

## **THE BEGINNING OF GANDHIAN ERA**



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## Methods of Gandhi and Reason for his Popularity

### Early career of Gandhi at South Africa

Gandhiji landed at Durban in 1893 as a young barrister on a one-year contract to sort out the legal problems of Dada Abdullah, a Gujarati merchant. He was to all appearances an ordinary young man trying to make a living that time. But he was the first Indian barrister, the first highly-educated Indian, to have come to South Africa.

Indian immigration to South Africa had begun when the White settlers recruited indentured Indian labour, mainly from South India, to work on the sugar plantations. In their wake had come Indian merchants, mostly Memon Muslims. Ex-indentured labourers, who had settled down in South Africa after the expiry of their contract, and their children, many born in South Africa itself, constituted the third group of Indians that was in South Africa prior to Gandhiji's arrival. None of these groups of Indians had much access to education and certainly very little education in English; even the wealthy merchants often knew only a smattering of English necessary to carry on their trade. **The racial discrimination to which they were subjected, as part of their daily existence, they had come to accept as a way of life, and even if they resented it, they had little idea about how to challenge it. But young Mohandas Gandhi was not used to swallowing racial insults in order to carry on with the business of making a living.** He was the son of a Dewan (Minister) of an Indian state whose family, though in straitened economic circumstances, was widely respected in his native Kathiawad. Further, he had spent three years in London studying for the Bar. Neither in India nor in England had he ever come in contact with the overt racism that confronted him within days of his arrival in South Africa.

His journey from Durban to Pretoria, which he undertook within a week of his arrival on the continent, consisted of a series of racial humiliations. Apart from the famous incident in which he was bundled out of a first-class compartment by a White man and left to spend the night shivering in the waiting room, he was made to travel in the driver's box in a coach for which he had bought a first-class ticket, when he ignored the coach leader's order to vacate even that seat and sit on the foot-board, he was soundly thrashed. On reaching Johannesburg, he found that all the hotels became full up the moment he asked for a room to stay the night. Having succeeded in securing a first-class train ticket from Johannesburg to Pretoria (after quoting extensively from railway regulations), he was almost pushed out again from his railway compartment and was only saved this humiliation by the intervention of a European passenger.'

On his arrival in Pretoria, where he was to work on the civil suit that had brought him to South Africa, he immediately convened a meeting of the Indians there. He offered to teach English to anybody who wanted to learn and suggested that they organize themselves and protest against oppression. He voiced his protest through the Press as well. Even though he had no plans of staying in South Africa at that stage, he tried his best to arouse the Indians in Pretoria to a sense of their own dignity as human beings and persuade them to resist all types of racial disabilities.

Having settled the law suit for which he had come, Gandhiji prepared to leave for India. But on the eve of his departure from Durban, he raised the issue of the bill to disenfranchise Indians, which was in the process of being passed by the Natal legislature. The Indians in South Africa



begged Gandhiji to stay on for a month and organize their protest as they could not do so on their own, not knowing even enough English to draft petitions, and so on. Gandhiji agreed to stay on for a month and stayed for twenty years.

Gandhiji's experience in South Africa was unique in one respect. By virtue of being a British-educated barrister, he demanded many things as a matter of right, such as first-class train tickets and rooms in hotels, which other Indians before him had never probably even had the courage to ask for. Perhaps, they believed that they were discriminated against because they were not 'civilized,' that is, 'westernized.' But Gandhiji's experience, the first of a westernized Indian in South Africa, demonstrated clearly, to him and to them as well, that the real cause lay in the assumption of racial superiority by the White rulers. His uniqueness in being the only western-educated Indian also simultaneously placed on his shoulders the responsibility of leading the struggle of the Indians against increasing racial discrimination. Wealthy Indian merchants, senior to the twenty-five-year-old barrister in experience and age, appointed him as their leader because he was the only one who could speak to the rulers in their own language, the only one who understood the intricacies of their laws and their system of government, the only one who could draft their petitions, create their organizations, and represent them before their rulers.

### Moderate phase of struggle in South Africa

Gandhiji's political activities from 1894 to 1906 may be classified as the 'Moderate' phase of the struggle of the South African Indians. **During this phase, he concentrated on petitioning and sending memorials to the South African legislatures, the Colonial Secretary in London and the British Parliament.** He believed that if all the facts of the case were presented to the Imperial Government, the British sense of justice and fair play would be aroused and the Imperial Government would intervene on behalf of Indians who were, after all, British subjects. His attempt was to unite the different sections of Indians, and to give their demands wide publicity.

This he tried to do through the setting up of the **Natal Indian Congress** and by starting a paper called **Indian Opinion**. Gandhiji's abilities as an organizer, as a fund-raiser, as a journalist and as a propagandist, all came to the fore during this period. But, by 1906, Gandhiji, having fully tried the 'Moderate' methods of struggle, was becoming convinced that these would not lead anywhere.

### Passive resistance or Satyagraha phase of Struggle in South Africa

The second phase of the struggle in South Africa, which began in 1906, was characterized by the use of the **method of passive resistance or civil disobedience, which Gandhiji named Satyagraha**. Its basic tenets were:

1. A satyagrahi was not to submit to what he considered as wrong, but was to remain truthful, non-violent and fearless.
2. He should be ready to accept suffering in his struggle against the evil suffering was to be a part of his love for truth.
3. Even while carrying out his struggle against the evil-doer, a satyagrahi would love the evil-doer; hatred would be alien to his nature.
4. A true satyagrahi would never bow before the evil, whatever the consequence.

-doer. This

5. Only the brave and strong could practice satyagraha, which was not for the weak and cowards. Even violence was preferred to cowardice. Thought was never to be separated from practice.

It was first used when the Government enacted legislation making it compulsory for Indians to take out certificates of registration which held their finger prints. It was essential to carry this on-person at all times. At a huge public meeting held on 11 September, 1906, in the Empire Theatre in Johannesburg, Indians resolved that they would refuse to submit to this law and would face the consequences. The Government remained adamant, and so did the Indians.

Gandhiji formed the Passive Resistance Association to conduct the campaign. The last date for registration being over, the Government started proceedings against Gandhiji and twenty-six others. The passive resisters pleaded guilty, were ordered to leave the country and, on refusing to do so, were sent to jail. Others followed, and their numbers swelled to 155. The fear of jail had disappeared, and it was popularly called King Edward's Hotel.

General Smuts called Gandhiji for talks, and promised to withdraw the legislation if Indians voluntarily agreed to register themselves. Gandhiji accepted and was the first to register. But Smuts had played a trick; he ordered that the voluntary registrations be ratified under the law. The Indians under the leadership of Gandhiji retaliated by publicly burning their registration certificates. Meanwhile, the Government brought in new legislation, this time to restrict Indian immigration. The campaign, widened to oppose this. In August 1908, a number of prominent Indians from Natal crossed the frontier into Transvaal to defy the new immigration laws and were arrested. Other Indians from Transvaal opposed the laws by hawking without a license; traders who had licenses, refused to produce them. All of them were jailed. Gandhiji himself landed in jail in October 1908 and, along with the other Indians, was sentenced to a prison term involving hard physical labour and miserable conditions. But imprisonment failed to crush the spirit of the resisters, and the Government resorted to deportation to India, especially of the poorer Indians. Merchants were pressurized by threats to their economic interests.

At this stage, the movement reached an impasse. The more committed Satyagrahis continued to go in and out of jail, but the majority was showing signs of fatigue. The struggle was obviously going to be a protracted one, and the Government was in no mood to relent. Gandhiji's visit to London in 1909 to meet the authorities there yielded little result. The funds for supporting the families of the Satyagrahis and for running Indian Opinion were fast running out. Gandhiji's own legal practice had virtually ceased since 1906, the year he had started devoting all his attention to the struggle. At this point, Gandhiji set up Tolstoy Farm, made possible through the generosity of his German architect friend, Kallenbach, to house the families of the Satyagrahis and give them a way to sustain themselves. Tolstoy Farm was the precursor of the later Gandhian ashrams that were to play so important a role in the Indian national movement. Funds also came from India — Sir Ratan Tata sent Rs. 25,000 and the Congress and the Muslim League, as well as the Nizam of Hyderabad, made their contributions.

It was reached in 1914, to coincide with the coronation of King George

the Government and the Indians, which, however, lasted only till the end of 1912. Meanwhile, Gokhale paid a visit to South Africa, was treated as a guest of the Government and was made a promise that all discriminatory laws against Indians would be removed. The promise was never kept, and Satyagraha was resumed in 1913. This time the movement was widened further to include resistance to the poll tax of three pounds that was imposed on all ex-indentured



Indians. The inclusion of the demand for the abolition of this tax, a particularly heavy charge on poor labourers whose wages hardly averaged ten shillings a month, immediately drew the indentured and ex-indentured labourers into the struggle, and Satyagraha could now take on a truly mass character. Further fuel was added to the already raging fire by a judgement of the Supreme Court which invalidated all marriages not conducted according to Christian rites and registered by the Registrar of Marriages. By implication, Hindu, Muslim and Parsi marriages were illegal and the children born through these marriages illegitimate. The Indians treated this judgment as an insult to the honor of their women and many women were drawn into the movement because of this indignity.

