

Gauhati University
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Unit – V

Topic - Civil Disobedience Movement

By way of preparation for the ensuing Civil Disobedience Movement, Gandhiji in a letter addressed to Irwin, then Governor-General of India, put forward eleven –point demands. Apart from the release of political prisoners, the demands including reduction of land tax, prohibition, etc. As the British Government was unwilling to fulfill the demands a movement became inevitable. Gandhiji drew up a detailed programme of struggle and placed it in a meeting of the Congress Working Committee held in February, 1930 at the *Sabarmati Ashram*. With the acceptance of the programme by the congress ground was now prepared for launching a movement.

In an article published in the *Young India* Gandhiji by way of explaining the nature of his proposed non-violent movement clearly pointed out that only persons having faith in non-violence will participate in the movement for country's freedom. Gandhiji also appealed to the people to court arrest ungrudgingly and not to have recourse to violence or anger. People were also advised not to abide by the laws enforced by the British in India. Thus the new non-violent movement based on the above programme came to be called the 'Civil Disobedience Movement'.

In a historic letter written to the Governor-General Lord Irwin on March, 2, 1930, Gandhiji formally informed the government about his decision to launch a movement. Narrating the exploitation and oppressive nature of the British rule, Gandhiji expressed his desire and determination to end this system in his letter. Gandhiji declare: "We are not to kill anybody but it is our Dharma to see that the curse of this Government is blotted out". With Gandhiji's march on March 12, 1930, to violate the salt laws, began the Civil Disobedience Movement. The initial phase of the movement is also known as the salt Satyagraha. A close examination of the letter addressed to the Governor-General would reveal that the 11-Point charter of demand put forward by Gandhiji was prepared with utmost caution. Besides, it reflected the vital interests of all the classes of people. Gandhiji's idea was that if the demands were refused by the British, the Indians as a whole – from peasants and workers to wealthy businessmen – would participate in the proposed Civil Disobedience.

Manufacture of salt was a monopoly of the British government. According to the prevalent law it was illegal for anyone, other than the govt., to manufacture salt. Considering this to be unjust, Gandhiji decided to violate the salt-laws. On March, 12, 1930, Gandhiji along with his 78 chosen followers started march on foot from the Sabarmati Ashram to Dandi, a village on the Gujarat sea-cost. This is famous in history by the name "Dandi March." The distance that Gandhiji had to cover on foot was about 320 Kilometers. Gandhiji's march created unprecedented enthusiasm among the people and

soon the Civil Disobedience Movement spread all over the country. Gandhiji reached Dandi on April 6, and there he violated the existing salt-laws by personally manufacturing salt from the sea water. The news spread like a wild fire all over the country. As to the question why Gandhiji made a choice of salt as the item of his Civil Disobedience it may be argued that it was in issue of such widespread popular concern that in Gandhiji's opinion the breaking of salt-laws, would mobilize a mass following. The choice of the place and route was also no less important. The villages through which Gandhiji conducted his historic march (Padajatra) were inhabited by the people who had earlier given proof of their faith in non-violence and Satyagraha. Besides, Gandhiji had immense popularity in those villages through which he happened to pass. The distance that Gandhiji had to cover on foot was about 320 kilometre. Gandhiji's march created unprecedented enthusiasm among the people and soon the Civil Disobedience Movement spread all over the country.

Lacs of people participated in the movement by making salt on the sea-coasts violating the Salt Law. In other places, where there was no scope of manufacturing salt, people joined the Civil Disobedience by demonstrations, boycott of foreign goods, hartals, etc. In some places people refused to pay tax. Still many others organized mass demonstrations violating Section 144 which prohibited assembly of people. Another important feature of the movement was the participation of womenfolk. Kamala Nehru, Sarojini Naidu, Swarup Rani Nehru and others took active part in the *Salt Satyagraha*. In Calcutta itself women volunteers under the leadership of Arunabala Sengupta organized picketing before liquor shops and the shops selling foreign goods. In the North- West Frontier Province the movement was led by Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, better known as the "Frontier Gandhi".

Being alarmed at the intensity of the movement, the British government took resort to oppressive measures. The government put thousands of people under arrest including Gandhiji. The British also tried to suppress the movement by killing the *Satyagrahis*. When repressive measures failed to slow down the tempo of the movement, Lord Irwin expressed the desire to open negotiations with Gandhiji and other Congress leaders. It now became apparent that the British government had bowed its head to the movement. In view of the change in the attitude of the British government, Congress decided to take part in the Second Round Table Conference held in 1931 in London.

The Second Phase of the Civil Disobedience Movement : The Civil Disobedience Movement, after its temporary suspension, was resumed again in 1932 after Gandhiji had returned from London. The revival was inevitable as the government repression on the freedom fighters had mounted contrary to the assurance given by Irwin to Gandhiji. Jawaharlal Nehru and Purushottamdas Tandon were put behind the bar on a charge of fomenting the peasants of U.P. not to pay tax. However, immediately after the resumption of the movement, all the leaders including Gandhiji, Vallabhbhai Patel, Subhas Chandra Bose and others were put under arrest. Other repressive measures also followed. Prohibitory orders were issued banning meetings, demonstrations, etc. Even the Indian National Congress was declared to be an illegal organization. As a result of this ban, all the Congressmen went underground and started political work clandestinely.

