

## 19. EMERGENCE OF GANDHI

M.K. Gandhi had not played any leading role in the Congress and was unknown to the masses before his arrival in India in 1915. But, surprisingly, he became the undisputed leader of the Congress and the leader of masses within a short span of 5 years, i.e. from 1915 to 1920. Was this phenomenon an outcome of a skilful political game on the part of Gandhi or was it due to the circumstances? A number of factors contributed to the rise of Gandhi as the undisputed leader of the Congress.

### Reasons for his rise

**Satyagraha:** A major factor responsible for the emergence of Gandhi in Indian politics was the success of his resistance, namely Satyagraha, based on truth and non-violence in South Africa. The South African experience (1893-1914) contributed in a number of ways to the foundations of Gandhi's ideology and methods as well as to his later achievements in India. Till 1906, Gandhi was a rising lawyer-politician. He followed the 'moderate' techniques of prayers and petitions in the struggle against racial discrimination, a totally new departure began with three campaigns of Satyagraha during 1907-1908, 1908-1911 and 1913-1914. The peculiar conditions of South Africa enabled Gandhi to bring together people of different religions, communities and classes.

**South African experience:** This South African experience projected Gandhi as an all India figure from the beginning of his work in India more than any other politician all of whom (like Tilak, Lajpat Rai or Bipin Chandra Pal) had essentially regional bases. The South African experience made him an international celebrity. Further, the connections which many South African Indians had with their original homes in different parts of the country helped to spread the name of Gandhi throughout India. Thirteen out of the first 25 inmates of the Sabarmati Ashram (1915) came from Tamilnadu, something which would have been inconceivable then for any other Indian leader.

**Disappointment from Moderates:** The disillusionment of the people with the methods and failures of the Moderates was another contributory factor. The methods and techniques of the moderates did not include any technique for mass mobilization

because, in their opinion, the masses were not yet sufficiently educated and enlightened to take part in the nationalist movement. Their achievements also did not bring about any substantial relief to the masses in general and the peasants and the workers in particular. So, the masses were eagerly waiting for a leader who could lead them in a movement aimed at removing their hardships.

**Inability of Extremists:** Equally important was the failure of the Extremists to reach and mobilize the masses. Though the extremists made a departure in theory from the methods of the Moderates by including mass participation in their methods and techniques of political agitation, they could not put it into practice essentially because they had doubts about their ability to control the masses once they are aroused. Thus, the Extremists too, like the Moderates, did not provide leadership to the eagerly waiting masses, though they believed that mass action could be a variable weapon for achieving their aims.

**Failure of Revolutionaries:** The failure of the Revolutionary Terrorists to achieve their main goal of expelling the British from India through the use of force was as much responsible as the above factors for the emergence of Gandhi. The Revolutionary Terrorists did not bother to involve the masses in their activities. Even if they wanted to do so, they would not have succeeded in their goals because of the essentially peaceful nature of the Indian masses.

**Personality:** Above all, the personality of Gandhi and his simple and saintly habits were also responsible of his emergence in Indian politics. Gandhi had a good knowledge of the people and hence deliberately cultivated certain simple and saintly habits or what the non-disciples usually consider Gandhian Fads such as vegetarianism, nature therapy, experiments in sexual self-restraint, etc. Also, his use of simple Hindustani in preference to English and of religious texts, travelling in third class, wearing simple cloth from 1921 onwards etc., had the same impact on the minds of the common people who at once took him to their hearts. Gandhi was thus firmly rooted in the Indian traditions and it was from that fact that he drew his immense strength.



## What is Satyagraha?

'Satyagraha' was based on truth and non-violence (ahimsa). Though Gandhi's 'Satyagraha' revised considerate originality and was, in fact a meticulously worked out philosophy, nevertheless was influenced by Thoreau, Emerson, and Tolstoy.

