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## Emergence of Gandhi

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Towards the end of the First World War, various forces were at work in India and on the international scene. After the end of the war, there was a resurgence of nationalist activity in India and in many other colonies in Asia and Africa. The Indian struggle against imperialism took a decisive turn towards a broad-based popular struggle with the emergence of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi on the Indian political scene.

### Why Nationalist Resurgence Now

After the war, the conditions in India and influences from abroad created a situation that was ready for a national upsurge against foreign rule.

#### ■ Post-War Economic Hardships

India contributed in men and money towards the British war efforts. Thousands of Indian men died in the war on various fronts. The food supplies and ammunition and the army's keep came from the money raised by taxing Indians. When the war ended, all sections of the Indian population were experiencing hardships on various fronts.

**Industry** First, an increase in prices, then a recession coupled with increased foreign investment brought many industries to the brink of closure and loss. They now demanded protection against imports besides government aid.

**Workers and Artisans** This section of the populace faced unemployment and bore the brunt of high prices.

**Peasantry** Faced with high taxation and poverty, the peasants waited for a lead to protest.

**Soldiers** Soldiers who returned from battlefields abroad gave an idea of their experience to the rural folk. They were also surprised to return to a country that was impoverished and had less liberty than before.

**Educated Urban Classes** This section was facing unemployment as well as suffering from an acute awareness of racism in the attitude of the British.

### ■ **Expectations of Political Gains for Cooperation in the War**

The contribution of Indians to the British war effort was huge, though it has gone unacknowledged. Gandhi and most nationalists extended cooperation to the war effort and a huge number of Indian troops sacrificed their lives on the war fronts. So, after the war, there were high expectations of political gains from the British government and this too contributed towards the charged atmosphere in the country.

### ■ **Nationalist Disillusionment with Imperialism Worldwide**

The Allied powers, to rally the colonies to their side during the war, had promised them an era of democracy and self-determination after the war. During the war, both sides to the war had launched vicious propaganda to malign each other and expose each other's uncivilised colonial record. But soon it became clear from the Paris Peace Conference and other peace treaties that the imperialist powers had no intention of loosening their hold over the colonies; in fact they went on to divide the colonies of the vanquished powers among themselves. All this served to further erode the myth of the cultural and military superiority of the whites. As a result, the post-war period saw a resurgence of militant nationalist

activity throughout Asia and Africa—in Turkey, Egypt, Ireland, Iran, Afghanistan, Burma, Malaya, the Philippines, Indonesia, Indo-China, China and Korea.

### ■ **Impact of Russian Revolution (November 7, 1917)**

The Bolshevik Party of workers overthrew the Czarist regime and founded the first socialist state, the Soviet Union, under the leadership of Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov or Lenin. The Soviet Union unilaterally renounced the Czarist imperialist rights in China and the rest of Asia, gave rights of self-determination to former Czarist colonies in Asia and gave equal status to the Asian nationalities within its borders.

The October Revolution brought home the message that immense power lay with the people, and that the masses were capable of challenging the mightiest of tyrants provided they were organised, united and determined.

### **Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms and Government of India Act, 1919**

The British government, not prepared to part with or even share its power with the Indians, once again resorted to the policy of 'carrot and stick'. The carrot was represented by the insubstantial Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms, while measures such as the Rowlatt Act represented the stick.

In line with the government policy contained in Montagu's statement of August 1917, the government announced further constitutional reforms in July 1918, known as Montagu-Chelmsford or Montford Reforms. Based on these, the **Government of India Act, 1919** was enacted.

#### ■ **Main Features**

The main features of the Montford Reforms were as follows.

#### ● **Provincial Government—Introduction of Dyarchy**

The Act introduced dyarchy for the executive at the level of the provincial government.

**Executive** (i) Dyarchy, i.e., rule of two—executive councillors and popular ministers—was introduced. The governor was to be the executive head in the province.

(ii) Subjects were divided into two lists: ‘reserved’ which included subjects such as law and order, finance, land revenue, irrigation, etc., and ‘transferred’ subjects such as education, health, local government, industry, agriculture, excise, etc. The reserved subjects were to be administered by the governor through his executive council of bureaucrats, and the transferred subjects were to be administered by ministers nominated from among the elected members of the legislative council.

(iii) The ministers were to be responsible to the legislature and had to resign if a no-confidence motion was passed against them by the legislature, while the executive councillors were not to be responsible to the legislature.

(iv) In case of failure of constitutional machinery in the province the governor could take over the administration of transferred subjects also.

