



Research Paper

Mahatma Gandhi and India's Struggle for Independence

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Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was an Indian lawyer, anti-colonial nationalist and political ethicist who employed nonviolent resistance to lead the successful campaign for India's independence from British rule, and to later inspire movements for civil rights and freedom across the world. The honorific Mahātmā (Sanskrit: "great-souled", "venerable"), first applied to him in 1914 in South Africa, is now used throughout the world.

Gandhi returned to India from South Africa in 1915 at the request of Gopal Krishna Gokhale. Gandhi's contribution to the Indian freedom movement cannot be measured in words. He, along with other freedom fighters, compelled the British to leave India. His policies and agendas were non-violent and his words were the source of inspiration for millions. Gandhi's birthday, 2 October, is commemorated in India as Gandhi Jayanti, a national holiday, and worldwide as the International Day of Nonviolence. Gandhi is commonly, though not formally, considered the Father of the Nation in India and was commonly called Bapu.

Gandhi joined the Indian National Congress and was introduced to Indian issues, politics and the Indian people primarily by Gokhale. Gokhale was a key leader of the Congress Party best known for his restraint and moderation, and his insistence on working inside the system. Gandhi took Gokhale's liberal approach based on British Whiggish traditions and transformed it to make it look Indian.

Gandhi took leadership of the Congress in 1920 and began escalating demands until on 26 January 1930 the Indian National Congress declared the independence of India. The British did not recognise the declaration but negotiations ensued, with the Congress taking a role in provincial government in the late 1930s. Gandhi and the Congress withdrew their support of the Raj when the Viceroy declared war on Germany in September 1939 without consultation. Tensions escalated until Gandhi demanded immediate independence in 1942 and the British responded by imprisoning him and tens of thousands of Congress leaders. Meanwhile, the Muslim League did cooperate with Britain and moved, against Gandhi's strong opposition, to demands for a totally separate Muslim state of Pakistan. In August 1947 the British partitioned the land with India and Pakistan each achieving independence on terms that Gandhi disapproved.

Role in World War I

In April 1918, during the latter part of World War I, the Viceroy invited Gandhi to a War Conference in Delhi. Gandhi agreed to actively recruit Indians for the war effort. In contrast to the Zulu War of 1906 and the outbreak of World War I in 1914, when he recruited volunteers for the Ambulance Corps, this time Gandhi attempted to recruit combatants. In a June 1918 leaflet entitled "Appeal for Enlistment", Gandhi wrote *"To bring about such a state of things we should have the ability to defend ourselves, that is, the ability to bear arms and to use them... If we want to learn the use of arms with the greatest possible despatch, it is our duty to enlist ourselves in the army."* He did, however, stipulate in a letter to the Viceroy's private secretary that he "personally will not kill or injure anybody, friend or foe."

Gandhi's war recruitment campaign brought into question his consistency on nonviolence. Gandhi's private secretary noted that "The question of the consistency between his creed of '**Ahimsa**' (nonviolence) and his recruiting campaign was raised not only then but has been discussed ever since."

Champaran agitations

Gandhi's first major achievement came in 1917 with the Champaran agitation in Bihar. The Champaran agitation pitted the local peasantry against largely Anglo-Indian plantation owners who were backed by the local administration. The peasants were forced to grow Indigofera, a cash crop for Indigo dye whose demand had been declining for over two decades, and were forced to sell their crops to the planters at a fixed price. Unhappy with this, the peasantry appealed to Gandhi at his ashram in Ahmedabad. Pursuing a strategy of nonviolent protest, Gandhi took the administration by surprise and won concessions from the authorities.

Kheda agitations

In 1918, Kheda was hit by floods and famine and the peasantry was demanding relief from taxes. Gandhi moved his headquarters to Nadiad, organising scores of supporters and fresh volunteers from the region, the most notable being Vallabhbhai Patel. Using non-co-operation as a technique, Gandhi initiated a signature campaign where peasants pledged non-payment of revenue even under the threat of confiscation of land.

