

A STUDY ON SALT SATYAGRAHA MOVEMENT BY GANDHI

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ABSTRACT:

Salt March, also called Dandi March or Salt Satyagraha, major nonviolent protest action in India led by Mohandas (Mahatma) Gandhi in March–April 1930. The march was the first act in an even-larger campaign of civil disobedience (satyagraha) Gandhi waged against British rule in India that extended into early 1931 and garnered Gandhi widespread support among the Indian populace and considerable worldwide attention. Salt production and distribution in India had long been a lucrative monopoly of the British. Through a series of laws, the Indian populace was prohibited from producing or selling salt independently, and instead Indians were required to buy expensive, heavily taxed salt that often was imported. This affected the great majority of Indians, who were poor and could not afford to buy it. Indian protests against the salt tax began in the 19th century and remained a major contentious issue throughout the period of British rule of the subcontinent.

Introduction:

On March 12, 1930, Mahatma Gandhi embarked a historic Salt March from Sabarmati Ashram in Gujarat's Ahmedabad to the village of Dandi in the state's coastal area to protest against the steep tax the British levied on salt. The significant march came to be known as *Dandi March* or Salt March, also referred as the *Dandi Satyagraha*. The Salt March was a The 24-day Salt March, which was non-violent in nature, is historically significant as it led to the mass Civil Disobedience Movement.

Here's all we need to know about the Salt March or Dandi March:

1. The Salt March began on March 12, 1930 and continued till April 6, 1930. It was a 24-day non-violent march led by Mahatma Gandhi.
2. During that time, the British had prohibited Indians from collecting or selling salt. Indians were also forced to buy the staple diet ingredient from the British, who, not only exercised monopoly over its manufacture and sale but also levied a heavy salt tax. The Salt March was a collective beginning of a mass resistance movement against the British tyranny.
3. Upon reaching the seashore in *Dandi*, Mahatma Gandhi broke the law by producing illegal salt. This later turned into a mass civil disobedience movement throughout India as millions broke salt laws by either making salt or buying illegal salt.
4. The Salt March began with around 80 people, but as more and more people joined in for the 390 km-long journey, it grew into a strong force of 50,000 people.
5. The Salt March got national and international recognition and shook the Britishers with its non-violent nature. It got massive press coverage and drew the world's attention towards the Indian Independence Movement.

Indians campaign for independence (Salt Satyagraha), 1930-1931

Goals:

To end the British monopoly on salt, decrease dependence on foreign cloth, reduce land revenue assessments, build unity among Hindus and Muslims of all economic and social classes, and ultimately end British colonial rule over India and declare Purna Swaraj (complete independence).

The Salt Satyagraha campaign that began in 1930 sought to continue previous efforts that had attempted to undermine British colonial rule in India and establish Purna Swaraj (complete self-rule). The previous nationwide nonviolent campaign for independence (1919-22) had been called off by Gandhi because it broke into disarray and violence, even though it had been preceded by local campaigns: a campaign in Champaran (Indian peasants in Champaran campaign for rights, 1917) and a textile workers strike in Ahmedabad in 1918. Gandhi decided that Indians needed still more training and experience, through successful local struggles and through developing alternative institutions (see “Vykom Untouchables campaign for human rights (Vykom Temple Road Satyagraha), India, 1924-25” and “Bardoli peasants campaign against the Government of Bombay, 1928”). On New Year's Eve 1929 the leaders of the Indian National Congress declared themselves ready to raise the tricolor flag of India and call for Purna Swaraj.

Led by Mohandas K. Gandhi, the Congress's Working Committee decided to target the 1882 British Salt Act that gave the British a monopoly on the collection and manufacture of salt and allowed them to levy a salt tax. Although he faced initial ambivalence and opposition to the idea of targeting the Salt Laws, Gandhi asserted that salt would help unite Indians of all religious communities, castes, and regions for salt represented a basic and crucial dietary need that the British colonial government monopolized for its own benefit. By encouraging all Indians to defy the Salt Laws by manufacturing and selling salt themselves, Gandhi argued, Indians could collectively challenge the authority of the Raj.

With the help of the Working Committee, Gandhi planned to stage a 240-mile march from his ashram in Ahmedabad to the coastal village of Dandi where he would publicly break the Salt Laws on 6 April 1930. In preparation for the march that would begin on 12 March, the Working Committee contacted American, European, and Indian news media in order to ensure that a wide audience learned of the action. Before the march began, however, Gandhi wrote a letter to British Viceroy Lord Irwin on 2 March in which he offered to stop the march if the viceroy were to meet the Congress's demands. When Irwin ignored the letter and refused to meet with Gandhi, the Committee decided to move forward with the march.

On 12 March 1930, Gandhi and dozens of followers began their 24-day march to Dandi. During this campaign against the British salt monopoly, Gandhi stopped at many villages where he spoke out against the Salt Laws, encouraged Indian officials to resign from their posts, and urged Indians to boycott foreign cloth. As the drama of the march to Dandi continued to draw international media attention (with foreign journalists writing about and documenting the march), thousands of Indians (including Muslims and untouchables) joined Gandhi along the way.

On 5 April 1930, Gandhi and his fellow marchers reached the shores of Dandi, and the next morning the Indian leader bent down and picked up a clump of mud and salt—symbolizing a defiant breakage of the British Salt Laws. Gandhi's action emboldened millions of other Indians to break the Salt Laws by producing it themselves, buying it illegally, and refusing to pay the tax.

British officials were at first hesitant to make arrests for fear of creating martyrs and justifying Gandhi's claims about the repressiveness of the Raj. So in order to continue pressuring the government, Gandhi announced on 24 April a planned non-violent raid on the salt works at Dharasana, just 25 miles south of Dandi. As before, Gandhi wrote to Viceroy

Lord Irwin about the planned action and possible ways to avoid it. However, Gandhi's letter was met with his arrest on the night of 4 May 1930, a few days before the action was to take place.