(v) The secretary of state for India and the governor-general could interfere in respect of reserved subjects while in respect of the transferred subjects, the scope for their interference was restricted.

**Legislature** (i) Provincial legislative councils were further expanded and 70 per cent of the members were to be elected.

(ii) The system of communal and class electorates was further consolidated.

(iii) Women were also given the right to vote.

(iv) The legislative councils could initiate legislation but the governor’s assent was required. The governor could veto bills and issue ordinances.

(v) The legislative councils could reject the budget but the governor could restore it, if necessary.

(vi) The legislators enjoyed freedom of speech.

● **Central Government—Still Without Responsible Government**

No responsible government was envisaged in the Act for the government at the all-India level. The main points were:

**Executive** (i) The governor-general was to be the chief executive authority.

(ii) There were to be two lists for administration—central and provincial.

(iii) In the viceroy's executive council of eight, three were to be Indians.

(iv) The governor-general retained full control over the reserved subjects in the provinces.

(v) The governor-general could restore cuts in grants, certify bills rejected by the central legislature and issue ordinances.

**Legislature** (i) A bicameral arrangement was introduced. The lower house or Central Legislative Assembly would consist of 145 members (41 nominated and 104 elected—52 General, 30 Muslims, 2 Sikhs, 20 Special) and the upper house or Council of State would have 60 members, of which 26 were to be nominated and 34 elected—20 General, 10 Muslims, 3 Europeans and 1 Sikh (as per the figures given by Subhash Kashyap).

(ii) The Council of State had a tenure of 5 years and had only male members, while the Central Legislative Assembly had a tenure of 3 years.

(iii) The legislators could ask questions and supplementaries, pass adjournment motions and vote a part of the budget, but 75 per cent of the budget was still not votable.

Some Indians found their way into important committees including finance.

● On the home government (in Britain) front, the Government of India Act, 1919 made an important change—the Secretary of State for India was henceforth to be paid out of the British exchequer.

### ■ Drawbacks

The reforms had many drawbacks—

(i) Franchise was very limited. The electorate was extended to some one-and-a-half million for the central legislature, while the population of India was around 260 million, as per one estimate.

(ii) At the centre, the legislature had no control over the viceroy and his executive council.

(iii) Division of subjects was not satisfactory at the centre.

(iv) Allocation of seats for central legislature to the provinces was based on ‘importance’ of provinces—for instance, Punjab’s military importance and Bombay’s commercial importance.

(v) At the level of provinces, division of subjects and parallel administration of two parts was irrational and, hence, unworkable. Subjects like irrigation, finance, police, press and justice were ‘reserved’.

(vi) The provincial ministers had no control over finances and over the bureaucrats; this would lead to constant friction between the two. Ministers were often not consulted on important matters too; in fact, they could be overruled by the governor on any matter that the latter considered special.

### ■ Congress’s Reaction

The Congress met in a special session in August 1918 at Bombay under Hasan Imam’s presidency and declared the reforms to be “disappointing” and “unsatisfactory” and demanded effective self-government instead.

The Montford reforms were termed “unworthy and disappointing—a sunless dawn” by Tilak, even as Annie Besant found them “unworthy of England to offer and India to accept”.

### Views

When the Cabinet used the expression 'ultimate self-government' they probably contemplated an intervening period of 500 years.

—Lord Curzon

The Government of India Act, 1919 forged fresh fetters for the people.

—Subhash Chandra Bose

The Montford Reforms...were only a method of further draining India of her wealth and of prolonging her servitude.

—M.K. Gandhi

The dyarchy of the double executive was open to almost every theoretical objection that the armoury of political philosophy can supply.

—P.E. Roberts

Never in the history of the world was such a hoax perpetrated upon a great people as England perpetrated upon India, when in return for India's invaluable service during the War, we gave to the Indian nation such a discreditable, disgraceful, undemocratic, tyrannical constitution.

—Dr. Rutherford, British Member of Parliament

Devolution was intended to tie in a larger element of society to the status quo. But giving powers to local communities meant that energies which could have been applied against the imperial power were dissipated into communal rivalry. Division always worked for Britain's benefit ..... In Montford despotism proclaimed its benevolence.

—Walter Reid, *Keeping the Jewel in the Crown*

## Making of Gandhi

### ■ Early Career and Experiments with Truth in South Africa

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was born on October 2, 1869 in Porbandar in the princely state of Kathiawar in Gujarat. His father was a *diwan* (minister) of the state. Having studied law in England, Gandhi, in 1898, went to South Africa in connection with a case involving his client, Dada Abdullah. In South Africa he witnessed the ugly face of white racism and the humiliation and contempt to which Asians, who had

gone to South Africa as labourers, were subjected. He decided to stay in South Africa to organise the Indian workers to enable them to fight for their rights. He stayed there till 1914 after which he returned to India.

