

The Role of Mahatma Gandhi in Indian National Movement

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Abstract: Gandhiji's Role in the National Movement or Methods adopted by Mahatma Gandhi to make the Indian National Movement a mass movement. Gandhiji's role in the National Movement of India was undoubtedly the most remarkable. From 1919 to 1947 A.D. The father of the Nation. Mahatma Gandhi was one of these great men who dedicated their whole life to the service of the mankind. In this review paper we studied about Role of Mahatma Gandhi in Indian National Movement and major movement for Independence by Mahatma Gandhi.

I. INTRODUCTION

Mahatma Gandhi was born on October 2, 1869 A.D. in a trading family of porbander, a small town in Kathiawara. His full name was Mohan Das Karam Chand Gandhi and his father was the Diwan of Rajkot.

He went off to South Africa after marriage and worked as barrister there for twenty years. In South Africa, he had his first brush with apartheid. Once while he was traveling in a train, he was thrown out of the first class compartment despite having a ticket. This made him swear that he would do his best to erase apartheid from the face of his world. He went back to India only to find that his own country was being ruled by the British and his fellow citizens were being treated harshly by the British.

Role of Mahatma Gandhi in Freedom Struggle Like other great men in history, Gandhi took his time to grow and develop his techniques to ensure that his actions made an impact. His faith in different religions was commendable. He listened to the teachings of Christianity with the same belief and faith he read the Hindu scriptures with.

Gandhi arrived in India on 9 January, 1915. Initially, he spent a year visiting various places in India to have an understanding of the situation. His political engagement started in the 1917-18 period when he took up the issues of Champaran indigo farmers, the Ahmedabad textile workers and the Kheda peasants.

These struggles witnessed his specific method of agitation, known as Satyagraha, which had earlier developed in the South African context and through which he was partially successful in achieving his goals.

In Champaran, which was in North Bihar, the indigo planters were forcing the peasants to grow indigo even when it was not profitable for the peasants to do so. In fact, the peasants were suffering losses by cultivating indigo in their most fertile lands. Gandhi was invited by the peasants to lead their struggle against the indigo planters who enjoyed the support of the colonial state.

Gandhi went there to lead the struggle of the peasants and was successful to get them relief.

In Kheda district of Gujarat, most of the crops were damaged due to excessive rain. The peasants of Kheda demanded from the government that they should be allowed not to pay the revenue for that particular year. The government, however, refused. Gandhi started a Satyagraha movement on 22 March, 1918 and advised the peasants not to pay revenue. Many peasants participated in the movement. But the government refused to budge.

It was a test for the new method of agitation which Gandhi was trying in India. The agitation continued for some time. But Gandhi realised that it was not possible for the peasants to continue for long. Meanwhile, the government granted some concession to the poorer peasants.

The movement was then withdrawn. In Ahmedabad, Gandhi led the struggle of the workers for an increase in the wages due to rising prices during the War. After a protracted struggle, the workers were able to get 35% raise in their wages.

The struggles demonstrated to the Indian people Gandhi's method of political struggle and his principles of non-violent non-cooperation. They, on the other hand, helped Gandhi to familiarise himself with the Indian situation and understand the strengths and weaknesses of the Indian people. They also attracted many political workers who were to prove valuable in the future struggles.

Gandhi's vision of a free India based on religious pluralism, however, was challenged in the early 1940s by a new Muslim nationalism which was demanding a separate Muslim homeland carved out of India. Eventually, in August 1947, Britain granted independence, but the British Indian Empire was partitioned into two dominions, a Hindu-majority India and Muslim Pakistan. As many displaced Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs made their way to their new lands, religious violence broke out, especially in the Punjab and Bengal. Eschewing the official celebration of independence in Delhi, Gandhi visited the affected areas, attempting to provide solace. In the months following, he undertook several fasts unto death to promote religious harmony. The last of these, undertaken on 12 January 1948 at age 78 also had the indirect goal of pressuring India to pay out some cash assets owed to Pakistan. Some Indians thought Gandhi was too accommodating.

