

ROLE OF GANDHIJI IN NON COOPERATIVE MOVEMENT IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT:

Gandhi's message was simple: it was not British guns but imperfections of Indians themselves that kept their country in bondage. His program, the nonviolent noncooperation movement against the British government, included boycotts not only of British manufactures but of institutions operated or aided by the British in India: legislatures, courts, offices, schools. The campaign electrified the country, broke the spell of fear of foreign rule, and led to the arrests of thousands of satyagrahis, who defied laws and cheerfully lined up for prison. Non cooperative movement signified a new chapter in the history of Indian freedom struggle.

Introduction

The Non-Cooperation Movement was a significant phase of the Indian independence movement from British rule. It was led by Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi after the Jallianwala Bagh Massacre. It aimed to resist British rule in India through nonviolent means, "Ahimsa". Protesters would refuse to buy British goods, adopt the use of local handicrafts and picket liquor shops. The ideas of Ahimsa and nonviolence, and Gandhi's ability to rally hundreds of thousands of common citizens towards the cause of Indian independence, were first seen on a large scale in this movement through the summer of 1920. Gandhi feared that the movement might lead to popular violence. The non-cooperation movement was launched on 1 August 1920. The Non-cooperation movement was a reaction to the oppressive policies of the British Indian government such as the Rowlatt Act and the Jallianwala Bagh massacre. A meeting of civilians held at Jallianwala Bagh near the Golden Temple in Amritsar was fired upon by soldiers under the command of Brigadier-General Reginald Dyer, killing and injuring thousands of protestors. The outcry generated by the massacre led to thousands of unrests and more deaths at the hands of the police. The massacre became the most infamous event of British rule in India. A new chapter in the history of India's struggle for independence was opened with the non-cooperation movement in 1920. Based on the principles of non-violence and boycott, this movement was launched formally on August 1, 1920.

Features of the non-cooperation movement

- The movement was essentially a peaceful and non-violent protest against the British government in India.
- Indians were asked to relinquish their titles and resign from nominated seats in the local bodies as a mark of protest.
- People were asked to resign from their government jobs.
- People were asked to withdraw their children from government-controlled or aided schools and colleges.
- People were asked to boycott foreign goods and use only Indian-made goods.
- People were asked to boycott the elections to the legislative councils.
- People were asked not to serve in the British army.

- It was also planned that if the above steps did not bring results, people would refuse to pay their taxes.
- The INC also demanded Swarajya or self-government.
- Only completely non-violent means would be employed to get the demands fulfilled.
- The non-cooperation movement was a decisive step in the independence movement because for the first time, the INC was ready to forego constitutional means to achieve self-rule.
- Gandhiji had assured that Swaraj would be achieved in a year if this movement was continued to completion

What was the Non-Cooperation Movement?

Non-cooperation movement was started by Mahatma Gandhi in 1920 to drive the British out of the country. Non-cooperation movement was nothing but a declaration of peaceful; and non-violent war against the atrocities of the British government which had gone back on its words.

The Non-cooperation Movement meant active refusal to abide by the laws and regulations passed by the government.

- An appeal was made to all the Indians to surrender their titles and to boycott the law courts, the educational institutions and the election of the legislatures.
- It was thought in the beginning that this would be enough to emphasis upon the government the need for greater reforms and more amenities in the administration of the country.
- However, it was planned that, in case, it did not succeed in bringing down the Government; the payment of taxes would be refused.

Causes of the Movement

1. Disillusion at the end of the war: There were some Indians who did not want to cooperate with the government during the war but Gandhiji thought it improper to take advantage of the weak position of the rulers. With the outbreak of the World War I, India came to be involved in the War as a part of the British Empire.

The British Government utilized India's wealth, money and manpower for its own interest. About 1.25 million Indian soldiers fought on behalf of the British in different war fronts and many of them sacrificed their lives. They also donated about six crores and 21 lac pounds as war subscription.

So, Indians expected that in return of this valuable service, the British Government would grant autonomy to them at the end of the War. But they were greatly disillusioned. This dissatisfaction was one of the causes of the Non-cooperation Movement by Gandhi.

2. Home Rule movement: Indians were disappointed to see the British government adopting repressive measures. In response to it Tilak and Besant started Home Rule movement. The Lucknow Pact had brought the Congress and the Muslim League closer together. The return of the Extremists to the Congress in 1916 gave the Congress a militant character. The Home Rule movement prepared the ground for Non-Cooperation Movement.

3. Economic distress caused by the World War I: The War brought about great economic distress to the Indians. At the end of the war, the economic condition took a turn of the worse. Prices shot up. Price of cloths, sugar etc., began to soar. Foreign goods began to be imported. Both the peasants and the workers suffered due to the impact of war. The price of agricultural products did not increase. The workers being unemployed had to live in half starvation. According to Louis Fischer, not only political leaders, but also the soldiers and even the peasants claimed compensations for shedding Indian blood.