The term, Satyagraha was coined by Gandhi to express the nature of non-violent direct action of the Indians in South Africa against the racial policy of the government there. The literal meaning of Satyagraha is holding on to truth. He was anxious to distinguish Satyagraha from passive resistance (the method adopted by the Moderates). Passive resistance is an act of expediency where as Satyagraha is a moral weapon based on the superiority of soul-force or love-force over physical force. Passive resistance is the weapon of the weak, while 'Satyagraha' can be practiced only by the bravest who have the courage to die without killing. While in passive resistance the aim is to embarrass the opponent into submission, the aim of Satyagraha is to wean the opponent away from error by love and patient suffering. Passive resistance is static, while Satyagraha is dynamic. While passive resistance is a negative approach, Satyagraha is positive in content and it emphasized internal strength of character.

**Techniques:** There are different techniques of Satyagraha. Fasting is one technique, but it has to be applied generally against those who are bound by ties of close personal affection. Hijrat or voluntary migration is another technique of Satyagraha. Gandhi, however, made it very clear that people who adopt this technique should only aim at getting their legitimate rights and status and not be hostile to the other party. Thus, he felt that strikes and hartals could be effective weapons if they did not aim at destruction and sabotage. Gandhi would not consider scorched earth policy to be a technique of Satyagraha. He also ruled out underground activities. For him, means were as important as the end.

### Satyagraha in India

In India, the first time Gandhi was obliged to resort to Satyagraha was in Champaran district in Bihar where he got the grievances of the indigo cultivators redressed in 1917. For the second time, he put the technique of Satyagraha into practice in 1918 at Ahmedabad in order to solve a dispute between the textile mill workers and the owners there. In the same year, he launched Satyagraha for the third time in the Khera district of

Gujarat in order to force the British government to meet the peasants' demand of suspension of land revenue for the famine period. All these Satyagrahas were launched to solve the local issues. But they provided him with the required experience to launch future movements at an all-India level.

The technique of Satyagraha, being based on non-violence, could easily attract the masses to participate in the nationalist movement. However, as a politician, Gandhi in practice sometimes settled for less than complete non-violence. This was evident in his campaign for military recruitment in 1918 in the hope of winning post-war political concessions. Further, his repeated insistence that even violence was preferable to cowardly surrender to injustice sometimes created delicate problems of interpretation. But historically much more significant than this personal philosophy (fully accepted only by a relatively small group of disciples) was the way in which the resultant perspective on controlled mass participation objectively fitted in with the interests and sentiments of socially-decisive sections of the Indian people. Indian politicians, before Gandhi, had tended to oscillate between moderate mendicancy and individual terrorism basically because of their inhibition about uncontrolled mass movements. The Gandhian model proved acceptable to business groups as well as to the relatively better-off or locally dominant sections of the peasantry, all of whom stood to lose something if political struggle turned into uninhibited and violent social revolution. In more general terms, the doctrine of 'ahimsa' lay at the heart of the essentially unifying role assumed by Gandhi, mediating internal social conflicts, contributing greatly to the joint national struggle against foreign rule, but also leading to periodic retreats and sometimes major reverses.

### Gandhi's idea of 'non-cooperation'

To Gandhi, non-cooperation with the evil-doers; in this case the British government, was the duty of the virtuous man. It was considered by Gandhi as a mild form of agitation, and it was resorted to by him between 1921-1922 during the Non-cooperation Movement. This technique, with its programmes like the surrender of titles by the patriotic Indians conferred on them by the British, boycott of government schools and colleges by students as well as teachers, boycott of courts and other government services, boycott of foreign goods etc, had an immediate appeal to the masses who were suffering under the British rule.



### **Gandhi's views about 'civil disobedience'**

Civil disobedience of the laws of the unjust and tyrannical government is a strong and extreme form of political agitation according to Gandhi. Also, in his opinion, this technique can be more dangerous and powerful than armed rebellion and, hence, should be adopted only as a last resort. To the masses who had been the main victims of British imperialism and whose suffering reached the extreme point in the late 1920's due to the worldwide economic crisis (1929-32), this technique of agitation with its programmes such as the breaking of the notorious Salt Laws, picketing foreign cloth and liquor shops, hartals and strikes, non-payment of taxes (restricted to only a few areas) etc., seemed to be the only way to remove their sufferings.

