

## 8<sup>th</sup> – The Making of the National Movement II



**The advent of Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948):** In these circumstances that Mahatma Gandhi emerged as a mass leader. Gandhiji, aged 46, arrived in India in 1915 from South Africa. Mahatma Gandhi spent his first year in India travelling throughout the country, understanding the people, their needs and the overall situation.

• His earliest interventions were in local movements in Champaran, Kheda and Ahmadabad where he came into contact with Rajendra Prasad and Vallabhbhai Patel. In Ahmadabad he led a successful millworkers strike in 1918.

**The Rowlett Satyagraha:** In 1919, Gandhiji gave a call for a Satyagraha against the Rowlett Act that the British had just passed. This act empowered the government to imprison anyone without a trial, and to search any place without a warrant. The act curbed fundamental rights such as the freedom of expression and strengthened police powers. Mahatma Gandhi, Mohammad Ali Jinnah and others felt that the government had no right to restrict people's basic freedoms. They criticized the act as "devilish" and tyrannical. Gandhiji asked the Indian people to observe 6 April 1919 as a day of non-violent opposition to this act, as a day of "humiliation and prayer" and hartal (strike). Satyagraha Sabhas were set up to launch the movement.

**The Jalliwala Bagh massacre:** In 13 April 1919, a group of peaceful protesters, women included children and old people, gathered in Jalliwala Bagh in Amritsar to condemn the deportment of two nationalist leaders, Satya Pal and Dr. Saifuddin Kitchlew. All of a sudden, General Dyer, a British officer, entered the park with troops, blocked the only exit, and ordered his troops to fire at the people assembled. Hundreds died and thousands were injured because there was no way to escape. General Dyer remained unrepentant of this inhuman act till the end.

**Khilafat Agitation and the Non-Cooperation Movement:**

- The khilafat issue was one such cause. In 1920 the British imposed a harsh treaty on the Turkish sultan or khalifa. Indian Muslims were keen that the khalifa be allowed to retain control over Muslims sacred places in the erstwhile Ottoman empire.
- The leaders of the khilafat agitation, Mohammad Ali and Shaukat Ali, now wished to initiate a full-fledged non-cooperation Movement. Gandhiji supported their call and urged the congress to campaign against "Punjab wrongs" (Jallianwala massacre), the khilafat wrong and demand swaraj.

**People's Initiatives:**

- In many cases people resisted British rule non-violently. In others, different classes and groups, interpreting Gandhiji's call in their own manner, protested in ways that were not in accordance with his ideas. In Kheda, Gujarat, Patidar peasants organized non-violent campaigns against the high land revenue demand of the British. In coastal Andhra and interior Tamil Nadu, liquor shops were picketed.
- In the Guntur district of Andhra Pradesh, tribal's and poor peasants staged a number of "forest satyagrahas", sometimes sending their cattle into forests without paying grazing fee. They were protesting because the colonial state had restricted their use of forest resources in various ways. They believed that Gandhiji would get their taxes reduced and have the forest regulations abolished. In many forest villages, peasants proclaimed swaraj and believed that "Gandhiji raj" was about to be established.



## 8<sup>th</sup> – The Making of the National Movement II



- In Sind (now in Pakistan), Muslim traders and peasants were very enthusiastic about the khilafat call. In Bengal too, the Khilafat- Non-Cooperation alliance gave enormous communal unity and strength to the national movement.
- In Punjab, the Akali agitation of the Sikhs sought to remove corrupt mahants-supported by the british- from their gurdwaras. This movement got closely identified with the Non- Cooperation Movement. In Assam, tea garden laborers, shouting “Gandhi Maharaj Ki Jai”, demanded a big increase in their wages. They left the British- owned plantations amidst declarations that they were following Gandhiji wish. Interestingly, in the Assamese Vaishnava songs of the period the reference to Krishna was substituted by “Gandhi Raja”.

### Purna Swaraj

- At this time, there arose a new group of young leaders including Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhash Chandra Bose. They were deeply influenced by the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the ideas of socialism.
- Socialists believed of resources among people. On his return from England, he came under the influence of Gandhi and joined the freedom struggle. Nehru realized the need to take up the cause of the common people, and spent much of his efforts actually seeing the condition of the people for himself.

**Subhash Chandra Bose** popularly known as Netaji later on, he played an important role in involving students in the freedom struggle. Under the leadership of Nehru and Bose, the nationalist movement became increasingly militant, wanting not just swaraj but Purna swaraj or Complete independence.

**The people’s Mahatma:** People thought of Gandhiji as a kind of messiah, as someone who could help them overcome their misery and poverty. Gandhiji wished to build class unity, not class conflict, yet peasants could imagine that they would help them in their fight against Zamindaras, and agricultural laborers' believed he would provide them land. At times, ordinary people credited Gandhiji with their own achievements.

### The happenings of 1922-1929:

- Mahatma Gandhi, was against violent movements. He abruptly called off the Non- Cooperation Movement when in February 1922 a crowd of peasants set fire to a police station in Chauri Chaura. The peasants were provoked because the police had fired on their peaceful demonstration.
- Once the Non- Cooperation movement was over, Gandhiji’s followers stressed that the Congress must undertake constructive work in the rural areas. Other leaders such as Chitta Ranjan Das and Motilal Nehru argued that the party should fight elections to the councils and enter them in order to influence government policies. Through sincere social work in villages in the mid- 1920s, the Gandhians were able to extend their support base. This proved to be very useful in launching the Civil Disobedience movement in 1930.
- Two important developments of the mid-1920s were the formation of the **Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS)**, a Hindu organization, and the Communist party of India. These parties have held very different ideas about the kind of country India should be. The decade closed with the Congress resolving to fight for Purna Swaraj (complete independence) in 1929 under the president ship of Jawaharlal Nehru. Consequently, “independence Day” was observed on 26 January 1930 all over the country.