A social boycott of mamlatdars and talatdars (revenue officials within the district) accompanied the agitation. Gandhi worked hard to win public support for the agitation across the country. For five months, the administration refused, but by the end of May 1918, the Government gave way on important provisions and relaxed the conditions of payment of revenue tax until the famine ended.

Khilafat movement

Gandhi felt that Hindu-Muslim cooperation was necessary for political progress against the British. He leveraged the Khilafat movement, where Sunni Muslims in India and their leaders such as the sultans of princely states in India and the Ali brothers championed the Turkish Caliph as a solidarity symbol of the Sunni Islamic community. They saw the Caliph as their means to support Islam and the Islamic law after the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in World War I. Gandhi's support of the Khilafat movement led to mixed results. It initially led to strong Muslim support for Gandhi. However, the Hindu leaders including Rabindranath Tagore questioned Gandhi's leadership because they were largely against recognising or supporting the Sunni Islamic Caliph in Turkey.

The increasing Muslim support for Gandhi, after he championed the Caliph's cause, temporarily stopped the Hindu-Muslim communal violence. His support for the Khilafat movement also helped him sideline Muhammad Ali Jinnah, who had announced his opposition to the satyagraha non-cooperation movement approach of Gandhi. Jinnah began creating his independent support and later went on to lead the demand for West and East Pakistan. Jinnah was mainly interested in dealing with the British via constitutional negotiation, rather than attempting to agitate the masses.

By the end of 1922, the Khilafat movement had collapsed. Turkey's Atatürk had ended the Caliphate, the Khilafat movement ended, and Muslim support for Gandhi largely evaporated. Muslim leaders and delegates abandoned Gandhi and his Congress. Hindu-Muslim communal conflicts reignited. Deadly religious riots reappeared in numerous cities, with 91 in the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh alone.

Non-co-operation

In February 1919, Gandhi cautioned the Viceroy of India with a cable communication that if the British were to pass the Rowlatt Act, he would appeal to Indians to start civil disobedience. The British government ignored him and passed the law, stating it would not yield to threats. The satyagraha civil disobedience followed, with people assembling to protest the Rowlatt Act. On 30 March 1919, British law officers opened fire on an assembly of unarmed people, who peacefully gathered, participating in satyagraha in Delhi.

People rioted in retaliation. On 6 April 1919, a Hindu festival day, he asked a crowd to remember not to injure or kill British people but to express their frustration with peace, to boycott British goods and burn any British clothing they owned. He emphasised the use of non-violence to the British and towards each other, even if the other side used violence. Communities across India announced plans to gather in greater numbers to protest. The government warned him to not enter Delhi. Gandhi defied the order. On 9 April, Gandhi was arrested.

People rioted. On 13 April 1919, people including women with children gathered in an Amritsar park, and British Indian Army officer Reginald Dyer surrounded them and ordered troops under his command to fire on them. The resulting Jallianwala Bagh massacre (or Amritsar massacre) of hundreds of Sikh and Hindu civilians enraged the subcontinent but was supported by some Britons and parts of the British media as an necessary response. Gandhi in Ahmedabad, on the day after the massacre in Amritsar, did not criticise the British and instead criticised his fellow countrymen for not exclusively using 'love' to deal with the 'hate' of the British government. Gandhi demanded that the Indian people stop all violence, stop all property destruction, and went on fast-to-death to pressure Indians to stop their rioting.

The massacre and Gandhi's non-violent response to it moved many, but also made some Sikhs and Hindus upset that Dyer was getting away with murder. Investigation committees were formed by the British, which Gandhi asked Indians to boycott. The unfolding events, the massacre and the British response, led Gandhi to the belief that Indians will never get a fair equal treatment under British rulers, and he shifted his attention to swaraj and political independence for India. In 1921, Gandhi was the leader of the Indian National Congress. He reorganised the Congress. With Congress now behind him, and Muslim support triggered by his backing the Khilafat movement to restore the Caliph in Turkey, Gandhi had the political support and the attention of the British Raj.

