21. CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE MOVEMENT (1930 -34)

The Lahore Session was followed by a two-month lull, while the country and the government waited of Gandhi to decide on the precise methods of Non-violent struggle for 'Poorna Swaraj'. Independence pledges were taken at innumerable meetings throughout the country on 26th January denouncing the British for having ruined India economically, politically, culturally, and spiritually. In the pledges, it was asserted that it was a crime against man and God to submit any longer to such a rule. The Congress legislators were ordered to resign on 6th January 1930.

Gandhi issued an eleven-point ultimatum to Lord Irwin on 31st January, 1930. Further serious appeals were made for Civil disobedience, including non-payment of taxes. The choice of salt as the main issues also appeared some what eccentric at first, and Nehru later recalled his initial sense of bewilderment. Though the eleven points seemed a kind of retreat, they at least concretized the national demand and related it to specific grievances.

Demands

The eleven points included redressal of two peasants grievances, three specific bourgeois demands and six issues of general interest. The peasants' demands were:

- 50 per cent reduction in land revenue and;
- abolition of the salt tax and government salt monopoly.

The three specific bourgeois demands were:

- lowering of the Rupee-Sterling exchange ratio,
- textile protection and;
- reservation of coastal shipping for Indians.

The six issues of general interest were:

- 50 per cent cut in military expenditure,
- 50 per cent reduction in expenditure on civil administration (civil service salaries),
- total prohibition of Intoxicants,
- release of all political prisoners,
- reforms in the Central intelligence Department (C.I.D.) and;
- changes in the Arms Act enabling citizens to bear arms for self-defence.

What is Dandi March?

The Civil Disobedience Movement was started by Gandhi with his Dandi March (12th March to 6th April 1930). The Dandi March, from the Sabarmati Ashram to Dandi (a village on the Gujarat sea- coast) with 71 Ashram members drawn from all parts of India, attracted enormous publicity and attention from the entire country and even abroad. Gandhi declared on 11th March 1930 that wholesale illegal manufacture and auctioning of salt should begin after he had himself violated the law at Dandi; it could be accompanied by boycott of foreign cloth and liquor after his own arrest and everyone would have a free hand, subject to the pledge of non-violence and truth, though local leaders should be obeyed.

Stages of Civil Disobedience

The three different stages of the civil Disobedience movement witnessed varying role of different social groups and classes.

First stage (March to September 1930): It saw the high point of bourgeois participation in towns and controlled peasant mobilization in the villages on issues selected by Gandhi such as salt, non-payment of revenue, picketing of liquor shops, and non-payments of Chaukidari tax. Among industrialists, G.D. Birla donated approximately 5 lakh rupees to the movement according to British Intelligence estimates. His letters reveal him as actively trying to persuade the Calcutta Marwari foreign piece-goods importers to establish trade contacts instead with Ahmedabad and Bombay cotton mills. While Jamnalal Bajaj was unique among capitalists in being a full time Congress activist (he served as AICC treasurer for many years and went to jail in 1930), Walchand Hirachand urged fellow-businessmen in a letter to the FICCI in April 1930 to give up the policy of sitting on the fence and throw in their lot with those that were fighting for Swaraj. In May 1930, FICCI also decided to boycott the Round Table Conference as long as Gandhi stayed away from it and till the Viceroy made a definite promise regarding dominion status.

During the period 1921-22, the merchants and petty traders were, on the whole, much more enthusiastic supporters of the national movement than

industrialists and capitalists. Collective pledges by merchants not to indent foreign goods became very common in Bombay, Amritsar, Delhi and Calcutta and represented a more effective form of boycott than the spectacular picketing by (often women) volunteers. The overall impact was a remarkable fall in British cloth imports. Other British imports also suffered and, from May to August 1930, the British Trade Commissioner's office was flooded with panic-stricken reports and complaints from 'white' firms.