The Indians in South Africa consisted of three categories—one, the indentured Indian labour, mainly from south India, who had migrated to South Africa after 1890 to work on sugar plantations; two, the merchants—mostly Meman Muslims who had followed the labourers; and three, the ex-indentured labourers who had settled down with their children in South Africa after the expiry of their contracts. These Indians were mostly illiterate and had little or no knowledge of English. They accepted racial discrimination as a part of their daily existence. These Indian immigrants had to suffer many disabilities. They were denied the right to vote. They could reside only in prescribed locations which were insanitary and congested. In some colonies, Asians and Africans could not stay out of doors after 9 PM nor could they use public footpaths.

#### **Moderate Phase of Struggle (1894-1906)**

During this phase, Gandhi relied on sending petitions and memorials to the authorities in South Africa and in Britain hoping that once the authorities were informed of the plight of Indians, they would take sincere steps to redress their grievances as the Indians were, after all, British subjects. To unite different sections of Indians, he set up the Natal Indian Congress and started a paper *Indian Opinion*.

#### **Phase of Passive Resistance or Satyagraha (1906-1914)**

The second phase, which began in 1906, was characterised by the use of the method of passive resistance or civil disobedience, which Gandhi named *satyagraha*.

##### **Satyagraha against Registration Certificates (1906)**

A new legislation in South Africa made it compulsory for

Indians there to carry at all times certificates of registration with their fingerprints. The Indians under Gandhi's leadership decided not to submit to this discriminatory measure. Gandhi formed the Passive Resistance Association to conduct the campaign of defying the law and suffering all the penalties resulting from such a defiance. Thus was born *satyagraha* or devotion to truth, the technique of resisting adversaries without violence. The government jailed Gandhi and others who refused to register themselves. Later, the authorities used deceit to make these defiant Indians register themselves. The Indians under the leadership of Gandhi retaliated by publicly burning their registration certificates. All this showed up the South African government in a bad light. In the end, there was a compromise settlement.

**Campaign against Restrictions on Indian Migration**

The earlier campaign was widened to include protest against a new legislation imposing restrictions on Indian migration. The Indians defied this law by crossing over from one province to another and by refusing to produce licences. Many of these Indians were jailed.

**Campaign against Poll Tax and Invalidation of Indian Marriages** A poll tax of three pounds was imposed on all ex-indentured Indians. The demand for the abolition of poll tax (which was too much for the poor ex-indentured Indians who earned less than ten shillings a month) widened the base of the campaign. Then a Supreme Court order which invalidated all marriages not conducted according to Christian rites and registered by the registrar of marriages drew the anger of the Indians and others who were not Christians. By implication, Hindu, Muslim and Parsi marriages were illegal and children born out of such marriages, illegitimate. The Indians treated this judgement as an insult to the honour of women and many women were drawn into the movement because of this indignity.

**Protest against Transvaal Immigration Act** The Indians protested the Transvaal Immigration Act, by illegally

### Tolstoy Farm

As it became rather difficult to sustain the high pitch of the struggle, Gandhi decided to devote all his attention to the struggle.

The Tolstoy Farm was founded in 1910 and named as such by Gandhi's associate, Herman Kallenbach, after the Russian writer and moralist, whom Gandhi admired and corresponded with. Besides being an experiment in education, it was to house the families of the *satyagrahis* and to give them a way to sustain themselves.

The Tolstoy Farm was the second of its kind established by Gandhi. He had set up the Phoenix Farm in 1904 in Natal, inspired by a reading of John Ruskin's *Unto This Last*, a critique of capitalism, and a work that extolled the virtues of the simple life of love, labour, and the dignity of human beings. As at the Phoenix settlement, at Tolstoy Farm too, manual work went hand-in-hand with instruction. Vocational training was introduced to give "all-round development to the boys and girls". Co-educational classes were held, and boys and girls were encouraged to work together. The activities included general labour, cooking, scavenging, sandal-making, simple carpentry and messenger work. Manual work such as sweeping, scavenging and fetching water was perceived to be invaluable to the psychological, social and moral well-being of an integrated community. Gandhi's objective in this context was to inculcate the ideals of social service and citizenship besides a healthy respect for manual work from the early formative years itself. The farm worked till 1913.

migrating from Natal into Transvaal. The government held these Indians in jails. Miners and plantation workers went on a lightning strike. In India, Gokhale toured the whole country mobilising public opinion in support of the Indians in South Africa. Even the viceroy, Lord Hardinge, condemned the repression and called for an impartial enquiry.