Gandhi expanded his nonviolent non-co-operation platform to include the swadeshi policy – the boycott of foreign-made goods, especially British goods. Linked to this was his advocacy that khadi (homespun cloth) be worn by all Indians instead of British-made textiles. Gandhi exhorted Indian men and women, rich or poor, to spend time each day spinning khadi in support of the independence movement. In addition to boycotting British products, Gandhi urged the people to boycott British institutions and law courts, resign from government employment, and to forsake British titles and honours. Gandhi thus began his journey aimed at crippling the British India government economically, politically and administratively.

The appeal of "Non-cooperation" grew, and its social popularity drew participation from all strata of Indian society. Gandhi was arrested on 10 March 1922, tried for sedition and sentenced to six years' imprisonment. He began his sentence on 18 March 1922. With Gandhi isolated in prison, the Indian National Congress split into two factions, one led by Chitta Ranjan Das and Motilal Nehru favouring party participation in the legislatures, and the other led by Chakravarti Rajagopalachari and Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, opposing this move. Furthermore, cooperation among Hindus and Muslims ended as the Khilafat movement collapsed with the rise of Atatürk in Turkey. Muslim leaders left Congress and began forming Muslim organisations. The political base behind Gandhi had broken into factions. Gandhi was released in February 1924 for an appendicitis operation, having served only two years.

Salt Satyagraha (Salt March)

After his early release from prison for political crimes in 1924, over the second half of the 1920s Gandhi continued to pursue swaraj. He pushed through a resolution at the Calcutta Congress in December 1928 calling on the British government to grant India dominion status or face a new campaign of non-cooperation with complete independence for the country as its goal. After his support for World War I with Indian combat troops and the failure of the Khilafat movement in preserving the rule of the Caliph in Turkey, followed by a collapse in Muslim support for his leadership, some such as Subhas Chandra Bose and Bhagat Singh questioned his values and non-violent approach. While many Hindu leaders championed a demand for immediate independence, Gandhi revised his own call to a one-year wait, instead of two.

The British did not respond favourably to Gandhi's proposal. British political leaders such as Lord Birkenhead and Winston Churchill announced opposition to "the appeasers of Gandhi" in their discussions with European diplomats who sympathised with Indian demands. On 31 December 1929, an Indian flag was unfurled in Lahore. Gandhi led Congress in a celebration on 26 January 1930 of India's Independence Day in Lahore. This day was commemorated by almost every other Indian organisation. Gandhi then launched a new Satyagraha against the British salt tax in March 1930. Gandhi sent an ultimatum in the form of a letter personally addressed to Lord Irwin, the viceroy of India, on 2 March. Gandhi condemned British rule in the letter, describing it as "a curse" that "has impoverished the dumb millions by a system of progressive exploitation and by a ruinously expensive military and civil administration...It has reduced us politically to serfdom." Gandhi also mentioned in the letter that the viceroy received a salary "over five thousand times India's average income." In the letter, Gandhi also stressed his continued adherence to non-violent forms of protest.

This was highlighted by the Salt March to Dandi from 12 March to 6 April, where, together with 78 volunteers, he marched 388 kilometres (241 mi) from Ahmedabad to Dandi, Gujarat to make salt himself, with the declared intention of breaking the salt laws. The march took 25 days to cover 240 miles with Gandhi speaking to often huge crowds along the way. Thousands of Indians joined him in Dandi. On 5 May he was interned under a regulation dating from 1827 in anticipation of a protest that he had planned. The protest at Dharasana salt works on 21 May went ahead without him seeing.

According to Sarma, Gandhi recruited women to participate in the salt tax campaigns and the boycott of foreign products, which gave many women new self-confidence and dignity in the mainstream of Indian public life. However, other scholars such as Marilyn French state that Gandhi barred women from joining his civil disobedience movement because he feared he would be accused of using women as a political shield. When women insisted on joining the movement and participating in public demonstrations, Gandhi asked the volunteers to get the permission of their guardians and only those women who can arrange child-care should join him. Regardless of Gandhi's apprehensions and views, Indian women joined the Salt March by the thousands to defy the British salt taxes and monopoly on salt mining. After Gandhi's arrest, the women marched and picketed shops on their own, accepting violence and verbal abuse from British authorities for the cause in the manner Gandhi inspired.