In the countryside, the initial Gandhian Civil Disobedience movement took place in areas which had already witnessed some amount of Gandhian rural constructive work through local ashrams. Salt provided the initial vital catalyst, but illegal manufacture became difficult with the onset of the monsoon. Naturally, salt became the basis for a sustained campaign only in the coastal parts of Bombay presidency, Balasore in Orissa and Midnapur in Bengal. Picketing of liquor shops and of excise license auctions became an important element of Civil Disobedience movement both in small towns and villages. On the other hand, the peasants in many areas firmly refused to pay the chaukidari tax despite enormous physical correction and sale of property. Rural taluka of Khera district and Bardoli of Surat became centres of very successful no-revenue campaign with peasants taking refuge in the neighbouring Baroda state in a 'Hijrat' (voluntary migration) which, at its height on October 1930, involved over 15,000 peasants in Khera. In the Central Provinces, Maharashtra and Karnataka, the Congress leadership tried to utilize in a controlled manner the potentially explosive issue of poor peasants and tribal grievances regarding forest laws. Setting up training camps for 'forest satyagrahis' and carefully selecting satyagraha centres.

Second stage (October 1930 to March 1931): From the beginning of this stage, there was an evident decline in enthusiasm and support from urban merchants with dealers breaking Congress- imposed seals on foreign cloth at a number of places. The gains from Swadeshi demand were counter-balanced by frequent hartals which dislocated trade and industry. The alarm-signals from business groups calling for compromise, as well as the ultimate nationalist response to them, were more probably connected with developments in the countryside.

In the rural areas, the more purely Gandhian forms based on the relatively propertied peasants were losing some of their earlier potency in the face of ruthless British suppression. At the same time, there were signs of a 'second wave', taking less manageable and socially dangerous forms, like no- rent or tribal rebellion. (No-rent campaigns were different from No revenue campaigns, since the former were aimed at the local zamindars and landlords, whereas the latter were aimed at the Government). In scattered incidents throughout the country, the peasants were resisting the arrests of their leaders and the seizure of their property, mobilizing neighbouring villages through the blowing of conch-shells and surrounding and attacking police parties.

In August 1930 itself, Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru and Mr. Jayakar attempted to bring about compromise between the Congress and the government but failed because the government insisted on the withdrawal of the movement first. Meanwhile, the report of the Simon Commission had been submitted. The British government decided to call the first Round Table Conference to deliberate and discuss future constitutional reforms with the Indian leaders. The Conference started its deliberations on 12th November 1930. But the Congress did not participate in it. Realizing the futility of talks in the absence of the representatives of the Congress, the Conference was adjourned 'sine die' on 19th January 1931.

The government now realized the necessity of coming to terms with the Congress. He released the members of the Working Committee of the Congress, including Gandhi on 26th January 1931. Efforts for a compromise between the Congress and the government were revived by Tej Bahadur Sapru, Dr. Jayakar, etc. The efforts proved successful this time and the Gandhi-Irwin Pact was signed in March 1931. By it, the government agreed to:

(a) Withdraw all ordinances and end prosecutions.

(b) Release all political prisoners, except those guilty of violence.

(c) Restore the confiscated property of the Satyagraha.

(d) Permit peaceful picketing of liquor, opium and foreign cloth shops and;

(e) Permit the collection or manufacture of salt, free of duty, to persons residing within a specific distance of the seashore.

The Congress, on its part agreed to:

(a) suspend the Civil Disobedience movement.

(b) participate in the second Round Table Conference, and

(c) not to press for investigation into police excesses.

The Congress ratified it in its session held at Karachi in March 1931 due to the persuasion of Gandhi. Gandhi was deputed to attend the second Round Table Conference as the sole representative of the Congress. The spirit of the pact was already marred by the execution of Bhagat Singh and his comrades on the eve of the Karachi Session of the Congress. Certain other changes also took place between the signing of the Pact and the holding of second Round Table Conference. Lord Irwin was replaced by Lord Wellington as the Viceroy of India. Lord Wellington was staunch conservative and revived the repressive policy of the government soon after his arrival in India. In England, while the Conference was still in session, general elections took place and the Conservative government was in no mood to grant any concession to India. Gandhi returned to India in December 1931 as a dejected person and found that the government had already revived its policy of repression. He therefore, decided to revive the Civil Disobedience movement and the Congress Working Committee approved it.

Third stage (January 1932 to April 1934): The third phase of the movement was officially withdrawn by the Congress in April 1934 though, unofficially, the Congress admitted defeat in the 1933 itself. Outmaneuvered and facing repressive measures on an unprecedented scale, the national movement under the Congress still fought on valiantly for about a year and a half. The movement, during this phase comprised a wide range of activities almost totally suppressed. The forms of defiance included picketing the cloth and liquor shops, closing of markets and boycott of 'white' or loyalist business concerns, symbolic hoisting of Congress flags, holding in public of 'illegal' Congress sessions, salt satyagrahas, non-payment of chaukidari taxes, no-rent as well as no-revenue, forest law violations, etc.