Gandhiji decided that the time had now come for the final struggle into which all the resisters' resources should be channelled. The campaign was launched by the illegal crossing of the border by a group of sixteen Satyagrahis, including Kasturba, Gandhiji's wife, who marched from Phoenix Settlement in Natal to Transvaal, and were immediately arrested. A group of eleven women then marched from Tolstoy Farm in Transvaal and crossed the border into Natal without a permit, and reached New Castle, a mining town. Here, they talked to the Indian mine workers, mostly Tamils, and before being arrested persuaded them to go on strike.

Gandhiji reached New Castle and took charge of the agitation. The employers retaliated by cutting off water and electricity to the workers' quarters, thus forcing them to leave their homes. Gandhiji decided to march this army of over two thousand men, women and children over the border and thus see them lodged in Transvaal jails. During the course of the march, Gandhiji was arrested twice, released, arrested a third time and sent to jail. The morale of the workers, however, was very high and they continued the march till they were put into trains and sent back to Natal, where they were prosecuted and sent to jail. The treatment that was meted out to these brave men and women in jail included starvation and whipping, and being forced to work in the mines by mounted military police. Gandhiji himself was made to dig stones and sweep the compound. He was kept in a dark cell, and taken to court handcuffed and manacled.

The Governments' action inflamed the entire Indian community; workers on the plantations and the mines went on a lightning strike. Gokhale toured the whole of India to arouse Indian public opinion and even the Viceroy, Lord Hardinge, condemned the repression as 'one that would not be tolerated by any country that calls itself civilized' and called for an impartial enquiry into the charges of atrocities. The use of brutal force on unarmed and peaceful men and women aroused widespread indignation and condemnation.

Eventually, through a series of negotiations involving Gandhiji, the Viceroy, Lord Hardinge, C.F. Andrews and General Smuts, an agreement was reached by which the Government of South Africa conceded the major Indian demands relating to the poll tax, the registration certificates and marriages solemnized according to Indian rites, and promised to treat the question of Indian immigration in a sympathetic manner.

## Outcome and learning of the movement

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table and conceding the substance of the demands put forward by the movement. The blueprint for the 'Gandhian' method of struggle had been evolved and Gandhiji started back for his native land. The South African 'experiment' was now to be tried on a much wider scale on the Indian sub-continent.

The South African experiment prepared Gandhiji for leadership of the Indian national struggle. He had had the invaluable experience of leading poor Indian labourers, of seeing their capacity for sacrifice and for bearing hardship, their morale in the face of repression. South Africa built up his faith in the capacity of the Indian masses to participate in and sacrifice for a cause that moved them.

Gandhiji also had had the opportunity of leading Indians belonging to different religions: Hindus, Muslims, Christians and Parsis were all united under his leadership in South Africa. They also came from different regions, being mainly Gujaratis and Tamils. They belonged to different social classes; rich merchants combined with poor indentured labourers. Women came along with the men.

Another aspect of the South African experience also stood Gandhiji in good stead. He learnt, the hardest way, that leadership involves facing the ire not only of the enemy but also of one's followers. There were occasions on which Gandhiji was faced with a serious threat to his life may it be attack by white mob or an angry pathan follower.

Thus, Gandhiji learnt that leaders often have to take hard decisions that are unpopular with enthusiastic followers. **South Africa, then, provided Gandhiji with an opportunity for evolving his own style of politics and leadership, for trying out new techniques of struggle, on a limited scale, untrammelled by the opposition of contending political currents.** In South Africa, he had already taken the movement from its 'Moderate' phase into its 'Gandhian' phase. He already knew the strengths and the weaknesses of the Gandhian method and he was convinced that it was the best method around. It now remained for him to introduce it into India.

### Gandhiji's arrival in India

Gandhiji returned to India, in January 1915, and was warmly welcomed. His work in South Africa was well-known, not only to educated Indians, but even to the masses who flocked to him for his 'darshan' at the Kumbh Mela at Hardwar. Gokhale had already hailed him as being 'without doubt made of the stuff of which heroes and martyrs are made.' The veteran Indian leader noticed in Gandhiji an even more important quality: 'He has in him the marvelous spiritual power to turn ordinary men around him into heroes and martyrs.'

On Gokhale's advice, and in keeping with his own style of never intervening in a situation without first studying it with great care, Gandhiji decided that for the first year he would not take a public stand on any political issue. He spent the year travelling around the country, seeing things for himself, and in organizing his ashram in Ahmedabad where he, and his devoted band of followers who had come with him from South Africa, would lead a community life. The next year as well, he continued to maintain his distance from political affairs, including the Home Rule Movement that was gathering momentum at this time. His political understanding did not coincide with any of the political currents that were active in India then.

**His faith in 'Moderate' methods was long eroded**

It was the best time to agitate for Home Rule was when the British were at the height of the First World War.

**Further, he was deeply convinced that none of these methods of political struggle were really viable; the only answer lay in Satyagraha.** His reasons for not joining the existing political



organizations are best explained in his own words: 'At my time of life and with views firmly formed on several matters, I could only join an organization to affect its policy and not be affected by it. This does not mean that I would not now have an open mind to receive new light. I simply wish to emphasize the fact that the new light will have to be specially dazzling in order to entrance me.' **In other words, he could only join an organization or a movement that adopted "Non-violent Satyagraha" as its method of struggle.**

That did not, however, mean that Gandhiji was going to remain politically idle. During the course of 1917 and early 1918, he was involved in three significant struggles — in Champaran in Bihar, in Ahmedabad and in Kheda in Gujarat. The common feature of these struggles was that they related to specific local issues and that they were fought for the economic demands of the masses. Two of these struggles, Champaran and Kheda, involved the peasants and the one in Ahmedabad involved industrial workers.

## Three Events that Launched Gandhi – Champaran, Kheda and Ahmedabad

### Champaran (first civil-disobedience)

The story of Champaran begins in the early nineteenth century when **European planters had involved the cultivators in agreements that forced them to cultivate indigo on 3/20th of their holdings (known as the tinkathia system).** Towards the end of the nineteenth century, German synthetic dyes forced indigo out of the market and the European planters of Champaran, keen to release the cultivators from the obligation of cultivating indigo, tried to turn their necessity to their advantage by securing enhancements in rent and other illegal dues as a price for the release. Resistance had surfaced in 1908 as well, but the exactions of the planters continued till Raj Kumar Shukla, a local man, decided to follow Gandhiji all over the country to persuade him to come to Champaran to investigate the problem. Raj Kumar Shukla's decision to get Gandhiji to Champaran is indicative of the image he had **acquired as one who fought for the rights of the exploited and the poor.** Gandhiji, on reaching Champaran, was ordered by the Commissioner to immediately leave the district. But to the surprise of all concerned, Gandhiji refused and preferred to take the punishment for his defiance of the law. This was unusual, for even Tilak and Annie Besant, when externed from a particular province, obeyed the orders even though they organized public protests against them. **To offer passive resistance or civil disobedience to an unjust order was indeed novel.** The Government of India, not willing to make an issue of it and not yet used to treating Gandhiji as a rebel, ordered the local Government to retreat and allow Gandhiji to proceed with his enquiry.

A victorious Gandhiji embarked on his investigation of the peasants' grievances. Here, too, his method was striking. He and his colleagues, who now included Brij Kishore, Rajendra Prasad and other members of the Bihar intelligentsia, Mahadev Desai and Narhari Parikh, two young men from Gujarat who had thrown in their lot with Gandhiji, and J.B. Kripalani, toured the villages and from dawn to dusk recorded the statements of peasants, interrogating them to make sure that they were giving correct information.

Meanwhile, the Government appointed a Commission of Inquiry to go into the whole issue, and nominated Gandhiji as one of its members. Armed with evidence collected from 8,000 peasants, he had little difficulty in convincing the Commission that the tinkathia system needed

to be abolished and that the peasants should be compensated for the illegal enhancement of their dues. As a compromise with the planters, he agreed that they refund only twenty-five per cent of the money they had taken illegally from the peasants. Answering critics who asked why he did not ask for a full refund, Gandhiji explained that even this refund had done enough damage to the planters' prestige and position. As was often the case, Gandhiji's assessment was correct and, within a decade, the planters left the district altogether.

### **Ahmedabad Mill workers strike (first hunger strike)**

Gandhiji then turned his attention to the workers of Ahmedabad. A dispute was brewing between them and the mill owners over the question of a 'plague bonus' the employers wanted to withdraw once the epidemic had passed but the workers insisted it stay, since the enhancement hardly compensated for the rise in the cost of living during the War. The British Collector, who feared a showdown, asked Gandhiji to bring pressure on the mill owners and work out a compromise.

