all-India bodies – the All-India Khilafat Committee and the Jamiat al-Ulama-e-Hind. The earlier Muslim political organisation – Muslim League – was completely overshadowed by these two organisations until the mid-1920s. In 1919, the drive to mobilise the Muslim community for Khilafat demands began successfully. However, it was quite clear that the fight against the British could not succeed unless the non-Muslim Indians were also mobilised in a broader anti-imperialist struggle. At that point of time, the Congress as a nationalist organisation and Mahatma Gandhi as the most acceptable leader were highly revered. Gandhi was willing to lead the Khilafat movement, but the Congress was not yet prepared for an all-India movement. However, various other circumstances made it possible for the many anti-imperialist organisations to come together on one platform.

7.3 BACKGROUND TO THE NON-COOPERATION MOVEMENT

The Khilafat movement, besides its pan-Islamic character, was also deeply anti-imperialist and nationalist in its impulse. Beside this, there were several other factors which gave rise to intense anti-imperialist feelings among the Indian people in general. The economic and political situation of the country during and after the First World War created dissatisfaction against the British rule. The prices of commodities rose sharply during and after the War creating much hardship for the people. Moreover, the peasantry in some areas was also restive due to increasingly high demand of rents and taxes. This was reflected in the agitations by peasants and workers in various parts of country like Champaran, Kheda, Ahmedabad, Bombay, Madras, etc.

The political optimism of the War years also received severe setback when the British government backtracked on its promises to consider nationalist demands in return for the Indian support in the War. The Montague-Chelmsford Reforms, which resulted in the Government of India Act 1919, disillusioned the nationalists who had expected much more in the direction of self-government. The Indian National Congress, in a special session at Bombay in August 1918, condemned these proposals as ‘disappointing and unsatisfactory’ and demanded effective self-government.

As if to add insult to injury the colonial government passed the Rowlatt Act in March 1919, which empowered the government to arrest and imprison any person without trial. The Act was passed even when the Indian members in the Central Legislative Council opposed it. This incensed the Indian people and a widespread unrest followed. Under the leadership of Gandhi, a countrywide Satyagraha was held. There were huge meetings, demonstrations and strikes which sometimes also resulted in violence.

The massacre by the colonial government of peaceful protestors at Jallianwala Bagh in Punjab proved to be the last straw. On 13 April 1919, a huge but peaceful crowd gathered at Amritsar in the Jallianwala Bagh to protest against the arrest of their leaders who were participating in the anti-Rowlatt agitations. General Dyer ordered his troops to fire on the unarmed people. Hundreds were killed and thousands injured in the firing.

Such brutality shocked the entire nation and ripped open the mask of civilisation the British government was wearing. The great poet, Rabindranath Tagore renounced his knighthood in protest and declared thus: 'I, for my part, wish to stand, shorn of all special distinctions, by the side of my countrymen'. Similar sentiments were widespread and it was time for an all-India nationalist movement to emerge.

7.4 CONVERGENCE OF THE TWO MOVEMENTS UNDER GANDHI'S LEADERSHIP

Gandhi emerged on the national political scene after his constructive intervention in the peasants' and workers' struggles in Champaran, Kheda and Ahmedabad. After the War, he was emerging as almost a consensus candidate for the leadership of the Congress, particularly due to the ill-health of Bal Gangadhar Tilak. His belief in non-violence and his method of struggle through Satyagraha had also become known to people. The anti-Rowlatt agitation and the Khilafat movement were two widespread mobilisations after the War which were directed against the colonial government, and Gandhi played a major role in both of these. It may be said that it was his leadership that made the convergence of the two anti-imperialist streams – nationalist and the Khilafat – possible during this period.

The Khilafat leaders were very keen, right from the beginning, to get the support of the Hindus for their cause. In this effort, they found Gandhi as their staunchest ally. He further tried to join the nationalist demand for self-rule to the Muslim assertion over Khilafat question. He declared that 'In the proper solution of the Mahomedan question lies the realisation of Swarajya' [in Minault, 68]. This endeavour brought about an unprecedented Hindu-Muslim unity which was reflected in the subsequent mass mobilisations against the colonial rule. During the anti-Rowlatt agitations, Hindus and Muslims demonstrated together, and symbols of unity were made overtly public. The Khilafat leaders exhorted the Muslims not to kill cows for the Bakr-Id festival; an Arya Samaj leader, Swami Shraddhanand, was requested to give a speech from the pulpit of Jama Masjid in Delhi; in Amritsar, Dr. Saifuddin Kitchlew was given the keys of the Golden Temple; in Calcutta, Hindus were admitted for the first time to the Nakhuda Mosque; in Bombay, the leaders of both communities actively tried to sell banned political literature. There were similar shows of unity throughout the movement.

On 20 March 1919, a Khilafat Committee was formed in Bombay. Prominent local Muslim merchants were on the Committee which initially took a moderate stand, and their activities were restricted to meetings, petitions and deputations to secure a better treatment for Turkey at the Peace Conference. It was, however, the *ulama*-driven militant trend which pushed the movement beyond its narrow confines. The advocates of a militant movement gave whole-hearted support to the anti-Rowlatt agitation and wanted to launch a non-cooperation movement against the colonial government. An all-India Khilafat Day was observed on 17 October 1919 which was a huge success. The markets were closed and fasting, prayers, meetings and *hartals* were observed. In Delhi, Madras and Bombay, there were huge audiences, who gathered to hear their leaders. It was clear that the new Muslim leadership was reaching a much broader urban audience. In its wake, an all-India Khilafat Conference was organised in Delhi on 23-24 November 1919 in which Gandhi was also called. The Conference passed some important resolutions in case unjust treatment was meted out to Turkey during the peace settlement: boycott of peace celebrations by Muslims, non-cooperation with the government, and the boycott of British

goods. Gandhi was declared as the leader under whose guidance the movement would be carried forward and who commanded the respect of both the Hindus and the Muslims. Gandhi himself wanted all-round support for his nationalist cause and, therefore, he was not averse to the idea of bringing the two movements together provided they conformed to his method of politics. Thus, early in 1920, he declared that the Khilafat issue was more important than constitutional reforms and even the Punjab atrocities, and he was prepared to launch a movement of non-cooperation if the peace terms were antagonistic to the interests of Turkey. Besides this, other issues necessitating a wider movement were also present. The government had refused to rescind the Rowlatt Act, the Hunter Committee appointed to enquire into the Punjab atrocities tried to shield the guilty, the British House of Lords had voted in favour of General Dyer's heinous crimes, and in Britain, 30,000 pounds had been collected from the public as a gift to Dyer.