**Compromise Solution** Eventually, through a series of negotiations involving Gandhi, 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 solemnised according to Indian rites, and

**View**

“... a man who cares nothing for sensual pleasure, nothing for riches, nothing for comfort or praise, or promotion, but is simply determined to do what he believes to be right. He is a dangerous and uncomfortable enemy, because his body which you can always conquer gives you so little purchase upon his soul.”

—Gilbert Murray on Gandhi in the *Hibbert Journal*

promised to treat the issue of Indian immigration in a sympathetic manner.

■ **Gandhi's Experience in South Africa**

(i) Gandhi found that the masses had immense capacity to participate in and sacrifice for a cause that moved them.

(ii) He was able to unite Indians belonging to different religions and classes, and men and women alike under his leadership.

(iii) He also came to realise that at times the leaders have to take decisions unpopular with their enthusiastic supporters.

(iv) He was able to evolve his own style of leadership and politics and new techniques of struggle on a limited scale, untrammelled by the opposition of contending political currents.

■ **Gandhi's Technique of Satyagraha**

Gandhi evolved the technique of Satyagraha during his stay in South Africa. It was based on truth and non-violence. He combined some elements from Indian tradition with the Christian requirement of turning the other cheek and the philosophy of Tolstoy, who said that evil could best be countered by non-violent resistance. Its basic tenets were as follows:

- A satyagrahi was not to submit to what he considered as wrong, but was to always remain truthful, non-violent and fearless.

- A satyagrahi works on the principles of withdrawal of cooperation and boycott.

- Methods of satyagraha include non-payment of taxes, and declining honours and positions of authority.
- A satyagrahi should be ready to accept suffering in his struggle against the wrong-doer. This suffering was to be a part of his love for truth.
- Even while carrying out his struggle against the wrong-doer, a true satyagrahi would have no ill feeling for the wrong-doer; hatred would be alien to his nature.
- A true satyagrahi would never bow before the evil, whatever the consequence.
- Only the brave and strong could practise satyagraha; it was not for the weak and cowardly. Even violence was preferred to cowardice. Thought was never to be separated from practice. In other words, ends could not justify the means.

### **Gandhi in India**

Gandhi returned to India in January 1915. His efforts in South Africa were well known not only among the educated but also among the masses. He decided to tour the country the next one year and see for himself the condition of the masses. He also decided not to take any position on any political matter for at least one year. As for the political currents prevalent at that time in India, he was convinced about the limitations of moderate politics and was also not in favour of Home Rule agitation which was becoming popular at that time. He thought that it was not the best time to agitate for Home Rule when Britain was in the middle of a war. He was convinced that the only technique capable of meeting the nationalist aims was a non-violent satyagraha. He also said that he would join no political organisation unless it too accepted the creed of non-violent satyagraha.

During 1917 and 1918, Gandhi was involved in three struggles—in Champaran, Ahmedabad and Kheda—before he launched the Rowlatt Satyagraha.

### ■ **Champan Satyagraha (1917)—First Civil Disobedience**

Gandhi was requested by Rajkumar Shukla, a local man, to look into the problems of the farmers in context of indigo planters of Champaran in Bihar. The European planters had been forcing the peasants to grow indigo on 3/20 part of the total land (called *tinkathia* system). When towards the end of the nineteenth century German synthetic dyes replaced indigo, the European planters demanded high rents and illegal dues from the peasants in order to maximise their profits before the peasants could shift to other crops. Besides, the peasants were forced to sell the produce at prices fixed by the Europeans.

When Gandhi, joined now by Rajendra Prasad, Mazhar-ul-Haq, Mahadeo Desai, Narhari Parekh, and J.B. Kripalani, reached Champaran to probe into the matter, the authorities ordered him to leave the area at once. Gandhi defied the order and preferred to face the punishment. This passive resistance or civil disobedience of an unjust order was a novel method at that time. Finally, the authorities retreated and permitted Gandhi to make an enquiry. Now, the government appointed a committee to go into the matter and nominated Gandhi as a member. Gandhi was able to convince the authorities that the *tinkathia* system should be abolished and that the peasants should be compensated for the illegal dues extracted from them. As a compromise with the planters, he agreed that only 25 per cent of the money taken should be compensated.

