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## **Congress, Gandhi, and Civil Disobedience Movement**

### **Abstract**

Civil dissilience Movement was one of the important political developments of the sub-continent of 1930s era. It was directly or indirectly associated with all the stake holders of India. The present study is a humble attempt to put some light on the nature of this movement, the reaction of the British Raj and role of the Gandhi in it. Moreover, it tries to give answers of the questions that what was the role Gandhi and Congress in launching and making it a successful movement? How did the British Raj respond to this Movement? This paper is divided into four parts. The first part deals with the politics of Indian National Congress and British Raj during 1920s-30s. The second part indicates the position and role of Gandhi in this Movement and third part explains the nature of the movement. Finally, the last part highlights the reaction of this Movement and impacts of this movement on the politics of the Sub-continent. As far as, the methodology is concerned, the present study applies descriptive-analytical method.

**Keywords:** Indian National Congress, Civil Dis obedience, British Raj.

### **Introduction**

Civil disobedience movement was launched in 1930, under the dynamic leadership of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, who was the most popular leader among the common masses in the Subcontinent. It began on 12 March 1930, from the Sabramati ashram at Ahmadabad, Gandhi with few people kicked off his journey towards Dandi a village on the west coast of the India.<sup>1</sup> They travelled for 25 days and covered a distance of 385 km. They finally reached Dandi on 6 April 1930. After reaching there Gandhi protested against tyrant policies of Colonial Masters like salt law etc. The movement prolonged for four years from 1930 to 1934. It can be divided into two phases as it was started enthusiastically in 1930 and halted by Gandhi-Irwin talks and was re launched in 1932 after the Second Round Table conference.<sup>2</sup> The movement was started at the crucial time when the global economic depression hit British along with other European countries. It affected

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Indian markets as well. Indians boycotted British clothes and liquor. This movement was particularly dominated by the congress and many Hindus participated enthusiastically in it. Anne Basant started in Bengal and Bacha Kahn led this movement in N.W.F.P. In this way movement got support from all over subcontinent.<sup>3</sup> As far as the success of this movement is concerned, it remained unsuccessful in terms of the primary goals are concerned. However, it was remained successful in long run, as it spread awareness among Indians for the mass mobilization in the freedom movement. However, there were some negative impacts of this movement as well. It brought Indians on the suspicious grand in front of their Colonial Masters. This movement also compelled the bruisers to initiate the process of institutionalization in India. Hence, it is proved that this movement was remained successful in building pressure on the British in order to recognize congress as a political party of Indians.<sup>4</sup> However, this paper will try to explain the role of Gandhi and congress in this movement.

### **Historical background:**

The basic purpose of this movement was to refuse to obey certain laws or governmental demands for the purpose of influencing legislation or government policy characterized by the employment of such nonviolent, techniques as boycotting, picketing and non-payment of taxes.<sup>5</sup> The Indians adopted this method and launched a historical movement under the dynamic leadership of Gandhi in 1930. Initially, it was on small scale but later on it spread in the whole India and thousands of the people participated in it. This movement was more disciplined in nature as compare to the other movements of Gandhi and was based on the principles of Satiagraha. His Satiagraha was partially influenced by Shelly's articles on non-violence.<sup>6</sup>

### **Politics of the British at the time of this movement**

The attitude of British during early era of nineteen twenties was different. The British had dominancy over all the affairs of subcontinent. They were not giving any response to the Indian National Congress. Even they were not ready to accept it as a political party of local Indians. The glaring example before us was Simon Commission in 1927.<sup>7</sup> The British decided to send this commission according to the act of 1919 and this commission would be made an order to evaluate the changes that were necessary. But when this commission was sent not all the members of the commission were British. Interestingly, the purpose of this movement to solve the problems of local Indians and no single Indian was made member of this commission.<sup>8</sup> This act depicted their mind and thinking. Therefore, Indian National Congress and Gandhi aimed to boycott this commission.

### **Politics of Indian National Congress at the time of this Movement**

The political environment of subcontinent was rapidly changing in the early nineteen twenties. Few of the young and energetic politicians like Jawaharlal Nehru, Subhash Chandra Bose, Azad etc. They played their role in the policies of congress. The communal riots were rising between the Muslims and the Hindus after the Khilafat Movement. It was the time when local Indians were confronting numerous problems in the field of politics.<sup>9</sup> Congress worked very to get

recognition as a political party in subcontinent. It was the period when Gandhi dominated Congress.