### **Gandhian socio-economic programmes**

His socio-economic programmes consisted of those of Khadi, village reconstruction, Hindu-Muslim unity, Harijan welfare, etc. To begin with, his programme of Khadi and his anti-industrial theme had a real attraction of the peasants and the artisans who suffered heavily due to the process of modernization and industrialization particularly under colonial conditions. The programme of village reconstruction could immediately get him the support of rural folks who formed the overwhelming majority of Indian population. His programme of Harijan welfare, which included opening of wells, roads and temples and also some humanitarian work, aimed at improving the lot of the untouchables (called Harijans or the people of God by Gandhi), naturally endeared him to the hearts of these people. Thus, this programme indirectly helped to spread the message of nationalism down to the lowest and most oppressed sections of rural society and Harijans in many parts of the country developed a traditional loyalty towards the Congress which helped the party even after independence.

### **Non-cooperation Movement (1921 - 1922)**

The Non-Cooperation movement was launched by the Gandhi-led Congress Party in January 1921 in order to pressurize the British to redress three of its grievances:

- Punjab wrong
- Khilafat wrong
- Denial of Swaraj

Punjab wrong: Indian leadership wanted the British to remedy the 'Punjab wrong', i.e., the British government should express its regret on the happenings in Punjab, particularly in Amritsar.

The government, determined to suppress the nationalist agitation against the Rowlatt Act of 1919 (under this Act, anyone could be arrested and imprisoned without any trial), decided to meet the popular protest with repression, particularly in Punjab. At this time was perpetrated one of the worst political crimes in modern history. An unarmed but large crowd had gathered on 13 April 1919 in the Jallianwalla Bagh (a garden) at Amritsar to protest against the arrest and deportation of two of their popular leaders, (Dr. Satya Pal and Dr. Kitchlu). General Dyer, who had been recently given charge of the town to restore law and order, had already issued a proclamation banning all meetings but it was not made public. The General now surrounded the garden and closed the only exit and opened fire on the large peaceful crowd without any provocation. This massacre of innocent people sent the whole of the Punjab into ferment. As a result, martial law was proclaimed throughout Punjab and the people were subjected to the most uncivilized atrocities such as crawling on the ground, flogging, being deprived of water and electric supplies, etc. People got a glimpse of the ugliness and brutality that lay behind the facade of civilization that imperialism and foreign rule professed.

**Khilafat wrong:** Indians demanded the government to remedy the 'Khilafat Wrong', i.e. the British should adopt a lenient attitude towards Turkey which stood defeated in World War I. The Indian Muslims became apprehensive of the fate of Turkey and its Sultan who was also the Khalifa or the religious head of the Muslims all over the world. The Muslims, therefore, formed a Khilafat Committee under the leadership of the Ali brothers (Maulana Mohammed Ali and Shaukat Ali), Maulana Azad, Hakim Ajmal Khan and Hasrat Mohani. Its purpose was to organize a country wide agitation if the position of the Khalifa was undermined. Britain announced its peace terms to Turkey on 15th May 1920 and decided to abolish the title of Khalifa enjoyed by the Sultan of Turkey. The Central Khilafat Committee adopted the Non-Cooperation resolution (suggested by Mahatma Gandhi) at its Bombay session on 28th May 1920. A meeting of the Hindus and Muslims was held at Allahabad on June 1st and 2nd, and an appeal was made





to the government that Britain should offer better peace terms to Turkey and should not take away the title of the Khalifa. In case the government did not agree to their demand, they would refuse to cooperate with the government. Gandhi and many other Congress leaders viewed the Khilafat agitation as a golden opportunity for bringing the Hindus and Muslims together on the national front. Therefore, the Congress decided to cooperate with the Khilafat movement and club its demand with those of the Khilafat Committee.

**Swaraj issue:** Indians demanded a new scheme of reforms which would take India nearer to its goal of Swaraj. However, the word Swaraj was not yet properly defined by the Congress leaders at this stage.