Ambalal Sarabhai, one of the leading mill owners of the town, was a friend of Gandhiji, and had just saved the Sabarmati Ashram from extinction by a generous donation. Gandhiji persuaded the mill owners and the workers to agree to arbitration by a tribunal, but the mill owners, taking advantage of a stray strike, withdrew from the agreement. They offered a twenty per cent bonus and threatened to dismiss those who did not accept it.

The breach of agreement was treated by Gandhiji as a very serious affair, and he advised the workers to go on strike. He further suggested, on the basis of a thorough study of the production costs and profits of the industry as well as the cost of living, that they would be justified in demanding a thirty-five per cent increase, in wages.

The strike began and Gandhiji addressed the workers every day on the banks of the Sabarmati River. He brought out a daily news bulletin, and insisted that no violence be used against employers or blacklegs. Ambalal Sarabhai's sister, Anasuya Behn, was one of the main lieutenants of Gandhiji in this struggle in which her brother, and Gandhiji's friend, was one of the main adversaries.

After some days, the workers began to exhibit signs of weariness. The attendance at the daily meetings began to decline and the attitude towards blacklegs began to harden. In this situation, Gandhiji decided to go on a fast, to rally the workers and strengthen their resolve to continue. Also, he had promised that if the strike led to starvation he would be the first to starve, and the fast was a fulfillment of that promise. The fast, however, also had the effect of putting pressure on the mill owners and they agreed to submit the whole issue to a tribunal. The strike was withdrawn and the tribunal later awarded the thirty-five per cent increase as the workers had demanded.

### **Kheda (first non-cooperation)**

The dispute in Ahmedabad had not yet ended when Gandhiji learnt that the peasants of Kheda district were in extreme distress due to a failure of crops, and that their appeals for the remission of land revenue were being ignored by the Government. Enquiries by members of the Servants of India Society, Vithalbhai Patel and Gandhiji confirmed the validity of the peasants'



case. This case was that as the crops were less than one-fourth of the normal yield, they were entitled under the revenue code to a total remission of the land revenue.

**The Gujarat Sabha, of which Gandhiji was the President, played a leading role in the agitation. Appeals and petitions having failed, Gandhiji advised the withholding of revenue, and asked the peasants to 'fight unto death against such a spirit of vindictiveness and tyranny,' and show that 'it is impossible to govern men without their consent.'**

Vallabhbhai Patel, a young lawyer and a native of Kheda district, and other young men, including Indulal Yagnik, joined Gandhiji in touring the villages and urging the peasants to stand firm in the face of increasing Government repression which included the seizing of cattle and household goods and the attachment of standing crops. The cultivators were asked to take a solemn pledge that they would not pay; those who could afford to pay were to take a vow that they would not pay in the interests of the poorer ryots who would otherwise panic and sell off their belongings or incur debts in order to pay the revenue. However, if the Government agreed to suspend collection of land revenue, the ones who could afford to do so could pay the whole amount.

The peasants of Kheda, already hard pressed because of plague, high prices, arid drought, were beginning to show signs of weakness when Gandhiji came to know that the Government had issued secret instructions directing that revenue should be recovered only from those peasants who could pay. A public declaration of this decision would have meant a blow to Government prestige, since this was exactly what Gandhiji had been demanding. In these circumstances, the movement was withdrawn. Gandhiji later recalled that by this time 'the people were exhausted' and he was actually 'casting about for some graceful way of terminating the struggle'.

### Importance of these events

Champaran, Ahmedabad and Kheda served as demonstrations of Gandhiji's style and method of politics to the country at large. They also helped him find his feet among the people of India and study their problems at close quarters. He came to possess, as a result of these struggles, a surer understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the masses, as well as of the viability of his own political style. He also earned the respect and commitment of many political workers, especially the younger ones, who were impressed by his identification with the problems of ordinary Indians, and his willingness to take up their cause.

### The Rowlatt Bills and Rowlatt Satyagraha

It was this reservoir of goodwill, and of experience of Champaran, Ahmedabad and Kheda, that encouraged Gandhiji, in February 1919, to call for a nation-wide protest against the unpopular legislation that the British were threatening to introduce. **Two bills, popularly known as the Rowlatt Bills after the man who chaired the Committee that suggested their introduction, aimed at severely curtailing the civil liberties of Indians in the name of curbing terrorist violence, were introduced in the Legislative Council. One of them was actually pushed through in indecent haste in the face of opposition from all the elected Indian members. This act of the Government was treated by the whole of political India as a grievous insult, especially as it came at the end of the War when substantial constitutional concessions were expected.**

Constitutional protest having failed, Gandhiji stepped in and suggested that a Satyagraha be launched. A Satyagraha Sabha was formed, and the young members of the Home Rule Leagues who were more than keen to express their disenchantment with the Government flocked to join it. The old lists of the addresses of Home Rule Leagues and their members were taken out, contacts established and propaganda begun. The form of protest finally decided upon was the observance of a nation-wide hartal (strike) accompanied by fasting and prayer. In addition, it was decided that civil disobedience would be offered against specific laws.

The 6<sup>th</sup> of April was fixed as the date on which the Satyagraha would be launched. The movement that emerged was very different from the one that had been anticipated or planned. Delhi observed the 'hartal' on 30<sup>th</sup> March because of some confusion about dates, and there was considerable violence in the streets. This seemed to set the pattern in most other areas that responded to the call; protest was generally accompanied by violence and disorder. Punjab, which was suffering from the after effects of severe war-time repression, forcible recruitment, and the ravages of disease, reacted particularly strongly and both in Amritsar and Lahore the situation became very dangerous for the Government. Gandhiji tried to go to Punjab to help quieten the people, but the Government deported him to Bombay. He found that Bombay and even his native Gujarat, including Ahmedabad, were up in flames and he decided to stay and try to pacify the people.

## Jallianwala Bagh Massacre

Events in Punjab were moving in a particularly tragic direction. In Amritsar, the arrest of two local leaders Saifuddin Kitchlew and Satyapal on 10<sup>th</sup> April led to an attack on the town hall and the post office; telegraph wires were cut and Europeans including women were attacked. The army was called in and the city handed over to General Dyer, who issued an order prohibiting public meetings and assemblies.

On 13 April, Baisakhi day, a large crowd of people, many of whom were visitors from neighbouring villages who had come to the town to attend the Baisakhi celebrations, collected in the Jallianwala Bagh to attend a public meeting. **General Dyer, incensed that his orders were disobeyed, ordered his troops to fire upon the unarmed crowd.** The shooting continued for ten minutes. General Dyer had not thought it necessary to issue any warning to the people nor was he deterred by the fact that the ground was totally hemmed in from all sides by high walls which left little chance for escape. The Government estimate was 379 dead, other estimates were considerably higher.

The brutality at Jallianwala Bagh stunned the entire nation. Rabindranath Tagore renounced his knighthood in protest. The response would come, not immediately, but a little later. For the moment, repression was intensified, Punjab placed under martial law and the people of Amritsar forced into indignities such as crawling on their bellies before Europeans. **Gandhiji, overwhelmed by the total atmosphere of violence, withdrew the movement on 18<sup>th</sup> April 1919.** That did not mean, however, that Gandhiji had lost faith either in his non-violent Satyagraha or in the capacity of the Indian people to adopt it as a method of struggle. A year

on that of the 'Rajwade' launched another nation Satyagraha'.



## Khilafat Movement

The last year of the second decade of the twentieth century found India highly discontented. Main reasons were

1. The Rowlatt Act, the Jallianwala Bagh massacre and martial law in Punjab had belied all the generous wartime promises of the British.
2. The Montague-Chelmsford Reforms announced towards the end of 1919, with their ill-considered scheme of dyarchy satisfied few.
3. The Indian Muslims were incensed when they discovered that their loyalty had been purchased during the War by assurances of generous treatment of Turkey after the War — a promise British statesman had no intention of fulfilling. The Muslims regarded the Caliph of Turkey as their spiritual head and were naturally upset when they found that he would retain no control over the holy places which was his duty as Caliph to protect.
4. Even those who were willing to treat the happenings at Jallianwala Bagh and other places in Punjab as aberrations, that would soon be 'corrected', were disillusioned when they discovered that the Hunter Committee appointed by the Government to enquire into the Punjab disturbances was an eye wash and that the House of Lords had voted in favour of General Dyer's action and that the British public had demonstrated its support by helping the Morning Post collect 30,000 pounds for General Dyer.