Negotiations

The government, represented by Lord Irwin, decided to negotiate with Gandhi. The Gandhi–Irwin Pact was signed in March 1931. The British Government agreed to free all political prisoners, in return for the suspension of the civil disobedience movement. According to the pact, Gandhi was invited to attend the Round Table Conference in London for discussions and as the sole representative of the Indian National Congress. The

conference was a disappointment to Gandhi and the nationalists. Gandhi expected to discuss India's independence, while the British side focused on the Indian princes and Indian minorities rather than on a transfer of power. Lord Irwin's successor, Lord Willingdon, took a hard line against India as an independent nation and began a new campaign of controlling and subduing the nationalist movements. Gandhi was again arrested, and the government tried and failed to negate his influence by completely isolating him from his followers.

In Britain, Winston Churchill, a prominent Conservative politician who was then out of office but later became its prime minister, became a vigorous and articulate critic of Gandhi and opponent of his long-term plans. Churchill's bitterness against Gandhi grew in the 1930s. He called Gandhi as the one who was "seditious in aim" whose evil genius and multiform menace was attacking the British empire. Churchill called him a dictator, a "Hindu Mussolini", fomenting a race war, trying to replace the Raj with Brahmin cronies, playing on the ignorance of the Indian masses, all for selfish gain. Churchill attempted to isolate Gandhi, and his criticism of Gandhi was widely covered by the European and American press. It gained Churchill sympathetic support, but it also increased support for Gandhi among Europeans. The developments heightened Churchill's anxiety that the "British themselves would give up out of pacifism and misplaced conscience".

Round Table Conferences

During the discussions between Gandhi and the British government over 1931–32 at the Round Table Conferences, Gandhi, now aged about 62, sought constitutional reforms as a preparation for the end of colonial British rule, and begin the self-rule by Indians. The British side sought reforms that would keep the Indian subcontinent as a colony. The British negotiators proposed constitutional reforms on a British Dominion model that established separate electorates based on religious and social divisions. The British questioned the Congress party and Gandhi's authority to speak for all of India. They invited Indian religious leaders, such as Muslims and Sikhs, to press their demands along religious lines, as well as B. R. Ambedkar as the representative leader of the untouchables. Gandhi vehemently opposed a constitution that enshrined rights or representations based on communal divisions, because he feared that it would not bring people together but divide them, perpetuate their status and divert the attention from India's struggle to end the colonial rule.

The Second Round Table conference was the only time he left India between 1914 and his death in 1948. He declined the government's offer of accommodation in an expensive West End hotel, preferring to stay in the East End, to live among working-class people, as he did in India. He based himself in a small cell bedroom at Kingsley Hall for the three-month duration of his stay and was enthusiastically received by East Enders. During this time he renewed his links with the British vegetarian movement.

After Gandhi returned from the Second Round Table conference, he started a new satyagraha. He was arrested and imprisoned at the Yerwada Jail, Pune. While he was in prison, the British government enacted a new law that granted untouchables a separate electorate. It came to be known as the Communal Award. In protest, Gandhi started a fast-unto-death, while he was held in prison. The resulting public outcry forced the government, in consultations with Ambedkar, to replace the Communal Award with a compromise Poona Pact.

World War II and Quit India movement

Gandhi opposed providing any help to the British war effort and he campaigned against any Indian participation in World War II. Gandhi's campaign did not enjoy the support of Indian masses and many Indian leaders such as Sardar Patel and Rajendra Prasad, and as such failed. Despite his efforts, over 2.5 million Indians volunteered and joined the British military to fight on various fronts of the Allied Forces.