Within a decade, the planters left the area. Gandhi had won the first battle of civil disobedience in India. Other popular leaders associated with Champaran Satyagraha were Brajkishore Prasad, Anugrah Narayan Sinha, Ramnavmi Prasad and Shambhusharan Varma.

### ■ Ahmedabad Mill Strike (1918)— First Hunger Strike

In March 1918, Gandhi intervened in a dispute between cotton mill owners of Ahmedabad and the workers over the issue of discontinuation of the plague bonus. The mill owners wanted to withdraw the bonus. The workers were demanding a rise of 50 per cent in their wages so that they could manage in the times of wartime inflation (which doubled the prices of food-grains, cloth, and other necessities) caused by Britain's involvement in World War I. The mill owners were ready to give only a 20 per cent wage hike. The workers went on strike.

The relations between the workers and the mill owners worsened with the striking workers being arbitrarily dismissed and the mill owners deciding to bring in weavers from Bombay. The workers of the mill turned to Anusuya Sarabhai for help in fighting for justice. Anusuya Sarabhai was a social worker who was also the sister of Ambalal Sarabhai, one of the mill owners and the president of the Ahmedabad Mill Owners Association (founded in 1891 to develop the textile industry in Ahmedabad), for help in fighting for justice. Anusuya Behn went to Gandhi, who was respected by the mill owners and workers, and asked him to intervene and help resolve the impasse between the workers and the employers. Though Gandhi was a friend of Ambalal, he took up the workers' cause. Anusuya too supported the workers and was one of the chief lieutenants of Gandhi's. (It was Anusuya Behn who went on later to form the Ahmedabad Textile Labour Association in 1920.) Gandhi asked the workers to go on a strike and demand a 35 per cent increase in wages instead of 50 per cent.

Gandhi advised the workers to remain non-violent while on strike. When negotiations with mill owners did not progress, he himself undertook a fast unto death (his first) to strengthen the workers' resolve. But the fast also had the effect of putting pressure on the mill owners who finally

agreed to submit the issue to a tribunal. The strike was withdrawn. In the end, the tribunal awarded the workers a 35 per cent wage hike.

### ■ **Kheda Satyagraha (1918)—First Non-Cooperation**

Because of drought in 1918, the crops failed in Kheda district of Gujarat. According to the Revenue Code, if the yield was less than one-fourth the normal produce, the farmers were entitled to remission. The Gujarat Sabha, consisting of the peasants, submitted petitions to the highest governing authorities of the province requesting that the revenue assessment for the year 1919 be suspended. The government, however, remained adamant and said that the property of the farmers would be seized if the taxes were not paid.

Gandhi asked the farmers not to pay the taxes. Gandhi, however, was mainly the spiritual head of the struggle. It was Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel and a group of other devoted Gandhians, namely, Narahari Parikh, Mohanlal Pandya and Ravi Shankar Vyas, who went around the villages, organised the villagers and told them what to do and gave the necessary political leadership. Patel along with his colleagues organised the tax revolt which the different ethnic and caste communities of Kheda supported.

The revolt was remarkable in that discipline and unity were maintained. Even when, on non-payment of taxes, the government seized the farmers' personal property, land and livelihood, a vast majority of Kheda's farmers did not desert Sardar Patel. Gujaratis in other parts who sympathised with the cause of the revolt helped by sheltering the relatives and property of the protesting peasants. Those Indians who sought to buy the confiscated lands were socially ostracised.

Ultimately, the government sought to bring about an agreement with the farmers. It agreed to suspend the tax for the year in question, and for the next; reduce the increase in rate; and return all the confiscated property.

The struggle at Kheda brought a new awakening among the peasantry. They became aware that they would not be free of injustice and exploitation unless and until their country achieved complete independence.

### ■ Gains from Champaran, Ahmedabad and Kheda

- Gandhi demonstrated to the people the efficacy of his technique of satyagraha.
- He found his feet among the masses and came to have a surer understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the masses.
- He acquired respect and commitment of many, especially the youth.

### Rowlatt Act, Satyagraha, Jallianwala Bagh Massacre

While, on the one hand, the government dangled the carrot of constitutional reforms (though of an unsatisfactory order), on the other hand, it decided to arm itself with extraordinary powers to suppress any discordant voice against the reforms.