The terms of the Peace Treaty, which became public in May 1920, were a blow to the wishes of the Khilafat leaders. The Ottoman Empire controlled by the Turks was dismembered. The Arab countries were declared independent of the Ottoman Empire; Syria, Palestine and Mesopotamia were put under French and British mandates; Eastern Thrace and Smyrna were ceded to Greece; and although Constantinople remained with Turkey, the Straits were internationalised. Such disregard of their sentiments hurt most of the Indian Muslims very much. In a series of meetings held by the Khilafat Conference and in a meeting held along with Congress members on 1-2 June 1920 in Allahabad, it was decided to begin a programme of non-cooperation towards the government which would include:

- renunciation of titles conferred by the government,
- resignation from all kinds of government jobs, including military and police, and
- Non-payment of taxes to the government.

Both Gandhi and the Khilafat leaders were keen to start the non-cooperation movement as soon as possible. However, for this, the support of the Congress was necessary. Certain leaders of the Congress were opposed to this move as they felt that a movement on a religious issue like the Khilafat would not be conducive for the growth of the Indian polity. Their apprehensions were justified to some extent. The vocabulary of the Khilafat movement was entirely Muslim-oriented and filled with Islamic ideology and rhetoric. The arguments of even the best nationalists among them, such as Maulana Azad, were in support of allying with one set of non-Muslims (i.e., the Hindus) against another set of non-Muslims (i.e., the British). Through the entire course of the movement, the emphasis was on the separate existence of two communities and the need to unite them against the British who were considered as aggressors against both the Khalifa in Turkey and the Muslims and Hindus in India. So, although the Khilafat movement was anti-imperialist in orientation, the language of its articulation was basically Islamic.

However, at another level, strong nationalist sentiments were expressed during the course of the movement and constant appeals for communal amity were made. Moreover, the Khilafat leaders whole-heartedly supported the nationalist anti-imperialist movement like Rowlatt Satyagraha launched by Gandhi and the Congress and exhorted the Muslims to fully participate in this which resulted in the immense success of this agitation. Gandhi and Shaukat Ali together toured throughout the country mobilising support for the cause of non-cooperation. Other Khilafat leaders were also active in rallying support for the cause under the leadership of Gandhi. Thus, it may be said that during the summer of the 1920, there was a convergence of these two movements.

7.5 MAIN PHASES, 1920-22

The non-cooperation movement was formally launched on 1 August 1920. That day was also marked by the death of Lokmanya Tilak, which witnessed strikes and processions to mourn the passing way of this great national leader.

A special session of the Congress was held in Calcutta in September 1920 to finally deliberate and decide the issue of non-cooperation. It gave its assent to non-cooperation, despite some opposition by those interested in Council entry. By the time of the regular Congress Session in December 1920 held at Nagpur, the programme of non-cooperation was accepted without opposition. It involved the surrender of government titles and honorary positions, boycott of government schools and colleges, law courts, and foreign cloth. It could also be extended to include resignation from government service and non-payment of government taxes. Moreover, it was decided to set up national schools and colleges, establish and strengthen the panchayats for settlement of disputes, promotion of hand spinning and weaving, condemnation and renunciation of untouchability, maintenance of communal amity and strict observance of non-violence. Thus, for the first time, an open extra-constitutional programme of mass mobilisation was started by the Congress.

From January to March 1921, the main emphasis of the movement was on the boycott of government schools, colleges and law courts, and the use of *charkha*. Thousands of students left schools and colleges and joined 800 national schools and colleges that had come up throughout the country. There were massive student strikes in Calcutta and Lahore, and the educational boycott was particularly successful in Bengal and Punjab. Although the boycott of the law courts was not as successful, many leading lawyers of the country like C.R. Das, Motilal Nehru, Saifuddin Kitchlew, C. Rajagopalachari, M.R. Jayakar, Vallabhbhai Patel, Asaf Ali and T. Prakasham quit their practice. The boycott of foreign cloth became a very successful programme. Thousands of volunteers moved from house to house trying to convince people about the necessity to adopt Swadeshi. The foreign-made clothes were collected and set on fire. There was also picketing of shops selling foreign cloth. The impact of this was enormous. The value of import of such merchandise fell from Rs. 102 crore in 1920-21 to Rs. 57 crore in 1921-22. Import of British cotton piece goods declined from 1292 million yards in 1920-21 to 955 million in 1921-22. Many merchants took vow not to deal in foreign cloth. Another type of boycott movement was against liquor and toddy shops leading to a substantial fall in government revenue. Excise revenue declined in Punjab by Rs. 33 lakhs and in Madras by about Rs. 65 lakhs.

The next phase of the movement may be said to have started from the Vijayawada session of the Congress held in March 1921. It was decided to concentrate in the next three months on enrolling one crore members for the party, collecting one crore rupees for the Tilak Swaraj Fund and distributing and installing 20 lakh *charkhas*. This phase also achieved its objectives to a large extent. Tilak fund was oversubscribed, 50 lakh members were enrolled and *charkhas* were widely popularised and khadi became the dress of the movement.

The third phase of the movement witnessed its high points in a challenging speech by Mohammed Ali in July 1921 declaring it 'religiously unlawful for the Muslims to continue in the British Army' and asking them to resign and to take part in the successful boycott of the visit of the Prince of Wales in November 1921. The colonial government immediately arrested Mohammed Ali along with some other leaders. Another important

nationalist campaign during this phase was against the visit by the Prince of Wales. As soon as he landed in Bombay on 17 November, he was greeted with city-wide strikes and demonstrations which sometimes culminated in riots. Wherever he went, there were strikes and demonstrations.