But the British government had refused to annul the Rowlatt Act, make amends for the atrocities in the Punjab, satisfy the nationalist urge for Swaraj, and offer more lenient terms to Turkey. So, in June, 1920 an all party conference met at Allahabad and approved a programme of boycott of schools, colleges and law courts. The Khilafat Committee launched a non-cooperation movement on 31st August, 1920.

#### **What was the programme of Non-cooperation?**

The Congress, under the leadership of Gandhi, started the Non-cooperation movement in January 1921. The movement included some negative as well as positive programmes. The negative programmes were: surrender of titles and honorary officers and resignation from nominated seats in local bodies; refusal to attend government or semi-government functions; boycott of government schools and colleges by the students and teachers; boycott of British courts by lawyers and litigants; boycott of elections for the councils as suggested by the reforms of 1919; boycott of foreign goods; refusal on the part of the military, clerical and labouring classes to offer themselves as recruits in Mesopotamia. These programmes were negative in nature as through these, Indians sought to refuse to cooperate with the British in administering and exploiting their country for the benefit of the foreign rulers.

Some positive programmes were also undertaken during the non-cooperation movement so that the Indians in general would not have to suffer unduly due to the above mentioned negative programmes and also in order to make the movement a success. They were: establishment of national schools, colleges, and private arbitration courts (known as panchayats) all over India;

popularization of Swadeshi and revival of hand spinning and hand-weaving for producing Khadi (hand-woven cloth); development of harmony between the Hindus and Muslims; removal of untouchability and other measures for Harijan welfare; emancipation and upliftment of women. The first two programmes sought to remove the hardships caused to the people by the negative programmes, while the last three ensured the participation of Muslims, Harijans and women in the Non-cooperation movement.

#### **Phases of Non-cooperation**

Four phases may be distinguished in the course of the movement, specifically responding to successive calls from the Congress. During the first phase, i.e. from January to March 1921, the main emphasis was on students leaving government, schools and colleges and lawyers giving up practice. Even the 'charkha' (the spinning wheel) programme initially had a strong intelligentsia orientation; with students and educated urban people in general being urged to take up spinning on a voluntary basis is a symbol of their identification with the rural masses and as a quick road to Swadeshi. After spectacular beginning with massive student strikes at Calcutta and Lahore and eminent lawyers like C.R. Das and Motilal Nehru giving up their practice, this exclusively intelligentsia movement soon began showing signs of decline.

The second phase (April to June 1921) started when the Vijaywada session of the All India Congress Committee (AICC) found the country not yet sufficiently disciplined, organized and ripe for civil disobedience. So, it decided to concentrate on raising Rs. one crore for the Tilak Swaraj Fund enrolling one crore Congress members and installing 20 lakh charkhas by 30th June.

The third phase covered the period from July to November 1921. In the face of mounting pressures from the masses, the Bombay AICC meeting of July adopted a somewhat more militant stance, concentrating on boycott of foreign cloth (including public bonfires) and boycott of the expected visit of the Prince of Wales in November, though full scale civil disobedience through non-payment of taxes was again postponed. At this juncture, Gandhi gave a call for flooding the prisons with volunteers, and organization of volunteer bands was given top priority. Viceroy Reading quickly grasped the significance of the new mass orientation involved in the picketing and courting of arrest by tens



of thousands. He realized that the change from Gandhi's appeal to intellectuals to appeal to ignorant masses had altered the situation but it had the advantage of bringing intellectuals and persons of property closer to the British. The Prince of Wales was treated with an extremely successful country-wide hartal on 17th November and there were violent clashes in Bombay which made Gandhi denounce the violence and postpone once again plans for civil disobedience in the selected single taluka of Bardoli.

The developments in the fourth phase (between November 1921 and February 1922) nearly brought the government to its knees. Some Khilafat leaders like Hasrat Mohani, angered by the jailing of the Ali brothers in November (for speeches at the Karachi Khilafat), were demanding complete independence and giving up of the non-violence dogma. The new government policy of large-scale arrests and ban on meetings and volunteer groups threatened to alienate the liberals while much of the country seemed to be on the brink of formidable revolt. Gandhi finally decided on the issue of infringed liberties of speech, press and association to begin from the second week of February 1922. As is well known, this campaign, together with the entire movement, was abruptly called off on 11th February, at Gandhi's insistence, following news of the immolation of 22 policemen by angry peasants at Chauri Charua in Gorakhpur district of Uttar Pradesh on 5th February, 1922.