The post-First World War period also saw the preparation of the ground for common political action by Hindus and Muslims:

1. The Lucknow Pact (1916) had stimulated Congress- Muslim League cooperation;
2. The Rowlatt Act agitation brought Hindus and Muslims, and also other sections of the society, together; and radical nationalist Muslims like Mohammad Ali, Abul Kalam Azad, Hakim Ajmal Khan and Hasan Imam had now become more influential than the conservative Aligarh school elements who had dominated the League earlier.
3. The younger elements advocated militant nationalism and active participation in the nationalist movement. They had strong anti-imperialist sentiments.

In this atmosphere emerged the Khilafat issue around which developed the historic Non-Cooperation Movement.

### Khilafat issue

The Khilafat issue paved the way for the consolidation of the emergence of a radical nationalist trend among the younger generation of Muslims and the section of traditional Muslim scholars who were becoming increasingly critical of the British rule. This time, they were angered by the treatment meted out to Turkey by the British after t

The Muslims in India, as the Muslims all over the world, regarded the sultan of Turkey as their spiritual leader, Khalifa, so naturally their sympathies were with Turkey. During the War, Turkey had allied with Germany and Austria against the British. When the War ended, the British took

a stern attitude towards Turkey— Turkey was dismembered and the Khalifa removed from power. This incensed Muslims all over the world. In India, too, the Muslims demanded from the British

1. That the Khalifa's control over Muslim sacred places should be retained, and
2. The Khalifa should be left with sufficient territories after territorial arrangements.

In early 1919, a Khilafat Committee was formed under the leadership of the Ali brothers (Shaukat Ali and Muhammad Ali), Maulana Azad, Ajmal Khan and Hasrat Mohani, to force the British Government to change its attitude to Turkey. Thus, the grounds for a country-wide agitation were prepared.

### Development of Khilafat—Non-Cooperation Programme

For some time, the Khilafat leaders limited their actions to meetings, petitions, deputations in favour of the Khilafat. Later, however, a militant trend emerged, demanding an active agitation such as stopping all cooperation with the British.

Thus, at the All India Khilafat Conference held in Delhi in November 1919, a call was made for boycott of British goods. The Khilafat leaders also clearly spelt out that unless peace terms after the War were favourable to Turkey they would stop all cooperation with the Government. Gandhi, who was the president of the All India Khilafat Committee, saw in the issue a platform from which mass based and united non-cooperation could be declared against the Government.

### Congress Stand on Khilafat

It was quite clear that the support of the Congress was essential for the Khilafat movement to succeed. However, although Gandhiji was in favour of launching Satyagraha and non-cooperation against the Government on the Khilafat issue, the Congress was not united on this form of political action.

Tilak was opposed to having an alliance with Muslim leaders over a religious issue and he was also skeptical of Satyagraha as an instrument of politics. So Gandhiji made a concerted bid to convince Tilak of the virtues of Satyagraha and of the expediency of an alliance with the Muslim community over the Khilafat issue. There was opposition to some of the other provisions of the Gandhi's non-cooperation programme also, such as boycott of councils. **Later, however, Gandhi was able to get the approval of the Congress for his programme of political action and the Congress felt inclined to support a non-cooperation programme on the Khilafat question because—**

1. It was felt that this was a golden opportunity to cement Hindu-Muslim unity and to bring Muslim masses into the national movement; now different sections of society—Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, peasants, artisans, capitalists, tribals, women, students—could come into the national movement by fighting for their own rights and realising that the colonial rule was opposed to them;



2. The Congress was losing faith in constitutional struggle, especially after the Punjab incidents and the blatantly partisan Hunter Commission Report;
3. The Congress was aware that the masses were eager to give expression to their discontent.

## Non Cooperation Movement- Its Background, Programme & Evaluation

### Muslim League's Support to Congress

The Muslim League decided to give full support to the Congress and its agitation on political questions. In early 1920, a joint Hindu-Muslim deputation was sent to the viceroy to seek redress of grievances on the issue of Khilafat, but the mission proved abortive.

In February 1920, Gandhi announced that the issues of the Punjab wrongs and constitutional advance had been overshadowed by the Khilafat question and that he would soon lead a movement of non-cooperation if the terms of the peace treaty failed to satisfy the Indian Muslims.

The Treaty of Sevres with Turkey, signed in May 1920, completely dismembered Turkey.

### Major events and development of movement

In June 1920 an all-party conference at Allahabad approved a programme of boycott of schools, colleges and law courts, and asked Gandhi to lead it. **On August 31, 1920 the Khilafat Committee started a campaign of non-cooperation and the movement was formally launched.** (Tilak had, incidentally, breathed his last on August 1, 1920.)

In September 1920 at a special session in Calcutta, the Congress approved a non-cooperation programme till the Punjab and Khilafat wrongs were removed and Swaraj was established. The programme was to include -

1. Boycott of government schools and colleges;
2. Boycott of law courts and dispensation of justice through Panchayats instead;
3. Boycott of Legislative Councils; (there were some differences over this as some leaders like C.R. Das were not willing to include a boycott of councils, but bowed to Congress discipline; these leaders boycotted elections held in November 1920 and the majority of the voters too stayed away);
4. Boycott of foreign cloth and use of khadi instead; also practice of hand-spinning to be done;
5. Renunciation of government honours and titles; the second phase could include mass -payment of civil disobedience including resignation from government service, and non taxes.

During the movement, the participants were supposed to work for Hindu-Muslim unity and for removal of untouchability, all the time remaining non-violent.

**In December 1920 at the Nagpur session of the Indian National Congress-**

- i. The programme of non-cooperation was endorsed;
- ii. An important change was made in Congress creed; now, instead of having the attainment of self-government through constitutional means as its goal, the Congress decided to have the attainment of swaraj through peaceful and legitimate means, thus committing itself to an extra-constitutional mass struggle;
- iii. Some important organisational changes were made: a Congress Working Committee (CWC) of 15 members was set up to lead the Congress from now onwards; Provincial Congress Committees on linguistic basis were organised; ward committees were organised; and entry fee was reduced to four annas
- iv. Gandhi declared that if the non-cooperation programme was implemented completely, swaraj would be ushered in within a year.

Many groups of revolutionary terrorists, especially those from Bengal, also pledged support to the Congress programme. At this stage, some leaders like Mohammad Ali Jinnah, Annie Besant, G.S. Kharpade and B.C. Pal left the Congress as they believed in a constitutional and lawful struggle while some others like Surendranath Banerjee founded the Indian National Liberal Federation and played a minor role in national politics henceforward. The adoption by the Congress of the non-cooperation movement initiated earlier by the Khilafat Committee gave it a new energy, and the years 1921 and 1922 saw an unprecedented popular upsurge.

### Spread of the Movement

Gandhi accompanied by the Ali brothers undertook a nationwide tour. About 90,000 students left government schools and colleges and joined around 800 national schools and colleges, which cropped up during this time. These educational institutions were organised under the leadership of Acharya Narendra Dev, C.R. Das, Lala Lajpat Rai, Zakir Hussain, Subhash Bose (who became the principal of National College at Calcutta) and included Jamia Millia at Aligarh, Kashi Vidyapeeth, Gujarat Vidyapeeth and Bihar Vidyapeeth.

Many lawyers gave up their practice, some of whom were Motilal Nehru, Jawaharlal Nehru, C.R. Das, C. Raja-gopalachari, Saifuddin Kitchlew, Vallabhbhai Patel, Asaf Ali, T. Prakasam and Rajendra Prasad. Heaps of foreign cloths were burnt publicly and their imports fell by half. Picketing of shops selling foreign liquor and of toddy shops was undertaken at many places. Tilak Swaraj Fund was oversubscribed and one crore rupees collected. Congress volunteer corps emerged as the parallel police.

In July 1921, the Ali brothers gave a call to the Muslims to resign from the Army as that was unreligious. The Ali brothers were arrested for this in September. Gandhi echoed their call and asked local Congress committees to pass similar resolutions to that effect.

Now, the Congress gave a call to local Congress bodies to start civil disobedience if it was against union brought that the people were ready for it. Already, a no taxes in Midnapore (Bengal) and in Guntur (Andhra) was going on. In Assam, strikes in tea plantations, steamer services, Assam-Bengal Railways had been organised. J.M. Sengupta was a prominent leader in these strikes. In November 1921, the visit of the Prince of Wales to India invited strikes and demonstrations.



The spirit of defiance and unrest gave rise to many local struggles such as Awadh Kisan Movement (UP), Eka Movement (UP), Mappila Revolt (Malabar) and the Sikh agitation for the removal of mahants in Punjab.

## Government Response

Talks between Gandhi and Reading, the viceroy, broke down in May 1921 as the Government wanted Gandhi to urge the Ali brothers to remove those portions from speeches which suggested violence. Gandhi realised that the Government was trying to drive a wedge between him and the Khilafat leaders and refused to fall into the trap.

In December, the Government came down heavily on the protestors. Volunteer corps were declared illegal, public meetings were banned, the press was gagged and most of the leaders barring Gandhi were arrested.