In the fourth phase, both the non-cooperators and the government appeared in confrontationist mood. Khilafat leaders like Hasrat Mohani were in favour of demanding complete independence from the British rule. At the ground level the Congress was influential among a very large number of people and its Volunteer Corps became almost a parallel police force. The Congress had sanctioned its provincial committees to start civil disobedience movement wherever it was felt necessary. The government, on the other hand, had started using repression as its official policy. There were large-scale arrests, ban on meetings and prohibition of the volunteer corps. The threat of violence on both sides was increasing and it was extremely disturbing to Gandhi who not only abhorred violence particularly among the non-cooperators but also feared that intensive state repression would crush the movement. His apprehensions proved correct when on 5 February 1922, in Chauri-Chaura in Gorakhpur district, the police provoked a crowd of demonstrators. The people attacked the policemen who then fired on them. Angered by this, the people set fire to the police station building in which many policemen died. When Gandhi heard about this violent incident, he decided to withdraw the movement which was later ratified by the Congress Working Committee.

Soon after Gandhi was arrested on 10 March 1922 and was sentenced to 6 years in jail. The Khilafat movement also declined due to several national and international factors. The withdrawal of non-cooperation was a severe blow and the Khilafat leaders reacted angrily to the decision of the withdrawal. Even the international situation was not favourable. The Turks themselves, under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal, first abolished the Ottoman sultanate in 1922 and then did away with the office of the Khalifa itself in 1924. After this, there was little justification for the movement to continue.

7.6 ROLE OF THE MOVEMENTS IN THE ANTI-IMPERIALIST STRUGGLES

The Khilafat and non-cooperation movements played extremely important role in generating and spreading anti-imperialist consciousness among the Indian people. To begin with, there was a remarkable unity between various communities. The Hindus and Muslims together participated in the movement throughout the country and often it was difficult to distinguish between non-cooperation and Khilafat meetings. Despite the Malabar happenings, in which the Muslim peasants revolted against their largely Hindu landlords and killed and converted scores of them, the Hindu-Muslim unity remained intact throughout the period. At some places, two-thirds of those arrested during the non-cooperation movement were Muslims. Gandhi played the most important role in bringing about and sustaining this relationship.

Another important issue which the non-cooperation movement brought to the fore was the need to fight against caste discrimination and untouchability. Gandhi must be credited for emphatically bringing this issue to the forefront of the national politics for the first time. From then on this issue would remain quite important for the nationalist politics. The need for social justice was clearly acknowledged, pushed forward and was later enshrined in the Constitution of independent India.

Strong anti-colonial movements were afoot among various sections of population. Peasants and workers were particularly active during this period, besides the middle classes in both the urban and rural areas. Several peasant and worker movements occurred during this period. In 1921 alone there were 396 strikes involving 600,351 workers and a loss of 6,994,426 workdays. Peasant movements were even more prominent. In the Awadh region of the United Provinces, in Mewar in Rajasthan, and in many districts of north Bihar, there were very strong peasant movements involving millions of people.

Even in the urban areas the participation by various middle class groups was unprecedented throughout the country. Moreover, Gandhi's insistence on non-violence brought a large number of women into the movement. Such mobilisation of women was a very significant phenomenon both for the nationalist movement as well as for the liberation of women from the boundaries of their houses.

Thus, these movements under the leadership of Gandhi revolutionised the structure of Indian politics in several ways. The most significant success of the movement should be located in its mobilisation of various sections of people across the country and the creation of political and social consciousness in them. The common people now became integral to the project of nationalism.

7.7 SUMMARY

The Khilafat issue was of central concern to the Indian Muslims in the wake of the British pressure on Turkey and the impending reduction in size of the Ottoman Empire after the First World War. These religious sentiments became even more intensified due to Britain's presence as a colonial power in India. Thus, the religious and anti-imperialist feelings of Indian Muslims produced a very strong reaction against the British colonial rule. On the other hand, the failure of the colonial government to fulfill their promise of some measure of self-government for the Indians after the War created resentment among politically active groups. In addition to this, the Rowlatt Act further hurt the feelings of a large number of Indians, and the Jallianwala Bagh massacre following the anti-Rowlatt agitation was the last straw. At this moment, Gandhi provided an able leadership and united various strands of these anti-imperialist movements which developed into the non-cooperation movement involving millions of rural and urban people across the country. Although the movement failed to attain its objectives of either saving the Khalifa or to secure self-government for India, it mobilised a large number of people and imbued them with consciousness about their political rights. The small, powerless people in the dusty corners of the country stood against the mightiest of the empires in the world and raised their voice for freedom. In itself, it was the most significant achievement any movement could aspire to.

7.8 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

- 1) Discuss the nature of the Khilafat movement and its role in formation of the non-cooperation movement.
- 2) What was the programme of the non-cooperation movement?
- 3) What were the major achievements of the non-cooperation movement?

SUGGESTED READINGS

1. Chandra, Bipan, et al., ***India's Struggle for Independence 1857-1947***, Penguin Books, New Delhi, 1989.
2. Chandra, Bipan, Amles Tripathi, Barun De., ***Freedom Struggle***, NBT, New Delhi, 1972, 1977.
3. Chandra, Bipan., ***Modern India***, NCERT, New Delhi, 1971, 1976.
4. Minault, Gail., ***The Khilafat Movement: Religious Symbolism and Political Mobilisation in India***, OUP, Delhi, 1982.
5. Hasan, Mushirul., 'Pan-Islamism versus Indian Nationalism', *Economic and Political Weekly*, June 14, 1986.
6. Hasan, Mushirul., 'Religion and Politics: The Ulama and Khilafat Movement', *Economic and Political Weekly*, May 16, 1981.
7. Sarkar, Sumit., ***Modern India***, Macmillan, Madras, 1983, 1985.



ignou
THE PEOPLE'S
UNIVERSITY

UNIT 8 CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE MOVEMENT OF 1930

Structure

- 8.1 Introduction
 - Aims and Objectives
- 8.2 Resolution for Purna Swaraj
- 8.3 Beginning of the Civil Disobedience Movement
- 8.4 Varied Responses to the Movement
- 8.5 Gandhi-Irwin Pact
- 8.6 The Second Round Table Conference
- 8.7 Resuming the Civil Disobedience Movement
- 8.8 Summary
- 8.9 Terminal Questions