### **Participation in Non-cooperation**

The response of different social groups and classes to the movement was quite varied. To begin with students and teachers actively participated in the movement. Hence, the programme of educational boycott was quite effective, particularly in Bengal. All-India figures collected by the Intelligence Department revealed the impact to have been considerable in colleges, but non-existent at the primary level. A considerable number of national schools and colleges were also founded (like the Jamia Millia Islamia in Aligarh, later shifted to Delhi, the Kashi Vidyapeeth at Banaras and the Gujarat Vidyapeeth) along with 442 institutions started in Bihar and Orissa, 190 in Bengal, 189 in Bombay, and 137 in Uttar Pradesh. Many of these proved short-lived, as the pull of conventional degrees and jobs naturally reasserted itself when Swaraj failed to come in a year but quite a few survived to serve as valuable seminaries of nationalism.

For the peasants, the Gandhian programmes envisaged economic revival through self-help. Panchayats proved very popular in Bihar and Orissa while in Bengal 866 arbitration courts were set up between February 1921 and April 1922 and at their height they considerably outnumbered the government courts. The anti-liquor campaign became formidable partly because lower castes found in it an opportunity for sanskritizing and social upliftment. No definite statistics are available about the impact of the charkha drive but handloom cloth production did go up sharply between 1920 and 1923. The Khilafat agitation made Hindu-Muslim unity a powerful, though temporary fact. Progress regarding untouchability was much less marked, though Gandhi deserves all credit for bringing the issue to the forefront of national politics for the first time.

Labourers seemed to be running amuck throughout 1921 by the middle of 1920. The post war boom had succeeded by a recession particularly in the Calcutta industry, with the mill-owners trying to cut back production with a four-day week. The workers fought back, and there were a number of strikes in Bengali jute mills in 1921. Swami Vishwanand and Swami Dersananand tried to organize the coal miners of the Raniganj-Jharia belt, initially with some help from Indian mine owners fighting European hegemony. Though Gandhi himself did not include strikes, particularly political strikes, in the various programmes of the Non-cooperation movement, some regional Congress leaders did take active part in some strikes, most notably in Bengal and Madras.

The initial appeal for self-sacrifice to the upper and middle classes was hardly successful. Only 24 titles were surrendered out of 5,000 odd, and the number of lawyers giving up practice stood at 180 in March 1921. Polling was low in many places in the November 20 elections, falling to only 8% in Bombay city and 5% in Lahore, but candidates offered themselves in all but 6 out of 637 seats, and council functions could not be disrupted as planned.

A good number of merchants participated in the movement by refusing to indent foreign cloth. The value of imports of foreign cloth fell from Rs. 102 crores in 1920-21 to Rs. 57 crores in 1921-22. For importers of Lancashire cloth, nationalism in 1921 nearly coincided with short term business interests, as with the fall in the rupee sterling exchange ratio, Indian merchants were being asked to pay much more for British goods



than previously contracted for. Their support was decisive in bringing about a qualitative change in the Congress funds. The Congress had only Rs. 43,000 in its coffers in 1920 but was able to collect more than Rs. 130 lakhs between 1921 and 1923.

The big industrialists and capitalists, however, still remained hostile, and an Anti-Non-Cooperation Association was started in 1920 by Purshottamdas Thakurdas, Jamunadas Dwarkadas, Setalvad etc. While the textile was certainly helped by the national Swadeshi upsurge, fear of labour unrest was probably crucial in keeping industrialists ambivalent.