### **Position of Gandhi in this the Civil Disobedience Movement**

Gandhi had emerged as the leader of the both communities during the Khilafat Movement. He moved away from politics after the failure of non-cooperation movement in 1924. When Gandhi released from jail, he moved to his ashram. He started social work and rendered services for the welfare of common people. He formulated all India Khadi Association and focused in the rural uplift in India.<sup>10</sup> He was of the view that it is important to make themselves self-sufficient. So, he focused in making hand woven clothes. During this period, he was bitterly criticized by few of the congress leaders due to his passive attitude towards Baghat Singa's assassination. Interestingly, he was not participating in active politics in this period. Despite of this fact when congress decided to launch the civil disobedience movement they offered him for leading this movement. He accepted this offer and led this movement in 1930<sup>11</sup>.

### **Reasons of the civil disobedience Movement**

The political environment during this movement was very critical. The attitude of British towards the local Indians was very harsh. They were not ready to empower local Indians. Even they were not accepting the existence of Indian National Congress, as a political party and representative of local Indians. In those critical circumstances, there were many political and social developments which contributed directly or indirectly for launching this movement.<sup>12</sup> Following are the few important events which seem to be main factor behind this historical movement.

1. In the period of viceroy lord Irvin, British government called a conference of representative of the country in order to find an ultimate solution of the problems of sub-continent. Later on, they formed a commission under the supervision of Simon in 1928. This commission was known as Simon commission.<sup>13</sup> A very interesting fact is that this commission was formulated by British in order to decide the future of the local people of sub-continent but no single local Indian was invited or selected in this commission. It was a joke on the part of Colonial Masters. They were trying to set a formula to rule sub-continent without consulting local people. In this way such a non-serious and biased attitude of British hurt Gandhi generally and Indian National Congress particularly. At that time the congress leaders decided to change their policies. Hence, it is clear that it was also one of the cause of this movement.<sup>14</sup>

2- Another important political development took place in England which had lot of repercussions on subcontinent. In 1929 elections held in England and liberal party attained the majority. After acquiring majority, they promised India to give honor with issuing her membership of the common wealth. But leader of the opposition Churchill severely criticized the labor party on this act and labeled it as a crime. Consequently, labour party which formed government in England called back this declaration. This move was also very much disappointed the congress and Gandhi.<sup>15</sup>

3- In the response of this Simon commission report, Jawaharlal Nehru presented his own report which is known as Nehru report. The British government did not accept Nehru report and clearly rejected.<sup>16</sup>

4- On January 26, 1930, Indian National Congress called a session in Lahore which was presided by Nehru. In this session Gandhi gave some ultimatums to Colonial Masters. They did not respond to these ultimatums of Gandhi in reaction Indian National Congress decided to attain independence from foreign rule. It was decided in Lahore session of congress which proved to be a significant in the history of the congress. It was also declared on this occasion that freedom is our birth right. If any foreigner snatches it, we will oppose him forcibly. After this session not only all the supporters of Indian National Congress but also those who had reservations got together and decided to raise their voice against tyrant foreign rule.<sup>17</sup>

These were the few important political developments which were directly or indirectly contributed for launching this historical movement in the history of sub-continent.

### **Nature of the civil disobedience movement**

Civil disobedience movement was similar to the non-cooperation movement. It was slightly different in nature from non-cooperation movement. The difference was that people would not pay any tax to the British Raj and they would not accept their any act or law which they feel is going against their conscience. People from many areas participated in this movement<sup>18</sup>. The core theme was to build pressure on Colonial Masters. However, people in this movement started burning foreign cloths and started opposing anti India laws like salt law etc. This movement reached every nook and corner of the subcontinent. Not only men but women also took part in this movement although they faced lot of difficulties and problems but didn't get annoyed and faced all tough situation patiently and never turn violent. Moreover, there were very harsh conditions set by congress for the participants for this movement like all participants had to adopt complete severance of the Indian National Congress through peaceful means.<sup>19</sup> Another condition was that everyone should be ready to go for jail or bear any other such sort of problem. Besides it, it was also one of the conditions that Indian National Congress would not be responsible for any loss of participants and would not provide any financial or economic assistance. Everyone will have to follow the instructions and orders of their respective leader.<sup>20</sup> Interestingly, these conditions were very difficult to meet but despite of this fact people were ready to support and participate in this historical movement. It was all about the nature of the civil disobedience movement.