Gandhi's opposition to the Indian participation in World War II was motivated by his belief that India could not be a party to a war ostensibly being fought for democratic freedom while that freedom was denied to India itself. As the war progressed, Gandhi intensified his demand for independence, calling for the British to Quit India. In a 1942 speech in Mumbai. This was Gandhi's and the Congress Party's most definitive revolt aimed at securing the British exit from India. The British government responded quickly to the Quit India speech, and within hours after Gandhi's speech arrested Gandhi and all the members of the Congress Working Committee. His countrymen retaliated against the arrests by damaging or burning down hundreds of government-owned railway stations, and police stations, and cutting down telegraph wires. He urged Indians to *Karo ya Maro* ("Do or die") in the cause of their rights and freedom. Gandhi's arrest lasted two years, as he was held in the Aga Khan Palace in Pune.

Gandhi was released before the end of the war on 6 May 1944 because of his failing health and necessary surgery; the Raj did not want him to die in prison and enrage the nation. He came out of detention to an altered political scene – the Muslim League for example, which a few years earlier had appeared marginal, "now occupied the centre of the political stage" and the topic of Muhammad Ali Jinnah's campaign for Pakistan was a major talking point. Gandhi and Jinnah had extensive correspondence and the two men met several times over a period of two weeks in September 1944, where Gandhi insisted on a united religiously plural and independent India which included Muslims and non-Muslims of the Indian subcontinent coexisting. Jinnah

rejected this proposal and insisted instead for partitioning the subcontinent on religious lines to create a separate Muslim India (later Pakistan). These discussions continued through 1947.

While the leaders of Congress languished in jail, the other parties supported the war and gained organisational strength. Underground publications flailed at the ruthless suppression of Congress, but it had little control over events. At the end of the war, the British gave clear indications that power would be transferred to Indian hands. At this point, Gandhi called off the struggle, and around 100,000 political prisoners were released, including Congress's leadership.

Partition and independence

Gandhi opposed the partition of the Indian subcontinent along religious lines. The Indian National Congress and Gandhi called for the British to Quit India. However, the Muslim League demanded, "Divide and Quit India". Gandhi suggested an agreement which required the Congress and the Muslim League to co-operate and attain independence under a provisional government, thereafter, the question of partition could be resolved by a plebiscite in the districts with a Muslim majority.

Jinnah rejected Gandhi's proposal and called for Direct Action Day, on 16 August 1946, to press Muslims to publicly gather in cities and support his proposal for the partition of the Indian subcontinent into a Muslim state and a non-Muslim state. The Direct Action Day triggered a mass murder of Calcutta Hindus and the torching of their property. The British government did not order its army to move in to contain the violence. The violence on Direct Action Day led to retaliatory violence against Muslims across India. Thousands of Hindus and Muslims were murdered, and tens of thousands were injured in the cycle of violence in the days that followed. Gandhi visited the most riot-prone areas to appeal for a stop to the massacres.

Archibald Wavell, the Viceroy and Governor-General of British India for three years through February 1947, had worked with Gandhi and Jinnah to find a common ground, before and after accepting Indian independence in principle. Wavell condemned Gandhi's character and motives as well as his ideas. Wavell accused Gandhi of harbouring the single-minded idea to "overthrow British rule and influence and to establish a Hindu raj", and called Gandhi a "malignant, malevolent, exceedingly shrewd" politician. Wavell feared a civil war on the Indian subcontinent and doubted Gandhi would be able to stop it.

The British reluctantly agreed to grant independence to the people of the Indian subcontinent but accepted Jinnah's proposal of partitioning the land into Pakistan and India. The partition was controversial and violently disputed. More than half a million were killed in religious riots as 10 million to 12 million non-Muslims (Hindus and Sikhs mostly) migrated from Pakistan to India, and Muslims migrated from India into Pakistan, across the newly created borders of India, West Pakistan and East Pakistan.

Gandhi spent the day of independence not celebrating the end of British rule but appealing for peace among his countrymen by fasting and spinning in Calcutta on 15 August 1947. The partition had gripped the Indian subcontinent with religious violence and the streets were filled with corpses. Some writers credit Gandhi's fasting and protests for stopping the religious riots and communal violence.

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