## The Last Phase of the Movement

Gandhi was now under increasing pressure from the Congress rank and file to start the civil disobedience programme and the Ahmedabad session in 1921 (presided over, incidentally, by C.R. Das while still in jail; Hakim Ajmal Khan was the acting president) appointed Gandhi the sole authority on the issue. On February 1, 1922 Gandhi threatened to launch civil disobedience from Bardoli (Gujarat) if

1. Political prisoners were not released, and
2. Press controls were not removed.

However, the movement had hardly begun before it was brought to an abrupt end.

## Chauri Chaura Incident

A small sleepy village named Chauri-Chaura (Gorakhpur district, UP) has found a place in history books due to an incident of violence on February 5, 1922 which was to prompt Gandhi to withdraw the movement. The police here had beaten up the leader of a group of volunteers campaigning against liquor sales and high food prices, and then opened fire on the crowd, which had come to protest before the police station.

The agitated crowd torched the police station with policemen inside who had taken shelter there; those who tried to flee were hacked to death and thrown back into the fire. Twenty-two policemen were killed in the violence. Gandhi, not happy with the increasingly violent trend of the movement, immediately announced the withdrawal of the movement.

The CWC met at Bardoli in February 1922 and resolved to stop all activity that led to breaking of law and to get down to constructive work, instead, which was to include popularisation of Khadi, national schools, and campaigning for temperance, for Hindu-Muslim unity and equal rights for untouchability. However, most of the nationalist leaders including C.R. Das, Motilal Nehru, Subhash Bose, Jawaharlal Nehru, however, expressed their bewilderment at Gandhi's decision to withdraw the movement.

In March 1922 Gandhi was arrested and sentenced to six years in jail. He made the occasion memorable by a magnificent court speech "I am here, therefore, to invite and submit cheerfully to the highest penalty that can be inflicted upon me for what in law is deliberate crime, and what appears to me to be the highest duty of a citizen."

### Reasons behind withdrawal of the Movement

Gandhi felt that people had not learnt or fully understood the method of non-violence. Incidents like Chauri-Chaura could lead to excitement and fervour turning the movement generally violent. A violent movement could be easily suppressed by the colonial regime that could use the incidents of violence as an excuse to use the armed might of the state against the protestors.

Moreover, the movement was also showing signs of fatigue. This was natural as it is not possible to sustain any movement at a high pitch for very long. The Government seemed to be in no mood for negotiations.

The central theme of the agitation the Khilafat question also dissipated soon. In November 1922, the people of Turkey rose under Mustafa Kamal Pasha and deprived the Sultan of political power. Turkey was made a secular state. Thus, the Khilafat question lost its relevance. A European style of legal system was established in Turkey and extensive rights granted to women. Education was nationalised and modern agriculture and industries developed. In 1924, the caliphate was abolished.

### Evaluation of Khilafat Non-Cooperation Movement

The tremendous participation of Muslims in the movement and the maintenance of communal unity was in itself no mean achievement. There is hardly any doubt that it was Muslim participation that gave the movement its truly mass character in many areas, at some places two-thirds of those arrested were Muslims. And it was, indeed, unfortunate that this most positive feature of the movement was not to be repeated in later years once communalism began to take its toll. The fraternization that was witnessed between Hindus and Muslims, with Gandhiji and other Congress leaders speaking from mosques, Gandhiji being allowed to address meetings of Muslim women in which he was the only male who was not blind-folded, all these began to look like romantic dreams in later years. The movement brought the urban Muslims into the national movement, but at the same time it communalised the national politics to an extent. Although Muslim sentiments were a manifestation of the spread of a wider anti-imperialist feeling, the national leaders failed to raise the religious political consciousness of the Muslims to a level of secular political consciousness.

With the Non-Cooperation Movement, nationalist sentiments reached every nook and corner of the country and politicised every strata of population—the artisans, peasants, students, urban poor, women, traders etc. It was this politicisation and activation of millions of men and women, which imparted a revo

Colonial rule was based on two myths one, that such a rule was in the interest of Indians and two, that it was invincible. The first myth had been exploded by the economic critique by Moderate nationalists. The second myth had been challenged by Satyagraha through mass



struggle. Now, the masses lost the hitherto all-pervasive fear of the colonial rule and its mighty repressive organs.

## Swarajists and No Changers

The withdrawal of the Non-Cooperation Movement in February 1922 was followed by the arrest of Gandhiji in March and his conviction and imprisonment for six years for the crime of spreading disaffection against the Government. The result was the spread of disintegration, disorganization and demoralization in the nationalist ranks. There arose the danger of the movement lapsing into passivity. Many began to question the wisdom of the total Gandhian strategy. Others started looking for ways out of the impasse.

### Swarajist's Ideology

A new line of political activity, which would keep up the spirit of resistance to colonial rule, was now advocated by C.R. Das and Motilal Nehru. They suggested that the nationalists should end the boycott of the legislative councils, enter them, expose them as 'sham parliaments' and as 'a mask which the bureaucracy has put on,' and obstruct 'every work of the council.'

This, they argued, would not be giving up non-cooperation but continuing it in a more effective form by extending it to the councils themselves. It would be opening a new front in the battle. C.R. Das as the President of the Congress and Motilal as its Secretary put forward this programme of 'either mending or ending' the councils at the Gaya session of the Congress in December 1922. Another section of the Congress headed by Vallabhbhai Patel, Rajendra Prasad and C. Rajagopalachari, opposed the new proposal which was consequently defeated. Das and Motilal resigned from their respective offices in the Congress and on 1 January 1923 announced the formation of the Congress-Khilafat Swaraj Party better known later as the Swaraj Party. Das was the President and Motilal one of the Secretaries of the new party. The adherents of the council-entry programme came to be popularly known as 'pro-changers' and those still advocating boycott of the councils as 'no—changers.'

The Swaraj Party accepted the Congress programme in its entirety except in one respect — it would take part in elections due later in the year. It declared that it would present the national demand for self- government in the councils and in case of its rejection its elected members would adopt 'a policy of uniform, continuous and consistent obstruction within the councils, with a view to make the Government through the councils impossible.' The councils would, thus, be wrecked from within by creating deadlocks on every measure that came before them.

### Leadership of pro-changers and no-changers

Both Das and Motilal were highly successful lawyers who had once been Moderates but had

given up their legal practice and adopted the politics of boycott and non

practice, joined the movement as whole time workers and donated to the nation their magnificent houses in Calcutta and Allahabad respectively. They were great admirers of Gandhiji but were also his political equals. Both were brilliant and effective parliamentarians. One deeply religious and the other a virtual agnostic, both were secular to the core.

Different in many ways, they complemented each other and formed a legendary political combination. Das was imaginative and emotional and a great orator with the capacity to influence and conciliate friends and foes. Motilal was firm, coolly analytical, and a great organizer and disciplinarian. They had such absolute trust and confidence in each other that each could use the other's name for any statement without prior consultation.

The no-changers, whose effective head was Gandhiji even though he was in jail, argued for the continuation of the full programme of boycott and non-cooperation, effective working of the constructive programme and quiet preparations for the resumption of the suspended civil disobedience.

### Common grounds and Differences between pro-changers and no-changers

There was, of course, a lot of common ground between the two-

1. Both agreed that civil disobedience was not possible immediately and that no mass movement could be carried on indefinitely or for a prolonged period. Hence, breathing time was needed and a temporary retreat from the active phase of the movement was on the agenda.
2. Both also accepted that there was need to rest and to reinvigorate the anti-imperialist forces, overcome demoralization, intensify politicization, widen political participation and mobilization, strengthen organization, and keep up the recruitment, training and morale of the cadre.

In fact, the national movement was facing the basic problem that any mass movement has to face that was how to carry on political work in the movement's non-active phases? It was in the answer to this question that the two sides differed.

The Swarajists said that work in the councils was necessary to fill in the temporary political void. This would keep up the morale of the politicized Indians, fill the empty newspaper spaces, and enthuse the people. Electioneering and speeches in the councils would provide fresh avenues for political agitation and propaganda. Even without Congressmen, said the Swarajists, the councils would continue to function and, perhaps, a large number of people would participate in voting. This would lead to the weakening of the hold of the Congress.

Moreover, non-Congressmen would capture positions of vantage and use them to weaken the Congress. Why should such vantage points in a revolutionary fight be left in the hands of the enemy? By joining the councils and obstructing their work, Congressmen would prevent undesirable elements from doing mischief or the Government from getting some form of legitimacy for their laws.

As legislatures introduced the new councils, the Swarajists claimed that they would not be a part of the political struggle and that their intention was not to use them, as the Liberals desired, as organs for gradual transformation of the colonial state, but to use them as the ground on which the struggle for the overthrow of the colonial state was to be carried out.