But by the second half of 1932 itself, the Civil Disobedience movement was evidently losing ground. It is true that the decline in peasants' participation, evident for instance in Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh and U.P., was clearly a submission to overwhelmingly superior force rather than any loss of faith in the Congress. The halo of sacrifice and martyrdom, won by the latter during 1930-34, helped decisively in the winning elections from 1934 onwards. But we should not forget that voting was not the same as agitating. The days of the classic satyagrahas had passed and, though the propertied peasants would go on voting Congress, they were no longer ready to sacrifice their land, now that Gandhi had failed to get it restored for them in 1931. In some areas, most notably Gujarat, they would also become more prosperous after Depression was succeeded by a war boon and correspondingly less militant.

How Civil Disobedience collapsed?

As the mass movement declined, political 'realism' and certain sectional economic calculations pushed some business groups towards collaboration much as signing agreements, giving preferential treatment and lower import duty rates to British textile imports and other British commodities. Yet strong objective compulsions, both economic and political, existed to prevent anything like total sell-out or unqualified collaboration by Indian business groups. British insistence on retaining the existing exchange ratio remained a permanent grievance. Above all, collaboration was made difficult by the fact that the years 1932-34 were marked by a full-scale counter-offensive by British business interests. With Lancashire in particular closely aligning itself with the ultra-Tory opposition led by Churchill to any constitutional concession going beyond the Simon Commission's framework.

The ultimate result of the opposite pressures towards collaboration and conflict was an important re-alignment of business attitudes in support of a change in Congress policy away from mass agitation and towards Assembly and eventually ministerial participation. This realignment enabled Indian capitalists to overcome the fairly sharp split between near loyalists and nationalists within their own ranks which had become quite marked during the early 1930's. It also fitted in with developments in the Congress leaderships as it came to terms gradually with the evident decline of Civil Disobedience in the face of overwhelming repression.

Significance of Civil Disobedience

The Civil Disobedience Movement of 1930-34 was an advance over the Non-cooperation Movement of 1921-22 in quite a few respects.

- First of all, the stated objective of the movement of 1930-34 was the achievement of complete independence and not just the remedying of two specific 'wrongs' plus a very vague Swaraj.
- Secondly, in sharp contrast to what had happened after Chauri Chaura incident, Gandhi, during 1930-34, pushed ahead with the non-violent main stream despite sporadic incidents which were realistically recognized now as more or less inevitable.
- Thirdly, the methods adopted during the 1930-34 movement, from the beginning, involved deliberate violation of law and not mere Non-cooperation with foreign rule.
- Fourthly, participation in this movement involved much greater risk than in 1921-22, for, a frightened government from May 1930 onwards adopted a policy of senseless brutality even towards absolutely peaceful Satyagrahis, Apart from life and limb, the meagre property of the poor was very much at stake, for non-payment of land revenue or chaukidari tax was met by wholesale confiscation of household goods, implements and even land.
- Fifthly, large scale participation of women and teenagers was another significant feature of the civil disobedience movement. The Civil Disobedience movement, in fact, marked a major step forward in the emancipation of Indian women.
- Sixthly, the movement of 1930-34 obtained a better response from business groups and large sections of the peasantry than the movement of 1921-22.
- And finally, organizationally the Congress was now much stronger in most parts of the country than in 1921-22 when it had just taken the first step on the road towards becoming a mass party.

Yet it would be a considerable over simplification to present the Civil Disobedience Movement as an unqualified advance in every respect over the Non-cooperation Movement. To begin with, the stirring Hindu-Muslim unity of 1919-22 was obviously a thing of the past in 1930s. For, between the two movements stood not only the breakdown of the Nehru Report negotiations but a decade of intense communal organization and fratricidal strife. Outside the North West Frontier Province and a few isolated pockets like Delhi, Muslim participation remained low throughout the civil disobedience years. Further, unlike the Non-cooperation Movement, the Civil Disobedience Movement did not coincide with any major labour upsurge. Another difference between the two movements was that under the influence of the Civil Disobedience Movement, there was an evident decline in the older and more purely intelligentsia forms of protest like lawyers giving up their practice and students and teachers leaving official institutions to start national schools and colleges.

