

MAHATMA GANDHI AND THE NATIONAL MOVEMENT

Mahatma Gandhi: Early Life

Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948) played a pivotal role in India's independence movement. Born in Porbandar, Gujarat, he studied law in England and later worked in South Africa (1893-1914), where he fought against racial discrimination and developed his philosophy of Satyagraha (truth and non-violence). Returning to India in 1915, he led significant struggles in Champaran, Ahmedabad, and Kheda.

Key Methods of Struggle

- **Satyagraha:** Non-violent resistance against injustice.
- **Non-violence:** No harm through words or actions.
- **Swadeshi:** Promotion of local goods, self-sufficiency.
- **Mass Movement:** Involving people of all backgrounds in the struggle.

Early Satyagrahas

- **Champaran Satyagraha (1917):** Fought against forced indigo cultivation.
- **Ahmedabad Satyagraha (1918):** Supported mill workers for wage hikes.
- **Kheda Satyagraha (1918):** Helped peasants demand tax relief after crop failure.

Non-Cooperation Movement (1920-1922)

Initiated due to post-WWI British oppression, Rowlatt Act, and Jallianwala Bagh Massacre.

Causes:

- **Khilafat Movement:** Support for the Ottoman Caliph.
- **Rowlatt Act (1919):** Allowed imprisonment without trial.
- **Jallianwala Bagh Massacre (1919):** British troops killed hundreds of peaceful protestors.

Objectives:

- Attain self-government within the British Empire.
- Annul the Rowlatt Act.
- Restore the status of the Ottoman Caliph.

Programmes:

- Boycott British institutions, foreign goods, and government services.
- Promote swadeshi and khadi.
- Establish national schools and colleges.

Course & Impact:

- Leaders like Motilal Nehru and Rajendra Prasad gave up careers.
- People left government schools and colleges.
- Movement was suppressed; Gandhi suspended it after the violent **Chauri Chaura incident (1922)**.
- Created mass national consciousness but failed in its immediate objectives.

Civil Disobedience Movement (1930-1934)

Launched in response to British failure to grant constitutional reforms.

Causes:

- **Simon Commission (1927)**: Excluded Indian members.
- **Nehru Report (1928)**: Demanded Dominion Status.
- **Declaration of Poorna Swaraj (1929)**: Complete independence became the goal.

Key Events:

- **Dandi March (1930)**: Gandhi's symbolic act of making salt defied British laws.

- **Widespread Boycotts:** People refused to pay taxes, picketed liquor shops, and protested British laws.
- **Red Shirts Movement:** Led by Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan in Northwest India.
- **Brutal Repression:** Over 90,000 Satyagrahis were imprisoned.

Round Table Conferences & Gandhi-Irwin Pact (1931):

- Gandhi participated in the **Second Round Table Conference (1931)** but failed to secure concessions.
- **Civil Disobedience resumed in 1932**, met with harsh suppression.
- Movement declined by 1934 but had long-term effects.

Impact of the Movements

- **Mass Participation:** Workers, women, students, and peasants joined the struggle.
- **Strengthened Nationalism:** Created a unified resistance against British rule.
- **Women's Empowerment:** Women actively engaged in protests and nationalist activities.
- **Social Reforms:** Access to public spaces for lower castes improved.
- **Constitutional Reforms:** Led to the **Government of India Act, 1935**, paving the way for self-governance.

Conclusion

Though neither movement directly achieved independence, both played crucial roles in mobilizing the masses, fostering national unity, and pressuring the British government. The groundwork laid by these movements culminated in India's independence in 1947.