Suggested Readings

8.1 INTRODUCTION

The Civil Disobedience movement (1930-34) was the second mass movement, launched by the Indian National Congress under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, after a gap of about eight years, when the last mass movement known as the Non-cooperation-Khilafat movement was withdrawn in the wake of the famous Chauri-Chaura incident, which had taken place on 5th February 1922. After the withdrawal of this movement, the Indian National Congress in general and Gandhi in particular, were engaged in stemming the growing tide of communal problem in the country. During this period the Mahatma was also engaged in certain social questions such as eradication of untouchability, which he perceived as the scourge of the Indian society. However, there was not much of political activity involving the masses on a large scale and this opportunity came with the appointment of an all-white commission known as the Simon Commission, charged with the task of making an evaluation of the functioning of the Government of India Act 1919 also known as Montague-Chelmsford reforms and thereupon making recommendations to bring about possible amendments. However, the all-white composition of this Commission provoked the Indian political opinion across the board barring some exception. The slogan commonly heard in the streets was, 'Simon go back.' In the face of total disregard for Indian political opinion in constituting this Commission, it was resolved by the Congress that Indians themselves would formulate a constitution for which collaboration with other political parties was necessary and for this a mechanism was brought in place. Pandit Motilal Nehru became the Chairman of the Drafting Committee, which was also known as the Nehru Committee, with other members. This exercise of the constitution making could not take off due to internal wrangling among various groups on the grounds of better representation of communities and thus, a historic opportunity was lost. This loss of legal-constitutional opportunity was because of involvement of other political formations

whereas launching a nation-wide political movement was well within the control of the Congress and it resolved to do so in 1930.

Aims and Objectives

After reading this Unit, you would be able to understand:

- The background to and beginning of the civil disobedience movement
- The varied responses to the movement and
- The consequent events that followed the movement.

8.2 RESOLUTION FOR PURNA SWARAJ

The launching of the Civil Disobedience movement took place in 1930, as a consequence of the resolution of the Indian National Congress passed at its session at Lahore that now onwards its main objective would be to seek *Purna Swaraj*, complete independence. It was for the first time the Congress had made this declaration in such an open manner. At midnight of 31 December 1930, it adopted the tricolour as the national flag of India. With the declaration of the *Purna Swaraj*, as its goal and adoption of a national flag, it geared up to prepare for a long haul of another round of struggle to seek independence. The Congress authorised the All-India Congress Committee to launch the Civil Disobedience Movement, while it asked its members in the central and provincial legislatures to resign their seats.

It was a landmark decision of the Congress to demand the complete independence. However, this demand alone was not going to produce an immediate result without a sustained campaign for it, which was to be launched under the leadership of Gandhi. Given the mood in the party, it would have seemed ideal for him to launch a movement straight away, which he did not do. Instead he retired to his Sabarmati *Ashram* to contemplate over the possibility of launching an agitation for which creating a moral climate of non-violence was a pre-condition. Another crucial step taken in this direction was to observe 26th January 1930 as Independence Day, for which series of meetings were organised not only in the urban but also in rural areas. On all such occasions the national flag was unfurled and proclamation for independence was made. Within a week of observing the Independence Day, Gandhi served a memorandum on the Viceroy, Lord Irwin on 31 January 1930, which did not even remotely mention the resolve to attain *Purna Swaraj*. This memorandum contained 11 points, which were as follows: 1. Total prohibition. 2. Reduction of exchange ratio to 1s. 4d. 3. Reduction of land revenue by 50%. 4. Abolition of the salt tax. 5. Reduction of military expenditure by fifty percent to begin with. 6. Reduction of salaries of the highest-grade services by half. 7. Protective tariff on foreign cloth. 8. Passage of the Coastal Traffic Reservation Bill. 9. Discharge of all political prisoners except those condemned for murder. 10. Abolition of the C.I.D. 11. Issue of licenses to use firearms, for self-defence. The attainment of *Purna Swaraj* was nowhere mentioned. Questions arose as to how Gandhi was going to get complete independence, if he did not even address this question in the memorandum to the Viceroy. Many took it as a kind of retreat from the stated position of the Indian National Congress. Yet it is possible to argue that these eleven points as enunciated by Gandhi in more ways than one concretised the national demand as they also pertained to specific grievances of different sections of the society. For instance demands such as 50% cut in army expenses and civil services salaries, total prohibition, release of political prisoners,

reforms or the abolition of the C.I.D., and the changes in the arms Act, allowing the popular control of issues of firearms licenses pertained to general interest of the common masses of Indians. There were three demands, which were quite specific to the interest of the capitalists. For instance, lowering of the rupee-sterling exchanger ratio to 1s 4d, textile protection and reservation of coastal shipping for Indians were such which would have benefited this class only. However there were still some other demands, which concerned the peasantry alone, such as 50% reduction in land revenue and the abolition of the salt tax and the Government monopoly on salt.

Following the serving of this memorandum, Gandhi waited for a positive response from the Viceroy to these demands; however the Government did not respond and Gandhi was left with no option but to think of a strategy to launch a movement. Gandhi seriously contemplated on the issue or symbol to mobilise the masses and zeroed on 'salt' which was taxed by the Government and reflected on this issue most imaginatively: 'There is no article like salt outside water by taxing which the state can reach even the starving millions, the sick, the maimed and utterly helpless. The tax constitutes therefore the most inhuman poll tax ingenuity of man can devise.' Apart from the reason of taxing an item of common use such as salt, there were other reasons for the choice of 'salt' as the symbol of an unfolding movement. For instance, the salt was a non-divisive issue and no community or social group could ever raise an objection to it being the rallying point. Another reason for the choice of salt was that with the help of an item such as this, the message of the freedom struggle could be taken right into the homes of the people across classes and the masses. The choice of the salt, therefore, was a cleverly crafted idea. Thereafter Gandhi addressed a letter to the Viceroy, informing him of his intention to launch an agitation on the question of salt, giving the justification for doing so; he regarded the British rule as a curse because, 'It has impoverished the dumb millions by a system of progressive exploitation....it has reduced us politically to serfdom. It has sapped the foundations of our culture...it has degraded us spiritually.' Though Gandhi explained the historical consequences of the British rule, there were other reasons, the impact of certain other developments on the ordinary mass of the people. The worldwide economic slump since 1929 impacted India adversely. The prices of everything the peasant produced fell catastrophically until they were halved. It has to be recognised that the prices of items that peasant was to buy also came down, but it did not help him since his buying capacity was considerably limited.