COMMUNAL AWARD

- After the failure of the Second Round Table conference, Ramsay McDonald announced the 'Communal Award' on August 16, 1932. According to the Award, the right of separate electorate was not only given to the Muslims of India but also to all the minority communities in the country.
- The Award also declared untouchables as a minority and thus the Hindu depressed classes were given a number of special seats, to be filled from special depressed class electorates in the area where their voters were concentrated.
- Under the Communal Award, the principle of weightage was also maintained with some modifications in the Muslim minority provinces. Principle of weightage was also applied for Europeans in Bengal and Assam, Sikhs in the Punjab and North West Frontier Province, and Hindus in Sindh and North West Frontier Province.
- Though the Muslims constituted almost 56 per cent of the total population of Punjab, they were given 86 out of 175 seats in the Punjab Assembly. The Muslim majority of 54.8 per cent in Punjab was thus reduced to a minority. The formula favoured the Sikhs of Punjab and the Europeans of Bengal the most.
- The Award was not popular with any Indian party. Muslims were not happy with the Communal Award, as it has reduced their majority in Punjab and Bengal to a minority. Yet they were prepared to accept it.

- On the other hand, the Hindus refused to accept the awards and decided to launch a campaign against it. For them it was not possible to accept the 'untouchables' as a minority. They organized the Allahabad Unity Conference in which they demanded for the replacement of separate electorates by joint electorates. Many nationalist Muslims and Sikhs also participated in the conference.
- The Congress also rejected the Award in toto. Gandhi protested against the declaration of untouchables as a minority and undertook a fast unto death. He also held meetings with the untouchable leadership for the first time and try to convince them that they were very much part of the mainstream Hindu society.
- He managed to sign the Poona Pact with Dr. B. R. Ambedker, the leader of untouchables, in which the Congress met many of the untouchables' demands.

POONA PACT

- Poona Pact (1932) is the popular name of an agreement between the Untouchables (called Depressed Classes) of India led by Dr. B. R. Ambedkar and the Hindus of India, that took place on 24 September 1932 at Yerawada Jail in Pune.
- The text uses the term "Depressed Classes" to denote Untouchables who were later called Scheduled Castes under the Government of India Act 1935, and the later Indian Constitution of 1950. The Untouchables are now popularly known as Dalits.

Major highlights of the Pact are as follows:

1. There shall be seats reserved for the Depressed Classes out of general electorate seats in the provincial legislatures as follows: - Madras 30; Bombay with Sindh 25; Punjab 8; Bihar and Orissa 18; Central Provinces 20; Assam 7; Bengal 30; United Provinces 20. Total 148. These figures are based on the Prime Minister's (British) decision;
2. Election to these seats shall be by joint electorates subject;
3. The representation of the Depressed Classes in the Central Legislature shall likewise be on the principle of joint electorates and reserved seats by the method of primary election in the manner provided for in clause above for their representation in the provincial legislatures;
4. In the Central Legislature, 18 per cent of the seats allotted to the general electorate for British India in the said legislature shall be reserved for the Depressed Classes; and
5. In every province, out of the educational grant, an adequate sum shall be ear-marked for providing educational facilities to the members of Depressed Classes.

GANDHLJI'S EPIC FAST

- In September 1932, Gandhiji declared a fast unto death, to undo the provisions of the Communal Award of Ramsay McDonald, the then British Prime Minister, providing for the scheme of separate representation for the depressed classes, since that would cut across Hinduism.
- In May, 1933 Gandhiji undertook another fast not against the Government but "for purification of myself and my associates and for greater vigilance and watchfulness in connection with the Harijan cause."
- The President of the Congress, in consultation with Gandhiji, announced the suspension of the Civil Disobedience movement for 6 weeks. The Government continued its course of repression. Gandhiji, who was later released, decided to devote his time to Harijan work.
- The struggle was finally suspended by the All India Congress Committee who were allowed to meet at Patna and decided to call off the Civil Disobedience unconditionally, except for the provision that Gandhiji alone, when he thought it necessary, could offer Civil Disobedience.
- Gandhiji decided to start an individual Civil Disobedience movement, as from 1 August 1933, but he was arrested the previous night. He was released after a couple of days but was ordered to reside at Poona.
- Gandhi disobeyed this order, was re-arrested and sentenced to one year's imprisonment. There upon hundreds of Congressmen followed Gandhiji to prison. This movement continued till the early part of April, 1934.