4. Montague-Chelmsford Act: The Mont-Ford Act of 1919 could not satisfy the Congress. The actual scheme of reforms fell far short of nationalists' demands.

Impact of the Rowlatt Act: The passing of the Rowlatt Act and the Jallianwala Bagh tragedy gave a new turn to Indian politics. Gandhiji became firm in the policy of non-cooperation. The Rowlatt Act tried to put restriction upon the liberty of speech and Press, and this was taken to be a signal for still greater repressive measures from the British government. The whole of the nation rose in indignation against the government, and like a wild fire there was a wave of an agitation all over the country.

5. The Khilafat movement: The Khilafat leaders were told that they should not expect anything more. So, the Khilafat Committee accepted the suggestion of non-cooperation and asked Gandhi to lead the movement.

Thus it was apparent that the Congress had to work out something soon, for it was clear that the people were becoming impatient for action. So, the all India congress Committee met to decide on its course of action. The Nagpur session of the congress confirmed the resolution of starting non-cooperation movement. Gandhiji assured the nation that the Swaraj would be achieved within a year.

Result and Importance

Since swaraj was not achieved within a year as Gandhiji had assured, the movement was apparently a failure.

However, the significance and importance of Non-Cooperation movement cannot be denied. The non-cooperation movement led by Gandhiji was such a mass movement which had never been seen before and after the Great Rebellion of 1857. India for the first time saw a leader who had ability to fight face to face. According to Marjorie Sykes, Gandhiji had 'the gift of fight'.

Importance and immediate good results: Indian mill-owners earned a good profit due to the programme of boycott. The import of sugar from England decreased considerably. The import of British cotton-goods decreased from Rs. 6.7 crores to Rs. 2.8 crores within a period of six months. Likewise, the import of iron decreased to 50%.

Political importance: Popularity of the Congress and the movement increased among the masses. The non-cooperation movement certainly demonstrated that the Indian National Congress commanded the support and sympathy of vast sections of the Indian people. The spread of the movement was also nation-wide. It may be true that some areas were more active than others, but there were few that showed no sign of activity at all.

Participation of Muslims: Participation of the Muslims in the movement and the maintenance of communal harmony was also a great achievement. Muslim participation gave the movement a mass character.

Success in several cases: According to R.C. Majumdar, the non-cooperation movement was an acid test for the people. The movement was a success in several cases:

1. People became conscious of their political right.
2. People lost their trust in British administration.
3. They became confident of self-reliance.
4. The government failed to create fear in their mind.

Suspension of the non-cooperation movement

- Gandhiji called off the movement in February, 1922 in the wake of the Chauri Chaura incident.
- In Chauri Chaura, Uttar Pradesh, a violent mob set fire to a police station killing 22 policemen during a clash between the police and protesters of the movement.
- Gandhiji called off the movement saying people were not ready for revolt against the government through *ahimsa*. A lot of leaders like Motilal Nehru and C R Das were against the suspension of the movement only due to sporadic incidents of violence.

End of non-cooperation

The non-cooperation movement was withdrawn because of the Chauri Chaura incident. Although he had stopped the national revolt single-handedly, on 10 March 1922, Gandhi was arrested. On 18 March 1922, he was imprisoned for six years for publishing seditious materials. This led to suppression of the movement and was followed by the arrest of other leaders.

Although most Congress leaders remained firmly behind Gandhi, the determined broke away. The Ali brothers would soon become fierce critics. Motilal Nehru and Chittaranjan Das formed the Swaraj Party, rejecting Gandhi's leadership. Many nationalists had felt that the non-cooperation movement should not have been stopped due to isolated incidents of violence, and most nationalists, while retaining confidence in Gandhi, were discouraged.

Contemporary historians and critics suggest that the movement was successful enough to break the back of British rule, and possibly even the catalyst for the movement that led to independence in 1947.

But many historians and Indian leaders of the time also defended Gandhi's judgment. However, there have been claims that Gandhi called off the movement in an attempt to salvage his own personal image, which would have been tarnished had he been blamed for the Chauri Chaura incident, although a similar type of movement was introduced in 1930, the civil disobedience movement. The main difference was the introduction of a policy of violating the law.

Conclusion:

The non-cooperation movement evoked an unprecedented enthusiasm throughout the country. According to Dr. Tarachand, the non-cooperation movement was the first movement without weapon in the history of the world. It gave a new complexion to the people's urge for freedom. It marked the beginning of a new phase in the history of India's freedom movement.

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