#### **What the Non-cooperation achieved?**

The Non-Cooperation movement, despite its failure to achieve any of its three major objectives, had great significance in the Indian national movement. The Indian nationalist movement, for the first time in its history, acquired a real mass base with the participation of different sections of Indian society and more notably of peasants and workers. The nationalist sentiments reached the remotest corners of the country during this movement. Besides, it transformed the Indian National Congress from a deliberative assembly to an organization for action. The movement, above all, demonstrated the willingness and ability of the people in general to endure hardships and punishments caused by the government to a remarkable degree. The movement also inspired the people for further sacrifices in the cause of national independence.

#### **THE SWARAJIST PARTY**

- When C. R. Das and the other Bengal leaders were in Alipore Central Jail, they evolved a new programme of non-cooperation with the Government through legislatures.
- Their idea was to enter the legislatures in large numbers and “carry on a policy of uniform, continuous and consistent opposition to the Government.” Motilal Nehru also shared the views of C.R. Das. In July 1922, C.R. Das came out of jail and began to carry on propaganda in favour of Council- entry.
- When a meeting of the All-India Congress Committee was held at Calcutta in November 1922, there were differences of opinion among the Congress leaders on the question of Council-entry. While C. R. Das, Motilal Nehru and Hakim Ajmal Khan were in favour of it, C. Rajagopalachari, Dr. Ansari, etc., were opposed to it.
- In spite of lengthy debates, no decision was arrived at. At the annual session of the Congress held at Gaya in December 1922, the “No-changers” won a victory and the programme of Council-entry was rejected. C.R. Das who presided over the session resigned from the Congress and announced his decision to form the Swarajist Party.
- The Object of the new party was to wreck the Government of India Act, 1919 from within the Councils. In March 1923, the first Conference of the Swarajist Party was held at the residence of Motilal Nehru at Allahabad and the future programme of the Party was decided. The keynote of the programme of the Party was obstructionism.
- Its members were to contest elections on the issue of the redress of the wrongs done by the British bureaucracy, to oppose every measure of the Government and to throw-out all legislative enactments proposed by the British Government. The view of the Swarajists was that the seats in the legislatures must be captured so that they did not fall into the hands of undesirable persons who were tools in the hands of the bureaucracy in India.
- Leaders of the Swarajist Party declared that outside the Councils, they would co-operate with the constructive programme of the Congress under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi and in case their methods failed, they would, without any hesitation, join Mahatma Gandhi’s Civil Disobedience Movement, if and when launched by him.
- The Swarajist Party fought the elections in 1923 and refused to come to any understanding with the Liberal Federation. The Swarajist Party won a majority in the Legislative Council of the Central Provinces.
- It was the dominant Party in Bengal. It also won good support in U.P. and Bombay. However, the Swarajist party was at its best in the Central Assembly under the leadership of Motilal Nehru. By winning over the support of the Nationalist Party and a few other members, the Swarajist Party was able to command a working majority and was thus able to accomplish a lot.
- On 18th February, 1924, the Swarajist Party was able to get a resolution passed by which the



Government was requested to establish full responsible Government in India. A demand was also made that a Round Table Conference consisting of the representatives of India should be called at an early date to frame a Constitution for India.

- The appointment of the Muddiman Committee was the result of a resolution of the Swarajist Party. Motilal Nehru was requested to become a member of this Committee but he refused. Some of the demands in the budget of 1924-25 were rejected by the Central Assembly as a result of the efforts of the Swarajist Party.
- The Assembly also refused to allow the Government to introduce the entire Finance Bill. In February 1925, V.J. Patel introduced a Bill asking for the repeal of certain laws and with the

exception of one, the Bill was passed. A resolution was passed with the help of the Swarajist Party demanding the release of certain political prisoners.

- The Swarajists resorted to walkouts as a mark of protest against the policy of the Government. They boycotted all receptions, parties or functions organized by the Government. What was done in the Central Assembly was also done in those provincial legislatures where the Swarajists had some influence.
- For the first time, the Legislative Assembly wore the appearance of a truly National Assembly where national grievances were fully voiced, national aims and aspirations expressed without any reservation and real character of the British rule exposed. The British autocracy and Indian bureaucracy stood exposed to the whole world.