The no-changers opposed council-entry mainly on the ground that parliamentary work would lead to the neglect of constructive and other work among the masses, the loss of revolutionary zeal and political corruption. The legislators who would go into the councils with the aim of wrecking them would gradually give up the politics of obstruction and get sucked into the imperial constitutional framework, and start cooperating with the Government on petty reforms and piecemeal legislation. Constructive work among the masses, on the other hand, would prepare them for the next round of civil disobedience.

### Union of pro-changers and no-changers and approach of Gandhiji

As the pro-changer no-changer clash developed, the atmosphere of dismay in nationalist ranks began to thicken and they began to be haunted by the fear of the repetition of the disastrous split of 1907. Pressure began to develop on the leaders to put a check on their public bickering. Both groups of leaders began to pull back from the brink and move towards mutual accommodation. This trend was helped by several factors.

First, the need for unity was felt very strongly by all the Congressmen. Secondly, not only the no-changers but also the Swarajists realized that however useful parliamentary work might be, the real sanctions which would compel the Government to accept national demands would be forged only by a mass movement outside the legislatures — and this would need unity. Lastly, both groups of leaders fully accepted the essentiality of Gandhiji's leadership.

Consequently, in a special session of the Congress held at Delhi in September 1923, the Congress suspended all propaganda against council entry and permitted Congressmen to stand as candidates and exercise their franchise in forthcoming elections.

Gandhiji was released from jail on 5 February 1924 on health grounds. He was completely opposed to council-entry as also to the obstruction of work in the councils, which he believed was inconsistent with non-violent non-cooperation. Once again a split in the Congress loomed on the horizon. The Government very much hoped for and banked on such a split. When releasing the Mahatma, the Bombay Government had suggested that he 'would denounce the Swarajists for their defection from the pure principle of non-cooperation, and thus considerably reduce in legislatures their power for harm.

But Gandhiji did not oblige. Step by step, he moved towards an accommodation with the Swarajists. In fact, his approach towards the Swarajists at this stage brings out some of the basic features of his political style, especially when dealing with co-workers with whom he differed. Gandhiji's starting point was the fact that even when opposing the Swarajist leaders he had full trust in their bonafides. He described them as 'the most valued and respected leaders' and as persons who 'have made great sacrifices in the cause of the country and who yield to no one in their love of freedom of the motherland'.

Moreover, he and Das and Motilal Nehru throughout maintained warm personal relations based on mutual respect and regard. Immediately after his release, Gandhiji refused to publicly

ders. Even after coming on council-entry till he had discus

them, while he continued to believe in the futility and even harmful character of the Swarajists' programme, he remained convinced that public opposition to the 'settled fact' of council-entry would be counterproductive.

The courageous and uncompromising manner in which the Swarajists had functioned in the councils convinced Gandhiji that, however politically wrong, they were certainly not becoming a limb of imperial administration. To the contrary, he noted, 'they have shown determination, grit, discipline and cohesion and have not feared to carry their policy to the point of defiance. Once assume the desirability of entering Councils and it must be admitted that they have introduced a new spirit into the Indian Legislatures'.

Gandhiji was also pained by the bickering in the worst of taste among the proponents of the two schools. He was very keen to end this. In any case, felt Gandhiji, council entry had already occurred and now to withdraw would be 'disastrous' and would be 'misunderstood' by the Government and the people 'as a rout and weakness'. This would further embolden the Government in its autocratic behaviour and repressive policy and add to the state of political depression among the people.

The last straw came when the Government launched a full attack on civil liberties and the Swarajists in Bengal in the name of fighting terrorism. It promulgated an ordinance on 25 October 1924 under which it conducted raids on Congress offices and house searches and arrested a large number of revolutionary terrorists and Swarajists and other Congressmen including Subhas Chandra Bose and two Swarajist members of the Bengal legislature, Anil Baran Roy and S.C. Mitra. Perceiving a direct threat to the national movement, as an answer to the Government's offensive against the Swarajists, Gandhiji decided to show his solidarity with the Swarajists by 'surrendering' before them. On 6 November 1924, Gandhiji brought the strife between the Swarajists and no-changers to an end, by signing a joint statement with Das and Motilal that the Swarajist Party would carry on work in the legislatures on behalf of the Congress and as an integral part of the Congress. This decision was endorsed in December at the Belgaum session of the Congress over which Gandhiji presided. He also gave the Swarajists a majority of seats on his Working Committee.

### Achievements of Swarajist

Despite of the facts that Swarajists got only a few weeks to prepare for the elections and the franchise was extremely narrow, in elections to the legislative councils held in November 1923 they managed to do quite well. They won 42 out of 101 elected seats in the Central Legislative Assembly and got a clear majority in the Central Provinces; they were the largest party in Bengal; and they fared quite well in Bombay and U.P., though not in Madras and Punjab because of strong casteist and communal currents.

In the Central Legislative Assembly, the Swarajists succeeded in building a common political front with the Independents led by M.A. Jinnah, the Liberals, and individuals such as Madan Mohan Malaviya. They built similar coalitions in most of the provinces. And they set out to inflict defeat after defeat on the Government.

The legislatures, reformed in 1919, had a 'semblance' of power without any real authority. Though they had a majority of elected members, the executive at the centre or in the provinces was outside their control, being responsible only to the British Government at home. Moreover the Viceroy or the Governor could certify any legislation, including a budgetary grant, if it was rejected in the legislature. **The Swarajists forced the Government to certify legislation repeatedly at the centre as well as in many of the provinces, thus exposing the true character**



**of the reformed councils.** In March 1925, they succeeded in electing Vithalbhai Patel, a leading Swarajist, as the President of the Central Legislative Assembly.

**Though intervening on every issue and often outvoting the Government, the Swarajists took up at the centre three major sets of problems on which they delivered powerful speeches which were fully reported in the Press and followed avidly every morning by the readers. One was the problem of constitutional advance leading to self-Government; second of civil liberties, release of political prisoners, and repeal of repressive laws; and third of the development of indigenous industries.**

The Swarajist activity in the legislatures was spectacular by any standards. It inspired the politicized persons and kept their political interest alive. People were thrilled every time the all-powerful foreign bureaucracy was humbled in the councils. Simultaneously, during 1923-24, Congressmen captured a large number of municipalities and other local bodies. Das became the Mayor of Calcutta (with Subhas Bose as his Chief Executive Officer), and Vithalbhai Patel the President of Bombay Corporation, Vallabhbhai Patel of Ahmedabad Municipality, Rajendra Prasad of Patna Municipality, and Jawaharlal Nehru of Allahabad Municipality. The no-changers actively joined in these ventures since they believed that local bodies could be used to promote the constructive programme.

Despite their circumscribed powers, many of the municipalities and district boards, headed by a galaxy of leaders, set out to raise, however little, the quality of life of the people. They did excellent work in the fields of education, sanitation, health, anti-untouchability, and khadi promotion, won the admiration of friend and foe, and quite often aroused popular enthusiasm.

Thus, their great achievement lay in their filling the political void at a time when the national movement was recouping its strength. And this they did without getting co-opted by the colonial regime while some in their ranks fell by the wayside as was inevitable in the parliamentary framework, the overwhelming majority proved their mettle and stood their ground. They worked in the legislatures in an orderly disciplined manner and withdrew from them whenever the call came. Above all, they showed that it was possible to use the legislatures in a creative manner even as they promoted the politics of self-reliant anti-imperialism. They also successfully exposed the hollowness of the Reform Act of 1919 and showed the people that India was being ruled by 'lawless laws'.

### **The drawbacks of Swarajists and reasons behind their weakening**

The Swarajists suffered a major loss when C.R. Das died on 16 June 1925. Even more serious were a few other political developments. In the absence of a mass movement, communalism raised its ugly head and the political frustrations of the people began to find expression in communal riots. Actively encouraged by the colonial authorities, the communalists of all hues found a fertile field for their activities. Its preoccupation with parliamentary politics also started telling on the internal cohesion of the Swaraj Party.

For one, the limits of politics of obstruction were soon reached. Having repeatedly outvoted the Government and forced it to certify its legislation, there was no way of going further inside the legislatures and escalating the politics of confrontation. This could be done only by a mass movement outside. But the Swarajists lacked any policy of coordinating their militant work in

the legislatures with mass political work outside. In fact, they relied almost wholly on newspaper reporting.

The Swarajists also could not carry their coalition partners for ever and in every respect, for the latter did not believe in the Swarajists' tactic of 'uniform, continuous and consistent obstruction.' The logic of coalition politics soon began to pull back the Swarajists from militant obstructionism.

Some of the Swarajist legislators could also not resist the pulls of parliamentary perquisites and positions of status and patronage. The Government's policy of creating dissension among the nationalists by trying to separate the Swarajists from the Liberals, militant Swarajists from the more moderate Swarajists, and Hindus from Muslims began to bear fruit.

In Bengal, the majority in the Swaraj Party failed to support the tenants' cause against the zamindars and, thereby, lost the support of its pro-tenant, mostly Muslim, members. Nor could the Swaraj Party avoid the intrusion of communal discord in its own ranks.