- Throughout this period, the government continued to pursue a policy of severe repression which included imprisonment, police firing, beating in lock-up, shooting of detainees, atrocity on women, blockading of villages, and even looting and pillage.
- During the Civil Disobedience movement of 1930-31, more than 60,000 persons were imprisoned and during the Second Civil obedience movement of 1932-34 the number of persons who courted arrest were, about 66,000.
- The programme or the boycott of British goods which was part of the movements led to a substantial fall in the import of British goods into India. Further, the Civil Disobedience Movement roused the Indian people in general, including villagers and women folk. Women rarely came out of the seclusion of their homes in order to take part in the struggle for freedom.
- This not only gave an impetus to the freedom movement, but also helped in bringing out another social revolution: the emancipation of women.
- When the Civil Disobedience movement came to an end in April, 1934, Gandhiji appealed to Congressmen to devote themselves to nation-building activities: promotion of Hindu-Muslim unity, removal of untouchability, and spread of hand-spinning.

GANDHI-IRWIN PACT AND FIRST ROUND TABLE CONFERENCE (Nov. 1930-Jan. 1931)

- While the Civil Disobedience Movement continued vigorously in spite of untold repression, efforts were made for a compromise and after several attempts of Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru and Mr. M.R. Jayakar, an agreement was reached after 15 clays' strenuous discussions between the Viceroy and Mahatma Gandhi.
- This agreement, better known as the Gandhi-Irwin Pact, was signed on 5 March, 1931. Under the agreement, the Government was to make concession take steps for the participation of the representatives of Congress in the Second Round Table Conference, and the Congress on its part, had to withdraw the Civil Disobedience Movement.
- Meanwhile, a Round Table Conference had met in London early 1931. The intention seemed to have been, to set off the stage, before the world of "representative gathering" of Indians trying for an agreed plan for the future government of their country.
- It was not Indians, but the Viceroy and his officials who chose these representatives. What they actually did was to carefully assemble all the diverse elements, every creed, every party, every racial minority, every interest in this subcontinent.
- The spirit in which the Gandhi-Irwin Pact was signed did not last long. In spite of protests from all quarters, the Government carried out the execution of Sardar Bhagat Singh, Sukh Dev and Raj Guru on 23rd March 1931. On 18 April 1931, Lord Irwin was succeeded by Lord Willington. The new Viceroy had no intention to abide by the terms of the Pact.

SECOND ROUND-TABLE CONFERENCE (September-December 1931)

- In the meantime, however, the Congress Working Committee passed a resolution that Mahatma Gandhi should represent the Congress at the Second Round Table Conference to be convened later inl931 in London. Mahatma Gandhi did attend the Conference as the sole representative of the Congress.
- As was expected, the communal question and the differences among the Indian people loomed large in this conference and all efforts to solve it by consent proved unsuccessful. Gandhiji put up a valiant fight and some of the speeches he delivered were most striking.
- Apparently the Government's scheme at the Round Table Conference was only a scheme for Indians sharing power with the bureaucracy and not one designed to achieve responsible Government.
- Gandhiji returned empty-handed from the Round Table Conference. The condition on which the Congress had agreed to participate, abandonment of stark repression, was also being broken. Jawaharlal Nehru and T.A.K. Sherwani had been arrested and put in jail again.

- In the North West Frontier Province Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan and Dr. Khan Saheb were also arrested. Special ordinances had been enforced in the United Provinces, the North West Frontier Province and in Bengal.

THIRD ROUND TABLE CONFERENCE (November-December 1932)

- From September 1931 until March 1933, under the supervision of Samuel Hoare, the proposed reforms took the form reflected in the Government of India Act, 1935.
- Most of the main political figures of India were not present for this conference. In this conference, Chaudhary Rahmat Ali, a college student, coined the name PAKISTAN. He took the P from Punjab, the

A from Afghanistan, the KI from Kashmir, the S from Sindh and the TAN from Balochistan. In this Conference M.A.Jinnah was not present.