### The Simon commission (1927)



## 8<sup>th</sup> – The Making of the National Movement II



- Lord Reading was a viceroy of India from 1921 to 1926. He believed that the growing national movement could be easily suppressed if further constitutional reforms were carried out. The British government appointed a commission under Sir John Simon in 1927. The main purpose of the Simon commission was to take a decision on self-government for India.
- Not a single Indian member was included in Simon Commission. Indians all over the country criticized the fact that a body meant to decide Indian political future did not include a single Indian. The Congress, the Muslim League and the Hind Mahasabha decided to boycott the commission from England in February 1928.
- It was greeted with demonstrations, black flags and the slogan, 'Simon Go back'. Bhagat Singh, a revolutionary, killed Saunders, the British officer who had ordered the lathi charge. He was hanged on 23 March 1929. The Simon Commission submitted its report in 1930.

**The Gandhi-Irwin Pact (1931)** While the Civil Disobedience Movement was in full swing, the First Round Table Conference to discuss the recommendations of the Simon Commission was convened in London in November 1930. The Congress boycotted the conference. The British government realized that without the participation of the Congress, no decision could be taken on further constitutional reforms in India.

**The Second Round Table Conference (1931)** Mahatma Gandhi was deputed as the sole representative of the Congress at the **Second Round Table Conference** that was held at the end of 1931. The Muslim League was represented by Mohammad Ali Jinnah. Gandhi forcefully put forth the nationalist demand for independence and the immediate grant of dominion status to India. The British government refused and Gandhi returned disillusioned and disappointed.

**The Government of India Act (1935)**

The Third Round Conference was held in November 1932. Once again, the Congress did not participate. After the conference, the British Government passed the Government of India Act of 1935.

By the 1935 Act:

- India was to become a federation based on union of the provinces of British India and princely states. However, it was not binding on the princely states to join the federation.
- The right to vote was given only to the proper and other privileged classes.
- India at the time consisted of two parts one was ruled by the British; the other comprised principalities or princely states. Although the princely rulers ruled their states, they had no real powers and were completely at the mercy of the British. Most of Indian rulers led lives of luxury, and cared little for the welfare of their own subjects, whose conditions were often worse than that of the people of British India.

**The March to Dandi:**

- Purna Swaraj would never come on its own. It had to be fought for. In 1930, Gandhiji declared that he would lead a march to break the salt law. According to this law, the state had a monopoly on the manufacture and sale of salt. Mahatma Gandhi along with other nationalists reasoned that it was sinful to tax salt since it is such an essential item of our food.
- The Salt March related to the general shared by everybody, and thus did not divide the rich and the poor. Gandhi Ji and his followers marched for over 240 miles



## 8<sup>th</sup> – The Making of the National Movement II



from Sabarmati to the coastal town of Dandi where they broke the government law by gathering natural salt found on the seashore, and boiling sea water to produce salt.

### Quit India and Later:

- Mahatma Gandhi decided to initiate a new phase of movement against the British in the middle of the Second World War. The British must quit India immediately, he told them.
- To the people he said, “Do or die” in your effort to fight the British- but you must fight- non- violently. Gandhi Ji and other leaders were jailed at once but the movement spread. It specially attracted peasants and the youth who gave up their studies to join it. Communications and symbols of state authority were attacked all over the country. In many areas the people set up their own governments.

### Towards independence and Partition:

- Meanwhile, in 1940 the Muslim League had moved a resolution demanding “independent States” for Muslims in the north- western and eastern areas of the country. From the late 1930s, the league began viewing the Muslims as a separate “nation” from the Hindus.
- More importantly, the provincial elections of 1937 seemed to have convinced the League that Muslims were a minority, and they would always have to play second fiddle in any democratic structure. It feared that Muslims may even go unrepresented. The Congress’s rejection of the League’s desire to form a joint Congress- League government in the United Provinces in 1937 also annoyed the League.
- The Congress’s failure to mobilize the Muslims masses in the 1930s allowed the League to widen its social support. It sought to enlarge its support in early 1940s when most congress leaders were in jail. At the end of the war in 1945, the British opened negotiations with the congress, the league and themselves for the independence of India. The talks failed because the league saw itself as the sole spokesperson of India’s Muslims.
- Elections to the Provinces were again held in 1946. The Congress did well in the “General” constituencies but the League success in the seats reserved for Muslims was spectacular. It persisted with its demand for “Pakistan”. In March 1946 the British cabinet sent a three- member mission to Delhi to examine this demand and to suggest a suitable political framework for a free India. This mission suggested that India should remain united and constitute itself as a loose confederation with some autonomy for Muslim- majority areas.
- But it could not get the Congress and the Muslim League to agree to specific details of the proposal. Partition now became more or less inevitable. After the failure of the Cabinet Mission, the Muslim League decided on mass agitation for winning its Pakistan demand. It announced 16 august 1946 as “Direct Action Day”. By March 1947 violence spread to different parts of northern India.
- Many hundred thousand people were killed and numerous women had to face untold brutalities during the partition. Partition also meant that India changed, many of its cities changed, and a new country- Pakistan - was born. So, the joy of our country’s independence from British rule came mixed with the pain and violence of Partition.