### **Reaction of the British raj on this movement**

Initially they took this movement very lightly. They thought that Gandhi could not do anything through this non-violent movement. As soon as, this movement got popularity and many people took it seriously and started showing their complete confidence in Gandhi.<sup>21</sup> The British Raj realized the importance of this movement and changed their policies. They treated Gandhi and participants of this movement harshly. They put Gandhi and many other supporters of this movement behind the

bar. They even issued orders of *lathi* charge on Satiagrahis. The strength and popularity of the movement perturbed them a lot.<sup>22</sup> These all steps which were taken by the British Raj could not subdue the spirit of the revolutionaries and their all efforts went in vain.

One of the Indian writer has written that land was covered with the bodies of the people who were mourning under the strokes of the sticks. However, the Satiagrahis did not care of these all atrocities of the Colonial Masters and participated in this movement enthusiastically.<sup>23</sup>

### **Political Importance**

As for as the political importance of this movement is concerned it was very important and had a great influence over history of Indian National Congress. It proved beneficial in bringing about a change in the attitude of British Raj<sup>24</sup>. Besides it, this movement showed a new path of struggle forgetting rights. Furthermore, many important events also took place like round table conference etc due to this historical movement. Many believe that Round Table Conferences were the result of Simon commission but this was not the case. Lord Irwin remarked about this movement, “the movement which is started by Gandhi among the Hindus is a source of worries among the observers. We failed to suppress this movement. In case if British government did not summon a round table conference on my request, I will resign.”<sup>25</sup> However, one can understand the importance of this movement from the above statement of the lord Irwin.

### **Result of the civil disobedience Movement**

This movement was a historical and important one in nature. Inspire of these all oppressive policy of British Raj. This movement had some positive results for Indian National Congress.

#### **1. Change in British attitude**

Before this movement Colonial Masters were not considering Indian National Congress as a political party and representative of local Indians. After this movement they accepted it as a political party and started giving response to her. They invited local Indians for talks in round table conference.<sup>26</sup>

#### **2. Gandhi Irwin pact**

After this movement Colonial Masters started giving response in this regard Gandhi Irwin pact was signed between them. According to terms of this pact it was declared that British government would withdrew all political prisoners. In response congress assured of the suspension of civil disobedience movement and take part second round table conference.<sup>27</sup>

#### **3. Round table conferences**

Round table conferences were also one of the important outcome of this movement. Though these conferences could not bring positive change in the politics of the sub-continent. But at least colonial masters invited local Indians for the solution of the problems of sub-continent. These were the results of civil disobedience movement<sup>28</sup>.

## Conclusion

To conclude, civil disobedience movement was one of the most important movement in the history of the Indian National Congress. Gandhi had laid many other movements before this movement but this movement was much more disciplined and according his philosophy of non-violence and Satiyagraha. Furthermore, this movement changed the attitude of the British's and compelled them to accept as a political party and representative of the local Indians. After this movement the colonial masters started talking with local Indians for the solutions of the problems on equal footings. However due to these features this movement had great significance in the history of International Congress.

## Notes & References

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<sup>8</sup> Wolpert, *Gandhi's Passion*, 121.

<sup>9</sup> Payne, *Mahatma Gandhi*, 381.

<sup>10</sup> Wolpert, *Gandhi's Passion*, 128.

<sup>11</sup> Parel, *Gandhi*, 57.

<sup>12</sup> Brown, *Gandhi and the Civil Disobedience*, 34.

<sup>13</sup> Wolpert, *Gandhi's Passion*, 130.

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>17</sup> Wolpert, *Gandhi's Passion*, 132.

<sup>18</sup> Majumdar, *Jinnah and Gandhi*, 120.

<sup>19</sup> Wolpert, *Gandhi's Passion*, 133.

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<sup>23</sup> Payne, *Mahatma Gandhi*, 383.

<sup>24</sup> Brown, *Gandhi and the Civil Disobedience*, 101.

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