Moreover, the British government with a view to encouraging division among the Indians and thereby weakening the strength of the national movement declared the ill-famed "Communal Award" (1932). The Award was formally announced by the British Prime Minister Ramsay Mac-Donald. It provided for separate electorates for different Indian communities. That is to say, the Indians were divided community-wise e.g. the Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, etc. and each community was to send representative to the Provincial Legislatures separately. What was worse was that the Award even sought to create division among the Hindus by allowing the Depressed Classes, officially called 'Scheduled Castes' separate electorate. This was indeed an action on the part of the British to retard the political progress of India taking advantage of the unfortunate conditions of the depressed classes.

Gandhiji, who was then in jail for his Civil Disobedience Movement, declared the "Communal Award" to be unfortunate and took a vow to change it. However, Gandhiji's fast unto death in the Yerwada jail brought about negotiation culminating in the "Poona Pact" (1932). An agreement reached in a conference at Poona between the Caste Hindu represented by Rajendra Prasad, Malaviya etc. and Bhim Rao Ambedkar, Srinivasan, etc. on behalf of the Hindu Depressed classes, came to be known popularly as the Poona Pact. According to the agreement, subject to certain conditions, the Depressed Classes rejected the offer of separate electorate made in the Communal Award. This was how the British attempt to create division within the Hindu society could be averted. Gandhiji giving his consent to the Poona Pact withdrew the fast.

The Indian National Movement may be said to have stuck a bad pitch during the years following the Poona Pact. In fact, the national movement could not evoke much enthusiasm among the people. In this situation Gandhiji requested the Congress to suspend the Civil Disobedience Movement. All this happened in mid-1933, and Gandhiji devoted himself to the work for the welfare of the harijans. In early 1934, the Indian National Congress formally announced the withdrawal of the Civil Disobedience Movement.

Many, including Jawaharlal and Subhas Chandra Bose were shocked at Gandhiji's action in withdrawing the Civil Disobedience Movement. Nevertheless Gandhiji's arguments in favor of the withdrawal cannot be overlooked. First, Gandhiji considered it to be his moral duty to save the people, particularly the *satyagrahis* in the face of government torture. Second, Gandhiji was not at all prepared to give any more opportunity to the British to sow the seed of dissension among the Indians as they had done by offering the Communal Award. In fact, Gandhiji treasured national integrity in preference to the freedom struggle.

There is no gainsaying the fact that the Civil Disobedience Movement also like its predecessors Non Co-operation Movement failed to make India a free country. Yet one can hardly minimize the importance of the Civil Disobedience Movement. First, Civil Disobedience Movement was the second mass awakening in India, Non Co-operation being the first of its kind. Secondly, the Civil Disobedience was more intensive in magnitude than the Non-Co-operation Movement. Thirdly, participation in the Civil

Disobedience Movement was universal and never before subaltern people so enthusiastically joined the national struggle for freedom. Another important feature of the Movement was that the Indian peasantry raised their voice not only against the foreign rule, but protested also against the contemporary land tenure system. Lastly, the Civil Disobedience Movement once again proved beyond doubt the organizing capability of the Indian National Congress and that the Congress enjoyed the sympathy of the largest population of the country.

TOPIC

Unit V

Quit India Movement

The Quit India Movement of 1942 was different from all other movements which preceded it during the course of the freedom struggle under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. Gandhiji's creed was non-violence. Examples are not rare when he suspended a movement abruptly simply because it had taken a violent turn. But in 1942 Gandhiji was in a different mood, and there is no doubt that the programme that he had chalked out in 1942 was different from the type of movement known as satyagraha. No doubt Gandhiji eschewed violence as before, but his determination to end the foreign domination now made him a rebel, as it were 'Gandhiji was, perhaps, prepared to risk the occurrence of riots and civil wars'. The characteristic feature of the new movement of 1942 was that Gandhiji was even prepared to pay any price to rid the country of foreign domination. He did not consider mere courting arrest by the satyagrahis as enough. The movement was to include all possible forms of mass demonstration. It appeared that Gandhiji even approved taking up arms by the common people in self defence in the face of government repression. In a word, the characteristic feature of the 42 Movement was that 'it was not to be non-violent in the traditional sense of the term'.