The demand of the Congress for complete independence coincided with the immediate historical circumstances to produce a heady mixture for launching a movement, which Gandhi was contemplating ever since the Congress adopted the resolution to the same effect. Similar to earlier movements, this time too he proposed non-violence as a precondition for the movement and those who wished to join it. True to his conviction in Satyagraha, Gandhi did not wish to harm the enemy but to prove the point as emphatically as possible and the same lesson he was imparting to those *Satyagrahis*, who were to accompany Gandhi in his long march to Dandi. The *Satyagrahis* must not harbour any ill will towards the adversary. While the preparations for launching the movement were on, he addressed a letter to the Viceroy on the 2 March 1930 declaring his intention of launching the movement, which he did on 12 March 1930.

8.3 BEGINNING OF THE CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE MOVEMENT

Dandi March

Gandhi set out on a march to cover the distance of 200 miles to reach Dandi, a coastal town along with 78 of his chosen *Satyagrahis*, who came from all parts of the country and represented all sections of the society. About seventy-five thousand people had gathered at the Sabarmati Ashram to wish Gandhi and his disciples and all along the route thousands gathered to greet them. Along the route, Gandhi kept on addressing the people on issues of immediate and long-term concerns such as the importance of *ahimsa*, *Satyagraha* and other such issues. Practically everyday at the sunrise and sunset he conducted his daily prayer meetings under the open skies, addressed meetings in villages through which he passed, did his daily quota of spinning on *charkha*, wrote article for his journals and letters to his correspondents. The Dandi march took altogether twenty-four days to complete and throughout, the press was full of the stories about the march. The international press too keenly reporting the progress of the march and their stories were filled with descriptions of this 'ceremony of rebellion.' On 6 April 1930, after a night of fasting and prayer, the leader and his followers bathed in the sea at Dandi. Thereafter Gandhi bent down to pick up a handful of salt. With this act of defiance of the Salt Law began the Civil Disobedience movement. It was a signal for which masses were anxiously waiting for quite sometime. Wherever the sea was within reach, peasants and fishermen broke the law by making natural salt. Many people were arrested and in several cases the police resorted to *lathi* charge as freely as they could. Meetings were organised in innumerable towns to inaugurate the Civil Disobedience movement. The Government started using the coercive methods to suppress the Movement as many leaders were being arrested, starting with Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the President of the Indian National Congress.

In the course of the Civil Disobedience movement, while the question of breaking the salt law was central, however there were other issues too, which engaged the minds of the Congress leaders and accordingly strategies were planned. For instance village headmen were exhorted to give up their job and they overwhelmingly responded to this call of the Congress. In Gujarat, about 390 village headmen resigned their jobs. In many cases members of the legislatures too resigned their seats. In 1930, at the start of the Civil Disobedience movement, Vallabhbhai Patel wanted to launch a no-revenue campaign on a large scale particularly in Gujarat, to which Gandhi did not agree since he feared that such a step might result in confiscation of land, which he might not be able to regain. Gandhi's opposition to such a step was based on the logic that a campaign such as this should be waged on specific grievances rather than less easily fulfilled demands for *Swaraj*. However, despite Gandhi's disinclination, the no-revenue campaign was launched on a large scale after the arrest of Gandhi on 5 May 1930. With the launching of this campaign, the Government was excessively concerned, if the base of this campaign was to expand, '...if the people of Gujarat are successful in evading the payment of dues, we may expect a widespread extension of the movement. This would probably cause more embarrassment than any other single feature of the Civil Disobedience Movement.' In view of such a perception, the British decided to break the movement by coercion as in several cases *lathi*-wielding policemen were sent to villages to break into the peasants' houses, confiscate their property and farm animals and in some cases beat them up. In

order to escape such repressive measures, many peasant families chose to migrate to the neighbouring state of Baroda, while in other cases they suffered losses. The All-India Congress Committee had extended the scope of the Civil Disobedience movement by including the breach of forest laws, the non-payment of taxes in *ryotwari* areas and the boycott of foreign clothes, banks, shipping and insurance companies.

Though the Government intended to react rather harshly, it was wary of the impression of the Government using excessive measures. However, as the tempo of the movement picked up so did the Government's resolve to suppress the movement with force. Vallabhbhai Patel had already been arrested as early as 7th March 1930 under the orders of the local officials who had acted without the consent of even the Provincial Government. Early in April 1930, Jawaharlal Nehru was arrested in Allahabad. Among those who were convicted of the breach of the Salt Laws were C. Rajagopalachari, Madan Mohan Malviya, J. M. Sengupta, B. G. Kher, K. M. Munshi, Devdas Gandhi, Mahadev Desai and Vithalbhai Patel. And finally, after a lot of dithering, the Government decided to arrest Gandhi on 5 May 1930 at Karadi, a village near Dandi, under the provision of Bombay Regulation XXV of 1827, where trial could easily be dispensed with.

Gandhi's arrest sparked a wave of protests. In Bombay cotton mills and railways workshops stood still as thousands of workers came out in streets. Cloth-merchants went on a six-day *hartal*. There were clashes and firing in Delhi and Calcutta. In the big textile towns such as Sholapur, the textile workers went on strike from the 7th May and along with others, burnt down liquor shops and attacked all symbols associated with the Government such as railway station, law courts and police stations and municipal buildings. They virtually established parallel government, which could only be dislodged with the imposition of the martial law after 16 May.