Very soon, a group of **Responsivists** arose in the party who wanted to work the reforms and to hold office wherever possible. The Responsivists joined the Government in the Central Provinces. Their ranks were soon swelled by N.C. Kelkar, M.R. Jayakar and other leaders. Lajpat Rai and Madan Mohan Malaviya too separated themselves from the Swaraj Party on Responsivist as well as communal grounds.

To prevent further dissolution and disintegration of the party, the spread of parliamentary 'corruption,' and further weakening of the moral fiber of its members, the main leadership of the party reiterated its faith in mass civil disobedience and decided to withdraw from the legislatures in March 1926. Gandhiji, too, had resumed his critique of council-entry.

### **Decline of Swarajists**

The Swaraj Party went into the elections held in November 1926 as a party in disarray — a much weaker and demoralized force. It had to face the Government and loyalist elements and its own dissenters on the one side and the resurgent Hindu and Muslim communalists on the other. A virulent communal and unscrupulous campaign was waged against the Swarajists. Motilal Nehru was, for example, accused of sacrificing Hindu interests, of favouring cow-slaughter, and of eating beef. The Muslim communalists were no less active in branding the Swarajists as anti-Muslim. The result was a severe weakening of the Swaraj Party. It succeeded in winning forty seats at the Centre and half the seats in Madras but was severely mauled in all other provinces, especially in U.P., C.P., and Punjab.

Moreover, both Hindu and Muslim communalists increased their representation in the councils. The Swarajists also could not form a nationalist coalition in the legislatures as they had done in 1923. Once again the Swarajists passed a series of adjournment motions and defeated the Government on a number of bills. Noteworthy was the defeat of the Government on the Public Safety Bill in 1928. Frightened by the spread of socialist and communist ideas and influence and believing that the crucial role in this respect was being played by British and other foreign agitators sent to India by the Communist International, the Government proposed to acquire the power to deport 'undesirable' and 'subversive' foreigners. Nationalists of all colours, from the moderates to the militants, united in opposing the Bill. In March 1929, having failed to get



the Bill passed, the Government arrested thirty-one leading communists, trade unionists and other leftwing leaders and put them on trial at Meerut. This led to strong criticism of the Government by the nationalists. The Swarajists finally walked out of the legislatures in 1930 as a result of the Lahore Congress resolution and the beginning of civil disobedience.

### Constructive work by No-changers

In the meantime, the no-changers carried on laborious, quiet, undemonstrative, grass-roots constructive work around the promotion of khadi and spinning, national education and Hindu-Muslim unity, the struggle against untouchability and the boycott of foreign cloth. This work was symbolized by hundreds of ashrams that came up all over the country where political cadres got practical training in khadi work and work among the lower castes and tribal people. For example, there was the Vedchi Ashram in Bardoli taluqa, Gujarat, where Chimanlal Mehta, Jugatram Dave and Chimanlal Bhatt devoted their entire lives to the spread of education among the adivasis or kaliparaj; or the work done by Ravishankar Maharaj among the lower caste Baralyas of Kheda district.

In fact, Gandhian constructive work was multi-faceted in its content. It brought some much-needed relief to the poor, it promoted the process of the nation-in-the-making; and it made the urban-based and upper caste cadres familiar with the conditions of villages and lower castes. It provided Congress political workers or cadres continuous and effective work in the passive phases of the national movement, helped build their bonds with those sections of the masses who were hitherto untouched by politics, and developed their organizing capacity and self-reliance.

It filled the rural masses with a new hope and increased Congress influence among them. Without the uplift of the lower castes and Adivasis there could be no united struggle against colonialism. The boycott of foreign cloth was a stroke of genius, which demonstrated to rulers and the world the Indian people's determination to be free. National schools and colleges trained young men in an alternative, non-colonial ideological framework. A large number of young men and women who dropped out in 1920-21 went back to the officially recognized educational institutions but many often became whole time cadres of the movement.

As a whole, constructive work was a major channel for the recruitment of the soldiers of freedom and their political training — as also for the choosing and testing of their 'officers' and leaders. Constructive workers were to act as the steel frame of the nationalist movement in its active Satyagraha phase. It was, therefore, not accidental that khadi bhandar workers, students and teachers of national schools and colleges, and Gandhian ashrams' inmates served as the backbone of the civil disobedience movements both as organizers and as active Satyagrahis.

### Other Political Parties and Movements

The third decade of the twentieth century is a watershed in modern Indian history in more ways than one. While, on the one hand, this period marked the entry of Indian masses into the national movement, on the other hand, this period saw the basic crystallisation of the main political currents on the national scene.



These diverse political currents owed their origin partly to the coming on the scene of the Gandhian philosophy of Satyagraha based on truth and non-violence, as they embodied a positive or negative reaction to it. The international influence on Indian political thinkers during this phase was also more pronounced than before. The new forces to emerge during the 1920s included:

## Spread of Marxism and Socialist Ideas

These ideas inspired many socialist and communist groups to come into existence and resulted in the rise of a left wing within the Congress, represented by Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhas Bose. These young nationalists inspired by the Soviet Revolution and dissatisfied with Gandhian ideas and political programme, began advocating radical solutions for economic, political and social ills of the country.

These younger nationalists:

- i. Were critical both of Swarajists and No-changers,
- ii. Advocated a more consistent anti-imperialist line in the form of a slogan for purna swarajya (complete independence),
- iii. Were influenced by an awareness, though still vague, of international currents,
- iv. Stressed the need to combine nationalism and anti-imperialism with social justice and simultaneously raised the question of internal class oppression by capitalists and landlords.

Among the communist groups, the Communist Party of India (CPI) was formed in 1920 in Tashkent (now, the capital of Uzbekistan) by M.N. Roy, Abani Mukherji and others after the second Congress of Comintern. M.N. Roy was also the first to be elected to the leadership of Comintern.

In 1924, many communists—S.A. Dange, Muzaffar Ahmed, Shaikat Usmani, Nalini Gupta—were jailed in the **Kanpur Bolshevik conspiracy case**. In 1925, the Indian Communist Conference at Kanpur formalised the foundation of the CPI. In 1929, the Government crackdown on communists resulted in the arrest and trial of 31 leading communists, trade unionists and left-wing leaders who were tried at Meerut in the famous **Meerut conspiracy case**. Workers' and peasants' parties were organised all over the country and they propagated Marxist and communist ideas. All these communist groups and workers' and peasants' parties remained an integral part of the national movement and worked within the Congress.

## Activism of Indian Youth

All over, students' leagues were being established and students' conferences were being held. In 1928, Jawaharlal Nehru presided over the All Bengal Students' Conference.

## Peasants' Agitations

In the United Provinces these agitations were for revision of tenancy laws including lower rents, protection against eviction and relief from indebtedness. Similar peasant agitations took place in the Rampa region of Andhra, in Rajasthan, in ryotwari areas of Bombay and Madras. In Gujarat, the Bardoli Satyagraha was led by Patel (1928).

## Growth of Trade Unionism

The trade union movement was led by All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) founded in 1920. Lala Lajpat Rai was its first president and Dewan Chaman Lai its general secretary. Tilak was also one of the moving spirits.

The major strikes during the 1920s included those in Kharagpur Railway Workshops, Tata Iron and Steel Works (Jamshedpur), Bombay Textile Mills (this involved 1,50,000 workers and went on for 5 months), and Buckingham Carnatic Mills. In 1928, there were a number of strikes involving 5 lakh workers. In 1923, the first May Day was celebrated in India in Madras.

## Caste Movements

As in earlier periods, the varied contradictions of the Indian society found expression in caste associations and movements. These movements could be divisive, conservative and at times potentially radical, and included:

1. Justice Party (Madras)
2. Self-respect movement (1925) under "Periyar"—E.V. Ramaswamy Naicker (Madras)
3. Satyashodhak activists in Satara (Maharashtra)
4. Bhaskar Rao Jadhav (Maharashtra)
5. Mahars under Ambedkar (Maharashtra)
6. Radical Ezhavas under K. Aiyappan and C. Kesavan in Kerala
7. Yadavs in Bihar for improvement in social status
8. Unionist Party under Fazl-i-Hussain (Punjab).

## Revolutionary Terrorism with a turn towards Socialism

This line was adopted by those dissatisfied with the nationalist strategy of the political struggle with its emphasis on non-violence. In this also, two strands developed:

- a) Hindustan Republican Association (H.R.A.)—in Punjab- UP-Bihar
- b) Yugantar, Anushilan groups and later Chittagong Revolt Group under Surya Sen-in Bengal

## State's Peoples' Conference Movements (Praja Mandal Movements in Princely States)

The national movement in princely states started after 1920 after the non-cooperation movement which had taken place in the British provinces only. Under the national movement, the subjects of the princely states established people's organisation. The people's organisation started by the people of princely states for the national movement were, called 'Praja Mandals' or 'Praja Parishads'. The national movements in the princely states were also called Praja Mandal movements. The State's People's Conference brought together representatives from hundreds of Indian princely states including Baroda, Bhopal, Travancore and Hyderabad. It was established to encourage political dialogue between the princely class of India, and the British Raj, upon the issues of governance, political stability and future of India.