### ■ The Rowlatt Act

Just six months before the Montford Reforms were to be put into effect, two bills were introduced in the Imperial Legislative Council. One of them was dropped, but the other—an extension to the Defence of India Regulations Act 1915—was passed in March 1919. It was what was officially called the Anarchical and Revolutionary Crimes Act, but popularly known as the Rowlatt Act. It was based on the recommendations made in the previous year to the Imperial Legislative Council by the Rowlatt Commission, headed by the British judge, Sir Sidney Rowlatt, to investigate the ‘seditious conspiracy’ of the Indian people. (The committee had recommended that activists should be deported or

imprisoned without trial for two years, and that even possession of seditious newspapers would be adequate evidence of guilt.) All the elected Indian members of the Imperial Legislative Council voted against the bill but they were in a minority and easily overruled by the official nominees. All the elected Indian members—who included Mohammed Ali Jinnah, Madan Mohan Malaviya and Mazhar Ul Haq – resigned in protest.

The act allowed political activists to be tried without juries or even imprisoned without trial. It allowed arrest of Indians without warrant on the mere suspicion of ‘treason’. Such suspects could be tried in secrecy without recourse to legal help. A special cell consisting of three high court judges was to try such suspects and there was no court of appeal above that panel. This panel could even accept evidence not acceptable under the Indian Evidences Act. The law of *habeas corpus*, the basis of civil liberty, was sought to be suspended. The object of the government was to replace the repressive provisions of the wartime Defence of India Act (1915) by a permanent law. So the wartime restrictions on freedom of speech and assembly were re-imposed in India. There was strict control over the press and the government was armed with a variety of powers to deal with anything the authorities chose to consider as terrorism or revolutionary tactics.

### ■ Satyagraha Against the Rowlatt Act— First Mass Strike

Just when the Indians expected a huge advance towards self-rule as a reward for their contribution to the war, they were given the Montford Reforms with its very limited scope and the shockingly repressive Rowlatt Act. Not surprisingly the Indians felt betrayed. More so Gandhi, who had been at the forefront in offering cooperation in the British war effort, and who had even offered to encourage recruitment of Indians into the British Indian forces. He called the Rowlatt Act the “Black Act” and argued that not everyone should get punishment in response to isolated political crimes.

Gandhi called for a mass protest at all India level. But soon, having seen the constitutional protest meet with ruthless repression, Gandhi organised a Satyagraha Sabha and roped in younger members of Home Rule Leagues and the Pan Islamists. The forms of protest finally chosen included observance of a nationwide *hartal* (strike) accompanied by fasting and prayer, and civil disobedience against specific laws, and courting arrest and imprisonment.

There was a radical change in the situation by now.

(i) The masses had found a direction; now they could 'act' instead of just giving verbal expression to their grievances.

(ii) From now onwards, peasants, artisans and the urban poor were to play an increasingly important part in the struggle.

(iii) Orientation of the national movement turned to the masses permanently. Gandhi said that salvation would come when masses were awakened and became active in politics.

Satyagraha was to be launched on April 6, 1919 but before it could be launched, there were large-scale violent, anti-British demonstrations in Calcutta, Bombay, Delhi, Ahmedabad, etc. Especially in Punjab, the situation became so very explosive due to wartime repression, forcible recruitments and ravages of disease, that the Army had to be called in. April 1919 saw the biggest and the most violent anti-British upsurge since 1857. The Lieutenant Governor of Punjab, Sir Michael O'Dwyer, is said to have used aircraft strafing against the violent protestors.

### ■ Jallianwala Bagh Massacre (April 13, 1919)

Amritsar was the worst affected by violence. In the beginning there was no violence by the protestors. Indians shut down their shops and normal trade and the empty streets showed the Indians' displeasure at the British betrayal. On April 9, two nationalist leaders, Saifuddin Kitchlew and Dr Satyapal, were arrested by the British officials without any provocation except that they had addressed protest meetings, and taken to some unknown destination. This caused resentment among

the Indian protestors who came out in thousands on April 10 to show their solidarity with their leaders. Soon the protests turned violent because the police resorted to firing in which some of the protestors were killed. Tension ran high. In the riot that followed, five Englishmen are reported to have been killed and Marcella Sherwood, an English woman missionary going on a bicycle, was beaten up.

Troops were sent immediately to quell the disturbances. Brigadier-General Reginald Dyer was the senior British officer with the responsibility to impose martial law and restore order. By then the city had returned to calm and the protests that were being held were peaceful. Dyer, however, issued a proclamation on April 13 (which was also *Baisakhi*) forbidding people from leaving the city without a pass and from organising demonstrations or processions, or assembling in groups of more than three.

