

# **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.

The observance of the Independence Day in 1930 was followed by the launching of the Civil Disobedience Movement under the leadership of Gandhi. It began with the famous Dandi March of Gandhi. On 12 March 1930, Gandhi left the Sabarmati Ashram at Ahmadabad on foot with 78 other members of the Ashram for Dandi, a village on the western sea-coast of India, at a distance of about 385 km from Ahmadabad. They reached Dandi on 6 April 1930. There, Gandhi broke the salt law. It was illegal for anyone to make salt as it was a government monopoly. Gandhi defied the government by picking up a handful of salt which had been formed by the evaporation of sea. The defiance of the salt law was followed by the spread of Civil Disobedience Movement all over the country. Making of salt spread throughout the country in the first phase of the civil disobedience movement, it became a symbol of the people's defiance of the government.

## **Effects of the movement**

In Tamil Nadu, C. Rajgopalchari led a march-similar to the Dandi march-from Trichinopoly to Vedaranyam. In Dharsana, in Gujarat, Sarojini Naidu, the famous poetess who was a prominent leader of the congress and had been president of the congress, led non-violent satyagrahis in a march to the salt depots owned by the government. Over 300 satyagrahis were severely injured and two killed in the brutal lathi charge by the police. There were demonstrations, hartals, boycott of foreign goods, and later refusal to pay taxes. Lakhs of people participated in the movement, including a large number of women.

## **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, of the congress, an important resolution of fundamental rights and economic policy was passed. It laid down the policy of the nationalist movement on social and economic problems facing the country. It mentioned the fundamental rights which would be guaranteed to the people irrespective of caste and religion, and it favoured nationalisation of certain industries, promotion of Indian industries, and schemes for the welfare of workers and peasants. This resolution showed the growing influence of the ideals of socialism on the nationalist movement. Besides Gandhi, who was the sole representative of the congress, there were other Indians who participated in this conference. They included Indian princes, Hindu, Muslim and Sikh communal leaders. These leaders played into the hands of the British. The princes were mainly interested in preserving their position as rulers. The communal leaders had been selected by the British government to attend the conference. They claimed to be the representatives of their respective communities and not the country, though their influences within their communities were also limited. Gandhi alone as the representative of the congress represented the whole country.

Neither the princes nor the communal leaders were interested in India's independence. Therefore, no agreement could be reached and the second round table conference ended in a failure. Gandhi returned to India and the Civil Disobedience Movement was revived. The government repression had been continuing even while the conference was going on and now it was intensified. Gandhi and other leaders were arrested. The government's efforts to suppress the movement may be seen from the fact that in about a year 120000 persons were sent to jail. The movement was withdrawn in 1934. The congress passed an important resolution in 1934. It demanded that a constituent assembly, elected by the people on the basis of adult franchise, be convened. It declared that only such an assembly could frame a constitution for India. It thus asserted that only the people had the right to decide the form of government under which they would live. Though the congress had failed to achieve its objective, it had succeeded in mobilizing vast sections of the people in the second great mass struggle in the country. It had also adopted radical objectives for the transformation of Indian society.

## **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.