The change in the mood and outlook of Gandhiji has been explained by the modern historians in a variety of ways. Nevertheless it may be pointed out that the contemporary world situation vis a vis the objective of the British imperialist rule in India combined together to form the background of the Revolt of 1942. The origin of the 42 Movement also may be traced to this background. First, the unilateral declaration involving India in the World War II by the British strained its relation with the Congress. Secondly, a serious turn in the course of the war in 1941 caused much anxiety among the Indian leaders. Thirdly, the appearance of the Japanese army in Burma in 1942 endangered the Indian territory. Gandhiji, after a review of the contemporary was situation, came to the conclusion that the British were not strong enough to save the Indians from the Japanese attack. Nor Indians can save themselves as they were still under the British rule. In a situation like this Gandhiji decided to raise the 'Quit India' slogan. His argument was that the possibility of a Japanese attack on India was only due to the existence of British rule in the country. If India was left to herself Japan would be compelled to review her plan of an attack on India.

In a critical moment like this the Congress session in Bombay (1942) took a momentous decision which was to guide the future course of the national movement. On August 8, 1942 the Congress adopted the historic 'Quit India' Resolution which declared among other things that the immediate ending of the British rule in India was an urgent necessity. It was further resolved that the Congress was to launch a movement on the lines suggested by Gandhiji. As it has been noted earlier, Gandhiji now was in a militant mood and was in favour of a mass struggle on the widest possible scale. Though the Resolution was passed and adopted on August 8 the Congress leadership got no time to

implement the Resolution as most of the Congress leaders, including Gandhiji, were arrested early morning next day i.e., August 9. Gandhiji's last message to the nation at the time arrest (5 O'clock in the morning, August, 9 (1942) was karengye ye marengye or 'Do or Die', meaning self-immolation or drive the British out of the country. He also categorically declared; "Let every Indian consider himself to be a free man.... Mere going to jail would not do".

Tumult of protest was raised all over the country in protest against the governmental action in arresting the Congress leaders everywhere. This was how the 42 Movement had begun on August 9. One of the important aspects of the Quit India Movement was that in the absence of any leadership, the Movement did not follow a particular line. Despite Gandhiji's appeal to the people to remain non-violent the brutal repression led to violent rebellion. People took recourse to hartals, strikes in factories and other media of protests. In some places communication system was disrupted cutting of the telephone and telegraph wires and damage was caused to government buildings. Thus what started as a Quit India Movement ultimately took the form of an all-out rebellion. And the rebellion came to be known subsequently as 'August Revolution' since it had occurred in the month of August (1942).

The British had admitted, though not openly that the intensity of the popular rebellion in 1942 was higher in scale than that of 1857. Governmental repression, absence of leadership, etc. were some of the limitations from which the Revolt of 1942 had suffered. Non-participation of the Communists was another factor responsible for the weakness of the movement. Despite the limitations it would be a mistake to suppose that the movement was a total failure. First, the movement revealed the determination of the people to undergo any amount of suffering for the cause of the country. Secondly, the popular character of the August Rebellion was also revealed through the participation of students, working class and peasants. In the opinion of Sumit Sarkar, it was the participation of the peasant community that turned the movement into a mass upsurge. Thirdly, 1942 Movement marked the end of India's struggle for freedom and may be regarded as an apex of the freedom struggle. Lastly, the violent mass upsurge of 1942 convinced the British rulers that their hold was sure to collapse in India sooner or later.

Objective Questions & Answers

Q. When did the Swadeshi Movement take place? Name the three leaders of the Swadeshi Movement.

Ans: Swadeshi Movement took place between the period 1905-07. The three leaders Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Bipin Chandra Pal and Lala Lajpat Rai. They were popularly known as Lal, Bal, Pal.

Q. Write any two reasons responsible for the partition of Bengal.

Ans: (i) Bengal was a big province. British government assessed that it was difficult to govern such a large province. Hence the government decided to divide it.
(ii) To increase the communal gap between Hindu and Muslim and divide them.

Q. Why and when Cabinet Mission was sent to India?

Ans: Cabinet Mission was sent by the British government in the year 1946. Its objective was to:

- (i) Sort out the minority problem.
- (ii) Ensure that British leave India by the year 1948.

Q. Which event led to the withdrawal of the non-cooperation movement?

Ans: (i) It was the act of violence in Chauri-Chaura, which prompted Gandhiji to call off the movement.
(ii) Before launching of the non-cooperation movement Gandhiji had sought a pledge to all satyagrahis to remain non-violent in words and deed.

Q. Why did Mahatma Gandhi want to adopt the policy of Non-cooperation against the British in India?

Ans: (i) Gandhiji firmly believed that the British Rule in India was established with the cooperation of the local people and still existed due to their cooperation.
(ii) He launched the Non- cooperation so that he may put an end to the foreign rule and introduce self rule.

Q. Who represented India in the Second Round Table Conference in London?

Ans: Mahatma Gandhi.

Q. Who declared that in every condition the English would leave India by June 1948 A.D.?

Ans: Attlee.

Q. In which session of All India National Congress Gandhiji was authorized to begin the Civil Disobedience Movement?

Ans: Lahore Session.

Q. Who was Gandhiji's mentor?

Ans: Gandhiji's mentor was Gopal Krishna Gokhale.

Q. Name two people who were firmly opposed to Partition.

Ans. Mahatma Gandhi and Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan of NWFP continued to firmly oppose Partition