Nathuram Godse, a Hindu nationalist, assassinated Gandhi on 30 January 1948 by firing three bullets into his chest at point-blank range.

II. MAJOR MOVEMENT FOR FREEDOM INDIA BY MAHATMA GANDHI

His services rendered to the cause of India's freedom are unforgettable, which can be enumerated below.

A. *The Satyagrah Movement*

One of his major achievements in 1918 were the Champaran and Kheda agitations – a movement against British landlords. The farmers and peasantry were forced to grow and cultivate Indigo, and were even to forced to sell them at fixed prices. Finally, these farmers pledged to Mahatma Gandhi and non-violent protest took place. Wherein Gandhiji won the battle.

Kheda, in the year 1918 was hit by floods and farmers wanted relief from tax. Using non-cooperation as his main weapon Gandhiji used it in pledging the farmers for non-payment of taxes. Gandhiji got much public support and finally in May 1918, Government gave the provisions related to tax payment.

B. *Khilafat Movement:*

Gandhiji in the year 1919 approached Muslims, as he found the position of Congress was quite weak and unstable. Khilafat Movement is all about the worldwide protest against the status of Caliph by Muslims. Finally Mahatma Gandhi had an All India Muslim Conference, and became the main person for the event. This movement supported Muslims to a great extent and the success of this movement made him the national leader and facilitated his strong position in Congress party. Khilafat movement collapsed badly in 1922 and throughout their journey Gandhiji fought against communalism, but the gap between Hindus and Muslims widened.

C. *Non-cooperation Movement*

One of the first series of non violent protests nationwide was the non cooperation movement started by Mahatma Gandhi. This movement officially started the Gandhian era in India. In this freedom struggle, the non cooperation movement was basically aimed at making the Indians aware of the fact that the British government can be opposed and if done actively, it will keep a check on them. Thus, educational institutions were boycotted, foreign goods were boycotted, and people let go off their nominated seats in government institutions. Though the movement failed, Indians awakened to the concept of going against the British.

D. *Salt Satyagraha Movement - Dandi march*

Salt March was an active movement carried out in the year 1930. Gandhiji started focussing on expanding initiatives against untouchability, alcoholism and removal

of all bad habits. Salt march mainly known as Salt Satyagraha which began with Dandi march in the year 1930. This movement was an essential part of Indian Independence movement and non-violent resistance against tax. Gandhiji led this Dandi march with lot of followers behind him.

On the 24th day, he vowed to produce more salt without paying any tax and soon he broke the law for salt, which sparked outrage among Britishers. After this, Gandhiji was arrested and this news gained a lot of attention in the press.

Gandhi's each and every act was based on his principles and his path of non-violence.

E. *Quit India Movement:*

In August 1942, Gandhiji launched the Quit India Movement ("Bharat Chhodo Andolan"). A resolution was passed on 8 August 1942 in Bombay by the All India Congress Committee, declaring its demand for an immediate end of British rule. The Congress decided to organize a mass struggle on non-violent lines on the widest possible scale. Gandhiji's slogan of 'Do or Die' ('Karo ya Maro') inspired the nation. Every man, women and child began dreaming of a free India.

The government's response to the movement was quick. The Congress was banned and most of its leaders were arrested before they could start mobilizing the people. The people, however, were unstoppable. There were hartals and demonstrations all over the country. The people attacked all symbols of the British government such as railway stations, law courts and police stations. Railway lines were damaged and telegraph lines were cut. In some places, people even set up their independent government. The movement was most widespread in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Bengal, Bombay, Odisha and Andhra Pradesh. Places such as Ballia, Tamluk, Satara, Dharwar, Balasore and Talcher were freed from British rule and the people there formed their own governments.