## Nature of the Praja Mandal Movements

The Praja Mandal movements were oriented against the Feudalism and colonialism. The people of Praja Mandal movement fought against their feudal princes and the British administration simultaneously for their rights. The main demand of the Praja Mandal movements was the democratic rights.

## Activities of Praja Mandal Movements

1. The people of the Praja Mandal Movements implemented the constructive programmes of the Indian National Movement in their princely states.
2. They established schools, used khadi, encouraged cottage industries and started agitation against the Untouchability.

## The National Movement Associations in Princely States

### The Hitvardhak Sabha

The Hitvardhak Sabha was founded in Poona in May 1921. The aim of this association was to solve the problems of the people of southern princely states.

### Akhil Bhore Sansthan Praja Sabha

Wamanrao Patwardhan founded Akhil Bhore Sansthan Praja Sabha in Bhore region in November 1921. The aim of this Sabha was to fight for the problems related to people of Bhore region.

### All India Association of the People's Council

In the Bombay session of All India Association of the People's Council in 1927, the princely states national movement was made a national level movement. The Bombay session of the Council demanded the responsible government and rights of citizenship for the people of Princely States.

The Madras Session of Congress also adopted the demands of Bombay session of All India Association of People's Council. In the Karachi Session of the Council in 1936, the Council rejected the clause of the 1935 Act wherein the nomination of Princes of the Princely states to the Imperial Legislature was allowed. The Karachi Session of the Council demanded that the right of election of representative should rest with the subjects of the princely states. The Council and other people's movement also struggled for the farmers loans, taxes etc. in the princely states.

### Role of congress in Praja mandal movement

The policy and programme of the congress party contributed to Praja Mandal Movement. The Gandhian Movement of Non Cooperation, civil disobedience, role of Congress in the organization of All India States People's Conference and declaration of objectives to be involved in States People's Movement in the Tripuri Congress session provided the morale booster to



Praja Mandal Movemnt. The Indian National Congress joined hands with the People's Council and made it a part of national movement.

They worked with the aim of ending the British rule in India and integrating the princely states with India.

In Orissa the Congress leaders became instrumental in organization of State People's Conference in 1937 to enquire into the condition of the states, which was reconstituted in 1938 with H.K. Mahatab, Member of the congress working committee as its chairman. The installation of popular congress ministry in Orissa in July, 1937 inspired the people of feudatory states to carry on their crusade against the despotic rulers. **The congress leaders because of legal injunction could not participate in the movement of the States openly but they extended great moral support and much valuable indirect help to the movement.**

The prime-minister of Odhisa province for 1937-39, Biswanath Das issued an appeal to the rulers of the States in November 1938 and urged upon them to accept the legitimate demands of the people and thus to restore peace and tranquillity in their domain. Congress ministry in Orissa released few rebels of the State who were in provincial jail of Cuttack. The plight of the people of feudatory states reflected in the enquiry report of Orissa State Committee, which was presented to Lord Linlithgow, the Viceroy who came to Orissa in the first week of August, 1939. The Viceroy discussed the matter with the congress ministry. Thus the congress party actively co-operated the Praja Mandal agitation of Orissa states and gained popular esteem.

### Importance of Praja Mandal movements

The Praja Mandal Movement nakedly exposed the character of feudal polity and prepared the ground for integration of princely states. Thus the people's movement in the princely states was the reflection of inner desire of the people to merge into the main stream of the nation's political, social, economic and cultural life. As a result of the merging of the People's movement with the national movement, the princely states integrated with the independent India after 1947.

### Simon Commission and Anti Simon Commission Agitation

#### Why constituted before declared time?

From the latter part of 1927 the curve of the mass anti-imperialist upsurge began to take a marked upward turn. As it was the British Government that provided a catalyst and a rallying ground by an announcement on 8 November 1927 of an all-White commission to recommend whether India was ready for further constitutional progress and on which lines.

Indian nationalists had for many years declared the constitutional reforms of 1919 as inadequate and had been clamoring for an early reconsideration of the constitutional question, but the Government had been adamant that the declared period of ten years must lapse before fresh proposals were considered.

In 1927, however, the Conservative Government of Britain, faced with the prospect of electoral & feat at the hands of the Labour Party, suddenly decided that it could not leave an issue which

concerned the future of the British Empire in the irresponsible hands of an inexperienced Labour Government and it was thus that the Indian Statutory Commission, popularly known as the Simon Commission after its Chairman, was appointed. Lord Birkenhead, the Conservative Secretary of State was responsible for the appointment of the Simon Commission.

## Indian Response

The response in India was immediate and unanimous. **That no Indian should be thought fit to serve on a body that claimed the right to decide the political future of India was an insult that no Indian of even the most moderate political opinion was willing to swallow.** The call for a boycott of the Commission was endorsed by the Liberal Federation led by Tej Bahadur Sapru, by the Indian Industrial and Commercial Congress, and by the Hindu Mahasabha. The Muslim League even split on the issue, Mohammed Ali Jinnah carrying the majority with him in favour of boycott.

It was the Indian National Congress, however, that turned the boycott into a popular movement. The Congress had resolved on the boycott at its annual session in December 1927 at Madras, and in the prevailing excitable atmosphere, Jawaharlal Nehru had even succeeded in getting passed a snap resolution declaring complete independence as the goal of the Congress.

But protest could not be confined to the passing of resolutions, as Gandhiji made clear in the issue of Young India - 'It is said that the Independence Resolution is a fitting answer. The act of appointment (of the Simon Commission) needs for an answer, not speeches, however heroic they may be, not declarations, however brave they may be, but corresponding action . . .'

## Agitation

The action began as soon as Simon and his friends landed at Bombay on 3 February 1928. That day, all the major cities and towns observed a complete hartal, and people were out on the streets participating in mass rallies, processions and black-flag demonstrations. Everywhere that Simon went — Calcutta, Lahore, Lucknow, Vijayawada, Poona — he was greeted by a sea of black-flags carried by thousands of people. And ever new ways of defiance were being constantly invented.

The youth of Poona, for example, took advantage of the fact that for a long stretch between Lonavala and Poona the road and the rail-track ran within sight of each other. They climbed into a lorry and drove alongside the train that was carrying Simon and Company, waving black flags at them all the way from Lonavala to Poona. In Lucknow, Khaliquzzaman executed the brilliant idea of floating kites and balloons imprinted with the popular slogan 'Go Back Simon' over the reception organized in Kaiserbagh by the taluqdars for members of the Commission.

If humour and creativity was much in evidence, so too was popular anger at the manner in which the police dealt with the protesters. Lathi charges were becoming all too frequent, and

ow, Jawaharlal and respected and senior leaders were not spared the blows

Govind Ballabh Pant were beaten up by the police. But the worst incident happened in Lahore where Lala Lajpat Rai, the hero of the Extremist days and the most revered leader of Punjab, was hit on the chest by lathis on 30 October and succumbed to the injuries on 17 November



1928. It was his death that Bhagat Singh and his comrades were seeking to avenge when they killed the white police official, Saunders, in December 1928.

### Effect of Simon Agitation

The Simon boycott movement provided the first taste of political action to a new generation of youth. They were the ones who played the most active role in this protest, and it was they who gave the movement its militant flavour. And although a youth movement had already begun to take shape by 1927, it was participation in the Simon agitation that gave a real fillip to the formation of youth leagues and associations all over the country.

Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhas Bose emerged as the leaders of this new wave of youth and students and they travelled from one province to another addressing and presiding over innumerable youth conferences. The upsurge among the youth also proved a fruitful ground for the germination and spread of the new radical ideas of socialism that had begun to reach Indian shores. Jawaharlal Nehru had returned from Europe in 1927 after representing the Indian National Congress at the Brussels Congress of the League against Imperialism. He also visited the Soviet Union and was deeply impressed by socialist ideas. It was with the youth that he first shared his evolving perspective.

Although Jawaharlal Nehru's was undoubtedly the most important role, other groups and individuals too played a crucial part in the popularization of the socialist vision. Subhas Chandra Bose was one such individual, though his notion of socialism was nowhere as scientific and clear as Jawaharlal's. Among groups, the more important ones were the Naujawan Bharat Sabha in Lahore, and the small group of Communists who had formed the Workers' and Peasants' Parties with the specific aim of organizing workers and peasants and radicalizing the Congress from within. As a result, the young people who were being drawn into the anti-imperialist movement were also simultaneously becoming sympathetic to the ideas of socialism, and youth groups in some areas even developed links with workers' and peasants' struggles.