Dharasana Episode

The most interesting aspect of the Civil Disobedience movement was the use of non-violence as a method and the finest example of this was hugely manifested at Dharasana, where a Government salt manufacturing unit was in operation. Gandhi, just before his arrest, had stipulated some kind of raid, at this plant. However as a consequence of his arrest this responsibility fell on Sarojini Naidu, who became the first woman president of the Congress and others such as Imam Saheb, a close associate of Gandhi since the days in South Africa, Manilal, Gandhi's second son and others. It was planned that a band of 2000-2500 volunteers would raid Dharasana salt works. Before they advanced, Sarojini Naidu led them in prayers and appealed to them to be true to Gandhi's inspiration and abstain from violence. She said, 'You will be beaten, but you must not resist; you must not even raise a hand to ward off blows.' Round the depot a barrier of barbed wire had been erected and a ditch was dug. As the first picked column of the volunteers went forward, police officers ordered them to disperse but they advanced in silence. Soon scores of policemen swooped on them and started raining *lathi* blows on their heads. However, none of them resisted these blows and shortly, the ground was filled with injured bodies. After the first column of volunteers were beaten to pulp, came the turn of another column of volunteers and they proceeded to the designated spot with immense courage knowing fully well as to what awaited them. They too were struck with the same ferocity. After having gone through this experience of the police brutality, there was some change in the tactics as it was decided that a group of twenty-five men would advance and sit down and wait for the police to come. The police inflicted massive injuries and such brutality went on for hours.

NWFP

The experience of launching the Civil Disobedience and then suffering the police brutality was by and large much the same in Peshawar as in Dharasana. In the North West Frontier Province (NWFP) on 23rd April 1930, Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan and some Congress leaders were arrested, which resulted in unprecedented mass upsurge in Peshawar, with crowds confronting armoured cars and defying intensive firing, which killed about thirty people. Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, popularly known as the Frontier Gandhi had been politically quite active and raised a band of non-violent volunteers, known as *Khudai Khidmatgars*, who wore Red-Shirts, played an active role in this Movement. In the beginning some violent incidents occurred and the police abandoned the town to the Red Shirts, which was re-occupied after a while and then brutalities were unleashed on them, which was resisted by the Red Shirts with non-violence alone. In certain cases machine-guns were used. Even in this atmosphere of violent repression, there were stark examples of inter-community solidarity. One such example was the refusal of a platoon of the Garhwal Regiment, consisting of the Hindus only, to fire on the Muslims of the Frontier, while they were agitating. The British were able to restore order in Peshawar only ten days later on 4th May 1930 and a reign of terror was unleashed and the martial law was imposed. Ghaffar Khan's movement was largely limited to areas such as Kohat, Bannu, Dera Ismail Khan and Hazara; however, there were series of tribal incursions in the later part of 1930, which could be controlled only with the help of aerial bombardment.

Chittagong emerged as another important centre of the Civil Disobedience, apart from Sholapur, Dharasana and Peshawar. Here, a group of revolutionaries headed by Surjaya Sen launched a spectacular campaign against the British. The local armoury was seized and an Independence Proclamation was made in the name of the 'Independent Republican Army' and fought a pitched battle on the Jalalabad hill on 22 April 1930 in which twelve revolutionaries lost their lives.

While the above discussed developments as regards the Civil Disobedience were mostly taking place in the urban areas, the rural areas too witnessed plenty of such activities in variety of ways. For instance those rural areas, which had already experienced some amount Gandhian rural constructive work through local ashrams—Bardoli and Kheda in Gujarat, Bankura and Arambagh in Bengal, Bihpur in Bhagalpur in Bihar emerged as strong centres of political activities during the movement. It is true that salt was the initial catalyst, but in due course of time it could be sustained in the coastal areas, but with the onset of monsoon, even this became difficult. The other activities, which kept the momentum of the movement, were picketing of the liquor shops and excise license auctions in small towns as well as villages. The refusal to pay Chowkidari tax was another form of protest during the movement, even at the cost of massive coercion and in some cases sale of property. The Congress tried to channelise the peasants and tribal grievances regarding forest laws in areas such as Central Province, Maharashtra and Karnataka. Training camps for 'forest *Satyagrahis*' were started in several areas, where Congressmen trained them. The activities that were carried out were the boycott of Forest Department auctions, peaceful mass violation of grazing and timber restrictions and public sale/auction of illegally acquired forest produce.

8.4 VARIED RESPONSES TO THE MOVEMENT

The Civil Disobedience was an all-India movement and yet not all parts and social groups responded to the call of the movement in the same manner. Bombay was the main citadel

of the movement throughout 1930. Two strands of leadership were in action, one, was the Gandhian type leadership and the other, socialist oriented leadership of K.F. Narima and Yusuf Meherally. The Congress volunteers made serious efforts to reach out for working class support and received overwhelming responses in Gujarat areas such as Anand, Borsad and Nadiad taluks, in Kheda, Jambusar in Broach and Bardoli in Surat.

The Civil Disobedience movement remained weak in Sindh, despite an initial mob-police clash on 16 April in Karachi. In Maharashtra, the movement was considerably strong because of the changed nature of leadership of the Congress, who had come close to non-Brahman Satya Shodhak Samaj radicals, for example, social groups such as Mahars, who were not attracted to the Congress, as they were closer to Dr. B.R.Ambedkar. The Central Provinces areas such as Chanda, Amraoti, Betul, Raipur, Bhandara and Seoni emerged as strong centres of the movement due to the forest *Satyagraha* as being a part of the Civil Disobedience movement. There were instances of the local tribal leaders emerging on their own and taking part in the movement, which on occasions involved violent methods as well. Violent attacks on forest guards and police parties were common in these regions.

In Tamilnadu, C. Rajagopalachari played an important role in the Civil Disobedience movement. He organised a march from Trichinopoly to Vedaranniyam on the Tanjore coast to break the salt law in April 1930, followed by picketing of foreign cloth shops and anti-liquor campaigns in towns such as Coimbatore, Madurai and Virudhanagar. Similarly in Malabar, Kelappan, who was a Nair Congress leader, organised the salt march. In Andhra, salt marches were organised in the East and West Godavari, Krishna, Guntur districts, in which cultivators, merchants and others took an active part.