On *Baisakhi* day, a large crowd of people mostly from neighbouring villages, unaware of the prohibitory orders in the city, gathered in the Jallianwala Bagh, a popular place for public events, to celebrate the *Baisakhi* festival. Local leaders had also called for a protest meeting at the venue. It is not clear how many in the 20,000 odd people collected there were political protestors, but the majority were those who had collected for the festival. Meanwhile, the meeting had gone on peacefully, and two resolutions, one calling for the repeal of the Rowlatt Act and the other condemning the firing on April 10, had been passed. It was then that Brigadier-General Dyer arrived on the scene with his men.

The troops surrounded the gathering under orders from General Dyer and blocked the only exit point and opened fire on the unarmed crowd. No warning was issued, no instruction to disperse was given. An unarmed gathering of men, women and children was fired upon as they tried to flee.

According to official British Indian sources, 379 were identified dead, and approximately 1,100 were wounded. The

**Views**

The enormity of the measures taken by the Government in the Punjab for quelling some local disturbances has, with a rude shock, revealed to our minds the helplessness of our position as British subjects in India ... [T]he very least that I can do for my country is to take all consequences upon myself in giving voice to the protest of the millions of my countrymen, surprised into a dumb anguish of terror. The time has come when badges of honour make our shame glaring in the incongruous context of humiliation...

—**Rabindranath Tagore** in a letter to the Viceroy

No government deserves respect which holds cheap the liberty of its subjects.

—**M.K. Gandhi** in *Young India*, after the Jallianwala Bagh massacre

Indian National Congress, on the other hand, estimated more than 1,500 were injured, and approximately 1,000 were killed. But it is precisely known that 1650 bullets were fired into the crowd. The incident was followed by uncivilised brutalities on the inhabitants of Amritsar. Martial law was proclaimed in the Punjab, and public floggings and other humiliations were perpetrated. To take just one instance, Indians were forced to crawl on their bellies down the road on which the English missionary had been assaulted.

The entire nation was stunned. Rabindranath Tagore renounced his knighthood in protest. Gandhi gave up the title of Kaiser-i-Hind, bestowed by the British for his work during the Boer War. Gandhi was overwhelmed by the atmosphere of total violence and withdrew the movement on April 18, 1919.

Seen in an objective way, Dyer ensured the beginning of the end of the British Raj.

What had happened in Amritsar made Gandhi declare that cooperation with a 'satanic regime' was now impossible. He realised that the cause of Indian independence from British rule was morally righteous. The way to the non-cooperation movement was ready.

According to the historian, A.P.J Taylor, the Jallianwala Bagh massacre was the “decisive moment when Indians were alienated from British rule”.

The events of 1919 were to shape Punjab’s politics of resistance. Bhagat Singh was just 11 at the time of the Jallianwala Bagh massacre. For Bhagat Singh’s Bharat Naujawan Sabha, the massacre was to act as a symbol that would help overcome the apathy that came in the wake of the end of the non-cooperation movement.

Udham Singh, who bore the name, Ram Mohammad Singh Azad, later assassinated Michael O’Dwyer, the Lieutenant-Governor who presided over the brutal British suppression of the 1919 protests in Punjab. Udham Singh was hanged in 1940 for his deed. (His ashes were returned to India in 1974.)

### **The Hunter Committee of Inquiry**

The massacre at Jallianwalla Bagh shocked Indians and many British as well. The Secretary of State for India, Edwin Montagu, ordered that a committee of inquiry be formed to investigate the matter. So, on October 14, 1919, the Government of India announced the formation of the **Disorders Inquiry Committee**, which came to be more widely and variously known as the **Hunter Committee/Commission** after the name of chairman, Lord William Hunter, former Solicitor-General for Scotland and Senator of the College of Justice in Scotland. The purpose of the commission was to “investigate the recent disturbances in Bombay, Delhi and Punjab, about their causes, and the measures taken to cope with them”.

There were three Indians among the members, namely, Sir Chimanlal Harilal Setalvad, Vice-Chancellor of Bombay University and advocate of the Bombay High Court; Pandit Jagat Narayan, lawyer and Member of the Legislative Council of the United Provinces; and Sardar Sahibzada Sultan Ahmad Khan, lawyer from Gwalior State.

After meeting in Delhi on October 29, the committee took statements from witnesses called in from Delhi, Ahmedabad, Bombay and Lahore. In November, the committee reached Lahore and examined the principal witnesses to the events in Amritsar. Dyer was called before the committee. He was confident that what he had done was only his duty. Dyer stated that his intentions had been to strike terror throughout the Punjab and in doing so, reduce the moral stature of the 'rebels'. Dyer is reported to have explained his sense of honour by saying, "I think it quite possible that I could have dispersed the crowd without firing but they would have come back again and laughed, and I would have made, what I consider, a fool of myself." He also stated that he did not make any effort to tend to the wounded after the shooting as he did not consider it his job.

