

CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE MOVEMENT

Civil disobedience movement was a landmark event in the Indian Nationalist movement. In many ways, the civil disobedience movement is credited for paving the way for freedom in India. It was significant in many ways as it was a movement spread to the urban areas and witnessed the participation of women and people belonging to the lower castes.

Civil Disobedience Movement- How it Began

Civil disobedience was initiated under the stewardship of Mahatma Gandhi. It was launched after the observance of Independence Day in 1930. The civil disobedience movement commenced with the infamous Dandi march when Gandhi left the Sabarmati Ashram at Ahmedabad on foot with 78 other members of the Ashram for Dandi on 12 March 1930. After reaching Dandi, Gandhi broke the salt law. It was considered illegal to make salt as it was solely a government monopoly. The salt satyagraha led to a widespread acceptance of the civil Disobedience movement across the country. This event became symbolic of people's defiance of the government policies.

Effects of the movement

Following Gandhi's footsteps, C. Rajgopalchari in Tamil Nadu led a similar march from Trichinopoly to Vedaranyam. At the same time Sarojini Naidu, a prominent leader in the congress led the movement in Darasana in Gujarat. The police opened a lathi charge which led to over 300 satyagrahis being severely injured. Consequently, there were demonstrations, hartals, a boycott of foreign goods, and later refusal to pay taxes. A lakh of participants including women participated in this movement.

Reaction by the British government

In order to consider the reforms by the Simon Commission, the British government convened the first round table conference in November 1930. It was however boycotted by the Indian National Congress. The conference was attended by Indian princes, the Muslim League, Hindu Mahasabha, and some others. However, nothing came of it. The British realized that without the participation of congress no real constitutional changes would come about.

The viceroy, Lord Irwin made efforts to persuade Congress to join the second round table congress. Gandhi and Irwin reached an agreement wherein the government agreed to release all political prisoners against whom there were no charges of violence and in turn congress would suspend the civil disobedience movement. In the Karachi session in 1931, presided over by Vallabhbhai Patel, it was decided that the congress would participate in the 2nd round table congress. Gandhi represented the session which met in September 1931.

The Karachi Session

At the Karachi session, an important resolution of fundamental rights and economic policy was passed. Besides laying down the policy of the nationalist movement on social and economic problems facing the country, it guaranteed fundamental rights to the people irrespective of caste and religion and favoured the nationalisation of industries. The session met with the participation of Indian princes, Hindu, Muslim and Sikh communal leaders. However, the sole reason for their participation was to promote their vested interests. None of them were interested in the independence of India. Due to this, the second round table conference was met with a failure and

no agreement could be reached. The government repression intensified and Gandhi and many other leaders were arrested. In all about 12,000 people were arrested. After the withdrawal of the movement in 1939, Congress passed a resolution that demanded that a constituent assembly, elected by the people on the basis of adult franchise, be convened. And that only such an assembly could frame the constitution for India. Even though Congress did not succeed, this garnered vast sections of the people to participate in the mass struggle. Radical objectives for the transformation of Indian society were also adopted.

Impact of Civil Disobedience Movement

The impact of the civil disobedience movement reverberated far and wide. It created distrust towards the British government and laid the foundation for the freedom struggle, and popularised the new method of propaganda like the Prabhat, pheris, pamphlets, etc. Following the defiance of forest law in Maharashtra, Karnataka, and Central province and the refusal to pay the rural 'Chaukidari tax' in Eastern India, the government ended the oppressive salt tax.