In Orissa too, the Civil Disobedience movement received tremendous response under the leadership of Gopabandhu Chaudhary, particularly in the coastal districts such as Balasore, Cuttack and Puri. In Assam, the Civil Disobedience movement was not strong in view of the fact there were factional disputes among the leaders. For instance Tarunram Phookan was hostile to the movement as N.C.Bardaloi was unenthusiastic about it. Other reasons include social tensions, growing conflicts among the Bengalis and Assamese, Hindus and Muslims, and the tension developing from the inflow of the Muslim peasant immigrants from the densely-populated East Bengal. However there were students' protest and some activities in Sylhet and Kachar regions. In Bihar, the movement witnessed considerable participation in the rural areas where small landlords, small tenants took an active part in the movement. Salt *satyagraha* could not become that much popular due to physical conditions of it being landlocked. However, in due course of time due to shift from salt to no-*chowkidari* agitation, it was massively responded. There were instances when people in several districts refused to pay *chowkidari* tax, while foreign clothes and liquor sales also declined. Similarly, in Uttar Pradesh, the Civil Disobedience movement was more a rural rather than an urban phenomenon. Urban sections of the society were getting tired but the impetus for the movement came from the villagers since the Congress had reached out to such areas.

Though the Civil Disobedience movement was an all-India movement launched under the Gandhian leadership, there was no uniform pattern so far as responses of various social groups are concerned. In some cases strictly non-violent methods of protests were followed, while there were also instances of the participants resorting to violence. Unlike the Non-cooperation-Khilafat movement, when the movement was withdrawn after the violent Chauri-Chaura incident, this time Gandhi had clearly stated that even though the

Civil Disobedience movement would be launched on the basis of non-violence, he would not withdraw it if some violence broke out in the course of the movement. Therefore it is observed that the Civil Disobedience movement progressed essentially on the principles of non-violence; in spite of occasional incidents of violence at different places, the movement was not withdrawn. And yet towards the closing months, the movement's response was considerably weak. The Indian capitalist class had for the first time participated in this movement as a class but with limited appetite to sustain this movement. As businessmen, they could not afford to antagonise the Government on permanent basis; hence attempts were made to bring about truce between Gandhi and the Government.

8.5 GANDHI-IRWIN PACT

The changing historical circumstances coincided with the efforts of men of liberal disposition such as Tej Bahadur Sapru and M.R.Jayakar and a few others. Their efforts were borne out of sympathetic readings of the Government's intentions. These people approached Motilal Nehru as well as Jawaharlal Nehru but any peace negotiation was not possible without Gandhi's presence and consent. And for this purpose a special train was arranged for Poona, where he was imprisoned at Yeravada jail in August. The discussions were attended besides Gandhi and Nehru, by Vallabhbhai Patel, Sarojini Naidu, Jairamdas Daulatram and Syed Mahmood. It was revealed that there was little common ground between the Congress and the Government. The Congress, in a letter dated 15 August 1930, made it abundantly clear that it was prepared to call off the Civil Disobedience movement, provided its basic assumptions in constitution-making were accepted and amends made for the policy of repression by releasing political prisoners, returning confiscated property and reinstating officials dismissed for participation in the Civil Disobedience movement.

Despite such opposition of the Congress, the Viceroy, Lord Irwin made conciliatory gestures towards the Congress. In a public statement in the Central Legislature he made kind reference to Gandhi's, 'spiritual force, which impels Mr. Gandhi count no sacrifice too great in the cause, as he believes, of the India he loves.' As an accompaniment to conciliatory statements, he released Gandhi and members of the Congress Working Committee on 25th January 1931—the eve of Independence Day on 26th January. Due to efforts of the peacemakers and conciliatory approach of the Viceroy, the dialogue between Gandhi and Lord Irwin started on 17 February 1931 and went on till 5th March when the two agreed to sign a pact Known as Gandhi-Irwin Pact. It also came to known as Delhi Pact. This Pact provided for the following conditions: 1. Discontinuation of the Civil Disobedience movement. 2. Revocation of the Ordinances and the release of the political prisoners except those who were convicted of open violence. 3. Making of salt by those living in coastal areas not for commercial purposes but for personal consumption. 4. Picketing of shops selling foreign clothes and other imported item and the liquor shops. 5. Return of the confiscated land, not yet sold to third parties. 6. Remission of all fines not yet collected. 7. Gandhi's insistence for inquiry into police excesses was recorded with the Government agreeing for it as such. 8. The Congress on its part agreed to participate in the Round Table Conference. This political clause of the Congress attending the Second Round Table Conference had an implied meaning that it would accept the outcome of the Round Table Conference, which came nowhere closer to the Lahore Resolution of the complete independence. Subsequently it was decided that Gandhi would represent the Congress at the Second Round Table Conference. Sarojini Naidu and Pandit Malaviya accompanied him. He was not too optimistic about the outcome of the

Conference, as he had stated, 'When I think of the prospects in London, there is nothing wanting to fill me with utter despair...There is every chance of my returning empty handed.'

8.6 THE SECOND ROUND TABLE CONFERENCE

Gandhi sailed on board Rajputana, on 27 August 1931 for England. He travelled second class and kept up during the voyage his routine of early rising, spinning and prayer meetings. In London, on his arrival, he addressed a meeting at Friends' House. In London the venue of the Second Round Table Conference was St. James Palace, where delegates gathered, who were chosen not by the ordinary Indians but by the Viceroy and his officials. These delegates consisted of the Princes and Untouchables, Sikhs, Muslims, Christians, Hindus, Parsees, spokesmen of landowners, Chambers of Commerce and Trade Unions. It was ironical that in the multitude of representative, there were not many willing to speak for India as whole and the peasantry, who consisted the vast majority of Indians. From such a Conference, no idea and no majority that reflected the national will could possibly emerge.

Gandhi's apprehensions were proved right and when the Conference was underway, he discovered that there was heavy concentration on resolving the minorities' issues rather than focusing on India's independence and transfer of power to Indians. In the light of his past experience as much as the contemporary one, he was convinced that it was the British rule, which had driven a wedge between India's creeds and classes. He was firm in his conviction that once the foreign rule was thrown away, Indians would solve their communal difficulties easily and amicably. But under the circumstances, Gandhi's hopes and conviction were quite unlikely to be translated into political reality due to hard-line approaches taken by the community leaders and clever manipulation of these people by the British Government in India as well as England. He returned to India on 28 December 1931 empty handed.