Though Dyer's statement caused racial tensions among the members of the committee, the final report, released in March 1920, unanimously condemned Dyer's actions. The report stated that the lack of notice to disperse from the Bagh in the beginning was an error; the length of firing showed a grave error; Dyer's motive of producing a sufficient moral effect was to be condemned; Dyer had overstepped the bounds of his authority; there had been no conspiracy to overthrow British rule in the Punjab. The minority report of the Indian members further added that the proclamations banning public meetings were insufficiently publicised; there were innocent people in the crowd, and there had not been any violence in the Bagh beforehand; Dyer should have either ordered his troops to help the wounded or instructed the civil authorities to do so; Dyer's actions had been "inhuman and un-British" and had greatly injured the image of British rule in India.

The Hunter Committee did not impose any penal or disciplinary action because Dyer's actions were condoned by various superiors (later upheld by the Army Council).

Also, before the Hunter Committee began its

proceedings, the government had passed an Indemnity Act for the protection of its officers. The “white washing bill” as the Indemnity Act was called, was severely criticised by Motilal Nehru and others.

In England, it fell to the Secretary of State for War at the time, Winston Churchill, to review the report of the commission. In the House of Commons, Churchill (no lover of Indians) condemned what had happened at Amritsar. He called it “monstrous”. A former prime minister of Britain, H.H. Asquith called it “one of the worst outrages in the whole of our history”. The cabinet agreed with Churchill that Dyer was a dangerous man and could not be allowed to continue in his post. The decision that Dyer should be dismissed was conveyed to the Army Council. In the end, Dyer was found guilty of a mistaken notion of duty and relieved of his command in March 1920. He was recalled to England. No legal action was taken against him; he drew half pay and received his army pension.

Dyer was not, however, universally condemned. In the House of Lords, most of the peers favoured Dyer and the house passed a motion in his support. And the Morning Post is reported to have raised a sum of 26,000 pounds for Dyer; a famous contributor to the fund was Rudyard Kipling.

Strangely enough, the clergy of the Golden Temple, led by Arur Singh, honoured Dyer by declaring him a Sikh. The honouring of Dyer by the priests of Sri Darbar Sahib, Amritsar, was one of the reasons behind the intensification of the demand for reforming the management of Sikh shrines already being voiced by societies such as the Khalsa Diwan Majha and Central Majha Khalsa Diwan. This resulted in the launch of what came to be known as the Gurudwara Reform movement.

### ■ Congress View

The Indian National Congress appointed its own non-official committee that included Motilal Nehru, C.R. Das, Abbas

Tyabji, M.R. Jayakar and Gandhi. The Congress put forward its own view. This view criticised Dyer's act as inhuman and also said that there was no justification in the introduction of the martial law in Punjab.

### Summary

- **Why Nationalist Upsurge at End of First World War?**

Post-War economic hardship.  
Nationalist disillusionment with imperialism worldwide.  
Impact of Russian Revolution.

- **Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms**

Dyarchy in provinces.  
Two lists—reserved and transferred—for administration. Reserved subjects to be administered by governor through executive council and transferred subjects to be administered by ministers from legislative council.  
Extensive powers to governor, governor-general and secretary of state for interference.  
Franchise expanded, powers also extended.  
Governor-general to administer with an executive council of 8—three to be Indians.  
Two lists for administration—central and provincial.  
Bicameral central legislature—Central Legislative Assembly as the lower house and Council of States as the upper house.

- **Drawbacks**

Dyarchy arrangement too complex and irrational to be functional.  
Central executive not responsible to legislature.  
Limited franchise.

- **Sense of Betrayal by the British specially after Rowlatt Act**

British promises of reward after war failed to materialise.  
Nationalists disappointed.

- **Gandhi's Activism in South Africa (1893-1914)**

Set up Natal Indian Congress and started *Indian Opinion*.  
Satyagraha against registration certificates.  
Campaign against restrictions on Indian migration.

Campaign against poll tax and invalidation of Indian marriages. Gandhi's faith in capacity of masses to fight established; he was able to evolve his own style of leadership and politics and techniques of struggle.

● **Gandhi's Early Activism in India**

Champaran Satyagraha (1917)—First Civil Disobedience.

Ahmedabad Mill Strike (1918)—First Hunger Strike.

Kheda Satyagraha (1918)—First Non-Cooperation.

Rowlatt Satyagraha (1918)—First mass-strike.

Jallianwalla Bagh Massacre and the Inquiry Committee