The British responded with terrible brutality. The army was called out to assist the police. There were lathi-charges and firing at the unarmed demonstrators. Even old men and children were shot dead while taking part in processions. Protestors were arrested and tortured and their homes raided and destroyed. By December 1942, over sixty thousand people had been jailed.

The few leaders who had escaped arrest went into hiding and tried to guide the mass movement. Among them were Jai Prakash Narayan, S M Joshi, Aruna Asaf Ali, Ram Manohar Lohis, Achyut Patwardhan and Smt Sucheta Kripalani.

The Indians suffered greatly throughout the Second World War. There was a terrible famine in Bengal in AD 1943 in which over thirty lakh people died. The government did little to save the starving people.

F. India Independence

After the Quit India Movement the freedom struggle got even more intense and passionate. Entire India was united together in the movement for freedom. Everyone contributed what they could in the freedom struggle. The cry of Purna Swaraj or complete independence was raised. After much sacrifices and efforts, India gained its independence on the 15th August, 1947.

III. CONCLUSION

Above we studied about role of Mahatma Gandhi in Indian National Movement.

Gandhiji made social report a part of the programme of the nationalist movement. His greatest achievement in the field of social reform was the campaign against inhuman institution of untouchability which had degraded millions of Indians. His other achievement was in the field of cottage industries. He saw in the charkha, the spinning wheel, the salvation of the village people and its promotion became part of the congress programme. In addition to infusing people with the spirit of nationalism it provided employment to millions and created a large group of people who were ready to throw themselves into the struggle and court imprisonment. The charkha became so important that it eventually became a part of the flag of the Indian National Congress.

Gandhiji devoted himself to the cause of Hindu-Muslim unity. He regarded communalism as anti-national and inhuman. Under his leadership the unity of the nationalist movement was secured and the people worked hard for independence.

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- [3] Khan, Yasmin (2007). *The Great Partition: The Making of India and Pakistan*. Yale University Press. p. 18. ISBN 978-0-300-12078-3. Retrieved 1 September 2013. Quote: "the Muslim League had only caught on among South Asian Muslims during the Second World War. ... By the late 1940s, the League and the Congress had impressed in the British their own visions of a free future for Indian people. ... one, articulated by the Congress, rested on the idea of a united, plural India as a home for all Indians and the other, spelt out by the League, rested on the foundation of Muslim nationalism and the carving out of a separate Muslim homeland." (p. 18)
- [4] Khan, Yasmin (2007). *The Great Partition: The Making of India and Pakistan*. Yale University Press. p. 1. ISBN 978-0-300-12078-3. Retrieved 1 September 2013. Quote: "South Asians learned that the British Indian empire would be partitioned on 3 June 1947. They heard about it on the radio, from relations and friends, by reading newspapers and, later, through government pamphlets. Among a population of almost four hundred million, where the vast majority lived in the countryside, ..., it is hardly surprising that many ... did not hear the news for many weeks afterwards. For some, the butchery and forced relocation of the summer months of 1947 may have been the first they know about the creation of the two new states rising from the fragmentary and terminally weakened British empire in India." (p. 1)

- [5] Brown (1991), p. 380: "Despite and indeed because of his sense of helplessness Delhi was to be the scene of what he called his greatest fast. ... His decision was made suddenly, though after considerable thought – he gave no hint of it even to Nehru and Patel who were with him shortly before he announced his intention at a prayer-meeting on 12 January 1948. He said he would fast until communal peace was restored, real peace rather than the calm of a dead city imposed by police and troops. Patel and the government took the fast partly as condemnation of their decision to withhold a considerable cash sum still outstanding to Pakistan as a result of the allocation of undivided India's assets, because the hostilities that had broken out in Kashmir; ... But even when the government agreed to pay out the cash, Gandhi would not break his fast: that he would only do after a large number of important politicians and leaders of communal bodies agreed to a joint plan for restoration of normal life in the city. Although this six-day fast was a considerable physical strain, during it Gandhi experienced a great feeling of strength and peace."
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