When Abbas Tybaji and Kasturbhai Gandhi attempted to lead the volunteers who would participate in the action, they too were arrested. However, the poet and Working Committee member Sarojini Naidu then stepped in and helped lead the volunteers in performing the action.

In their attempt to raid the salt works, hundreds of non-violent volunteers were beaten with steel-tipped lathis and arrested. Many were badly injured. The action lasted until 6 June 1930, and throughout this time foreign journalists from both the United States and Europe reported on and filmed the non-violent actions and subsequent beatings, helping to spur international condemnation for the British crackdown.

The Indian National Congress, its Working Committee, and other affiliated groups were banned and their buildings seized. Censorship of Congress correspondence was also imposed and emergency ordinances, including the Emergency Powers Ordinance, were drafted in the summer of 1930.

The Indians escalated their campaign, and in the summer months the British colonial government increased its crackdown on the Indians who mounted an overwhelming number of civil disobedience actions in all parts of India. British authorities imposed a curfew, banned large assemblies and marches, seized property, and arrested thousands. In response to the various acts of civil disobedience and breaking of laws, police officers and military troops often beat protesters and shot at them.

Protesters did occasionally respond with violence to police crackdowns and raids. For example, despite the Congress's calls for non-violence, in April 1930 protesters raided a local armory and violently fought with police and soldiers. In another incident, marchers responded to a police raid on the Congress headquarters in May 1930 by pursuing the police back to their station, hurling bricks, stones, and bottles, and threatening to torch the building.

In response to the ongoing civil disobedience campaign, the British colonial government arrested and imprisoned over 60,000 people. However, as Indians began to take increasing pride in serving jail time and defying the British, acts of civil disobedience continued. Some of the most widespread methods were defying the salt laws, withholding taxes, and boycotting foreign cloth.

One of the centers of the campaign was in the Northwest Province, by Muslim Pashtun people led by Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan (see "Pashtuns campaign against the British Empire in India, 1930-1931"). The British dropped bombs on people in Peshawar to try to stamp out the nonviolent resistance.

Towards the end of 1930, the civil disobedience campaign began to wane. Many Congress leaders had been arrested, the industrial workers did not turn out in large numbers, and religious divisions among Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs continued to hinder much of the movement. Around this time, growing numbers of Indians began urging Congress members to come to an agreement with the colonial government.

Although representatives from Congress did not attend the Roundtable Conference in London a conference at which decisions concerning India's constitutional change were made,

Viceroy Lord Irwin announced on 24 January 1931 that all Working Committee members would be released from jail unconditionally.

Following Gandhi's own release from prison and realizing that a compromise would need to be made, he sent a letter to the viceroy in February in which he requested a meeting. During their talks, Gandhi and the viceroy debated and bargained over several points, and in the end struck an uneasy bargain. Congress would end the civil disobedience campaign, while "...the government would repeal the repressive ordinances, withdraw the punitive police, free prisoners, and allow banned organizations to resume operations. Indian officials who had quit their jobs would get them back, so long as the jobs had not been permanently filled in the interim. On the other hand, there would be no inquiry into police abuses. Farmers could not recover seized land that had been sold. Peaceful picketing of cloth and liquor shops could continue, but not as a political sanction. As although the salt laws would stay in place, the government would not interfere with small-scale manufacture for domestic use." (Ackerman and Duvall, p. 103-104).

Many Indians were unhappy with the terms of the truce, and some continued to engage in acts of civil disobedience. In August 1931, Gandhi sailed to England to attend the next Roundtable conference as the sole representative of Congress. When the talks became deadlocked and ultimately failed to form any concrete steps towards Indian independence, Gandhi and other Congress members tried to revive civil disobedience. However, with a new viceroy in place, the colonial government took pre-emptive measures by passing new ordinances and arresting hundreds including several Congress leaders. This new round of civil disobedience would not end formally for another two years, but was no longer an immediate threat to the British after its first six months.

The Salt Satyagraha has become an iconic campaign within the history of nonviolent struggle not because it accomplished its short-term goals – it did not – but because it delegitimized British rule. The earlier, widespread assumption among Indians was that the British really were superior and their humane ways of governing their empire gradually supported the development of India and would eventually give way to a dominion status in which Indians could pursue their interests with fairness and dignity. The Salt Satyagraha created a sea change in that attitude. The Indian millions on the sidelines could for the first time see that Gandhi was right when he said that Empire was a deadly business proposition requiring coercion to drive the British out. The naked brutality and unyielding rigidity of Britain, even to such an elementary change as giving up its salt monopoly, turned the millions of acquiescent Indians into agents of change.

Conclusion

Civil disobedience broke out all across India, soon involving millions of Indians, and British authorities arrested more than 60,000 people. Gandhi himself was arrested on May 5, but the satyagraha continued without him. On May 21, the poet Sarojini Naidu led 2,500 marchers on the Dharasana Salt Works, some 150 miles north of Bombay. Several hundred British-led Indian policemen met them and viciously beat the peaceful demonstrators. The incident, recorded by American journalist Webb Miller, prompted an international outcry against British policy in India. In January 1931, Gandhi was released from prison. He later met with Lord Irwin, the viceroy of India, and agreed to call off the satyagraha in exchange for an equal negotiating role at a London conference on India's future. In August of that year,

Gandhi travelled to the conference as the sole representative of the nationalist Indian National Congress. The meeting was a disappointment, but British leaders had acknowledged Gandhi as a force they could not suppress or ignore.

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