8.7 RESUMING THE CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE MOVEMENT

Within a week of Gandhi's return, he, along with other members, was arrested on 4 January 1932; a series of ordinances were promulgated. Not only the CWC but also several Provincial Congress Committees and innumerable local committees were declared illegal. Many organisations sympathetic to the Congress such as- Youth Leagues, National Schools, Congress Libraries and Hospitals- were also outlawed. The Congress funds were confiscated and buildings were occupied and every possible step was taken to ensure that Congress did not function at all. The civil liberties seemed suspended. Under these circumstances the Gandhi-Irwin Pact was shred to pieces and the Civil Disobedience movement was resumed. Lord Wellington, the Viceroy, who had replaced Lord Irwin, was a man of different disposition, who believed in a highhanded approach in dealing with nationalists. The friction between the congress and the Government had begun soon after the Pact was signed. The Congress received complaints that in Bardoli and Borsad, all prisoners had not been released, forfeited land had not been restored nor village officials reinstated. Tensions were mounting in Bengal, where the Pact did not, in any way, cover thousands of young men who had been detained without trial. In North-West Frontier Province, the repression against the Red Shirts was continuing with great zeal so much so that Gandhi was denied permission to enter the Province. The agrarian unrest was quite visible in the United Provinces.

The second Civil Disobedience during 1932-34 was launched in a political climate of total distrust of the Government as even the Government was determined to suppress it by using wanton coercion to the maximum, as the civil liberties were totally suppressed and even ordinary political act had become illegal. The forms of defiance included picketing of cloth and liquor shops, closing of markets and boycott of white or loyalist business concerns, symbolic hoisting of Congress flags, holding of illegal congress sessions, salt *satyagraha*, non-payment of *Chowkidari* tax, no-rent as well as no-revenue campaigns, violation of forest laws. There were occasions when the Congress carried out illegal activities such as secret radio transmitter and the use of bombs.

The Government severely repressed the movement. Towards the close of 1932, the movement had started tapering off, however in one form or the other it continued on till 1934. In the face of heavy repression, ordinary people started succumbing to it without losing faith either in Gandhi or in the congress. The leaders and the people who were arrested during the movement and kept in jail earned much greater respectability in the eyes of the society.

For a while it might appear that the Government of the day had an upper hand in dealing with and containing the movement. But the long-term consequence of the Civil Disobedience would tell us a different story altogether. This movement was able to free the minds of Indians even before the country earned its freedom on 15 August 1947. Gandhi had awakened the nation from its slumber. In the words of H.S.L.Polak, a close associate of Mahatma Gandhi in South Africa, a chronicler, 'It acquiesced no longer in conquest.' During the movement, the resolve of India to win freedom was further steeled, as they no longer feared the *lathis* and other means of repression as they were prepared to suffer for an altruistic cause to liberate India from subjugation. Again in the words of Polak, 'They shed their servility and thought henceforward as free men.' The lasting contribution of Mahatma Gandhi in this movement as in earlier movements was to convey to the British rulers, that their rule was no longer treated as legitimate and that Indians had come of age to be the master of their own destiny.

8.8 SUMMARY

In view of the above discussion the following conclusions can be drawn. Firstly, Gandhi once again proved that he enjoyed the confidence of the classes and masses while carrying out such movements. Secondly, he thoroughly underlined the non-violent methods because violence would give a handle to the British to suppress Indians, while raising the most legitimate demands. However, this time Gandhi's adherence to non-violence was less dogmatic as compared to experience in 1922, when he had withdrawn the Non-cooperation-Khilafat movement after the Chauri-Chaura violent incident.

This movement was significant because the social base of the nationalist movement had really expanded as more people from diverse background joined it with active participation. The participation of capitalists as a class was a noteworthy development, even though some tensions persisted among them as regards the extent to which they were prepared to go in the course of the movement. The geographical reach of the movement was immense. Large parts of India were involved in the movement, though with some variation of intensity. And finally, through this movement, the people of India were able to convey to the British that they no longer looked forward to them as there were leaders such as Gandhi and organisations such as Indian National Congress, which were closer to their heart and were willing to suffer and sacrifice in the cause of liberating India from the British rule.

8.9 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

1. Trace the beginnings of the Civil Disobedience Movement.
2. What was the response to Gandhi's civil disobedience movement in different parts of India?
3. Write short notes on:
 - (a) Gandhi-Irwin pact
 - (b) Second Round Table Conference

SUGGESTED READINGS

1. Brown, Judith., *Gandhi and Civil Disobedience: The Mahatma in Indian Politics, 1928-1934*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1977
2. Brown, Judith., *Gandhi: Prisoner of Hope*, OUP, Delhi, 1990
3. Chandra, Bipan, Mridula, Mukherjee, Aditya, Mukherjee, Sucheta, Mahajan and K.N. Panikkar., *India's Struggle for Independence 1857-1947*, Viking, Delhi, 1988
4. Sarkar, Sumit., *Modern India*, McMillan, Delhi, 1983
5. Hardiman, David., *Peasant Nationalists of Gujarat: Kheda District, 1917-1934*, OUP, Delhi, 1981
6. Hardiman, David., *Gandhi: In his Time and Ours*, Permanent Black, Delhi, 2003
7. Henningam, Stephen., *Peasant Movement in Colonial India, North Bihar, 1917-1942*, ANU, Canberra, 1982
8. Arnold, David., *Congress in Tamilnad, Nationalist Politics in South Asia, 1919-1937*, Manohar Book Services, Delhi, 1977
9. Arnold, David., *Gandhi*, Pearson Education, Harlow, 2001
10. Radhakrishnan, N., and N. Vasudevan, (Ed), *Gandhi and the Global Village*, Gandhi Media Centre, Delhi, 1988
11. Ganguly, Debjani, and John Docker., (Ed), *Rethinking Gandhi and Non Violent Relationality: Global Perspectives*, Orient Blackswan, Hyderabad, 2009