

Salt Satyagraha - History, Facts & Cause Of Salt March

Salt Satyagraha

The Salt Satyagraha was a mass civil disobedience movement initiated by Mahatma Gandhi against the salt tax imposed by the British government in India. He led a large group of people from Sabarmati Ashram on 12th March 1930 till Dandi, a coastal village in Gujarat, to break the salt law by producing salt from seawater.

Background to Salt Satyagraha

- By 1930, the Congress Party had declared that Poorna Swarajya or complete independence was to be the sole aim of the freedom struggle.
- It started observing 26 January as Poorna Swarajya Day, and it was decided that civil disobedience was to be the means employed to achieve it.
- Mahatma Gandhi was asked to plan and organise the first such act. Gandhiji chose to break the salt tax in defiance of the government.
- Some members of Congress were skeptical of the choice and other Indians and the British dismissed this choice of salt with disdain.
- The then Viceroy, Lord Irwin was hardly perturbed by the threat of a salt protest and the government did nothing to prevent the salt march from taking place.
- But Gandhiji's choice of using salt was nothing short of brilliant because it touched a chord with every Indian.
- It was a commodity required by all and the poor people were hurt because of the salt tax.
- Indians had been making salt from seawater free of cost until the passing of the 1882 Salt Act that gave the British monopoly over the production of salt and authority to impose a salt tax. It was a criminal offense to violate the salt act.
- Gandhiji also hoped to unite Hindus and Muslims as the cause was common to both groups.
- The salt tax accounted for 8.2% of the British Raj revenue from tax and Gandhiji knew that the government could not ignore this.

The course of the Salt Satyagraha

- Gandhiji informed Lord Irwin of his plan on 2nd March 1930.
- He would lead a group of people from his Ashram at Sabarmati on **12th March 1930** and walk through the villages of Gujarat.
- On reaching the coastal village of Dandi, he would make salt from seawater thereby breaking the salt act. Gandhiji started the march as planned with 80 of his followers. They were given strict instructions not to resort to any kind of violence.
- Thousands of people thronged the path from Sabarmati Ashram to Ahmedabad to witness the historic event.

- At the end of every day, Gandhiji would address thousands of people and attack the government in his speeches.
- Gandhiji talked to foreign journalists and wrote articles for newspapers on the way. This pushed the Indian independence movement into the forefront of world media. Gandhiji became a household name in the West.
- Sarojini Naidu joined him on the way. Every day more and more people joined him and on 5th April 1930, they reached Dandi.
- At this time, there were about 50,000 people participating in the march.
- On the morning of **6th April 1930**, Gandhiji broke the salt law by making salt. Thousands of people followed suit.

Effects of Salt Satyagraha

- Around 60,000 people including Gandhiji himself were arrested by the government.
- There was widespread civil disobedience carried on by the people. Apart from the salt tax, other unpopular tax laws were being defied like the forest laws, chowkidar tax, land tax, etc.
- The government tried to suppress the movement with more laws and censorship.
- The Congress Party was declared illegal. But this did not deter the satyagrahis who continued the movement.
- There were some incidents of violence in Calcutta and Karachi but Gandhiji did not call off the movement, unlike the previous time with the non-cooperation movement.
- C Rajagopalachari led a similar march on the southeast coast from Trichy to Vedaranyam in Tamil Nadu. He too was arrested for making salt.
- K Kelappan led a march in the Malabar region from Calicut to Payyanur.
- There were similar marches and salt was produced illegally in Assam and Andhra Pradesh.
- In Peshawar, the Satyagraha was organised and led by Gandhiji's disciple, Ghaffar Khan. In April 1930 he was arrested. Khan's followers (called Khudai Khidmatgars) whom he had trained in Satyagraha had gathered in a marketplace called the Qissa Khwani Bazaar. There they were fired at by the British Indian Army despite being unarmed.
- Thousands of women also took part in the Satyagraha.
- Foreign clothes were boycotted. Liqueur shops were picketed. There were strikes all over.
- On May 21, 1930, there was a protest against the Dharasana Salt Works by peaceful non-violent protestors led by Sarojini Naidu. The police lathi-charged the protestors brutally and it resulted in the deaths of 2 people with several others being injured. This event was reported in the international media and there was a condemnation of British policies followed in India.
- The British government was shaken by the movement. Also, its non-violent nature made it difficult for them to suppress it violently.
- This movement had three main effects:
- It pushed Indian freedom struggle into the limelight in western media.
- It brought a lot of people including women and the depressed classes directly in touch with the freedom movement.
- It showed the power of the non-violent Satyagraha as a tool in fighting imperialism.

- Gandhiji was released from prison in 1931 and he met with Lord Irwin who was keen to put an end to the civil disobedience movement and the media attention it had caught.
- As per the Gandhi-Irwin Pact, the civil disobedience movement would be ended and Indians, in return, would be allowed to make salt for domestic use. Lord Irwin also agreed to release the arrested Indians. Gandhiji attended the Second Round Table Conference in London as an 'equal'.

Drawbacks of Salt Sathyagraha

- The movement did not procure any major concessions from the government.
- Muslim support was limited.