

Non-cooperation movement

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, "Ahinsa". Protesters would refuse to buy British goods, adopt the use of local handicrafts and picket liquor shops. The ideas of Ahinsa 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 31st August, 1920.

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Factors leading to the movement

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.

Gandhi was horrified. He lost all faith in the goodness of the British government and declared that it would be a "sin" to cooperate with the "satanic" government.

Indian Muslims who had participated in the Khilafat movement to restore the status of the Caliph gave their support to the non-cooperation movement. In response to the Jallianwala Bagh Massacre and other violence in Punjab, the movement sought to secure Swaraj, independence for India. Gandhi promised Swaraj in one year if his Non-Cooperation programme was fully implemented. The other reason to start the non-cooperation movement was that Gandhi lost faith in constitutional methods and turned from cooperator of British rule to non-cooperator.

Other causes include economic hardships to the common man, which the nationalists attributed to the flow of Indian wealth to Britain, the ruin of Indian artisans due to British factory-made goods replacing handmade goods, and resentment with the British government over Indian soldiers dying in World War I while fighting as part of the British Army.

The calls of early political leaders like Bal Gangadhar Tilak (Congress Extremists) were called major public meetings. They resulted in disorder or obstruction of government services. The British took them very seriously and imprisoned him in Mandalay in Burma and V.O. Chidambaram Pillai got 40 years imprisonment. The non-cooperation movement aimed to challenge the colonial economic and power structure, and British authorities would be forced to take notice of the demands of the independence movement.

Satyagraha

Satyagraha is a Sanskrit term which is a compound of two words: satya ("truth") and agraha ("holding firmly to" or "force"). Gandhi's call was for a nationwide protest against the Rowlatt Act. All offices and factories would be closed. Indians would be encouraged to withdraw from Raj-sponsored schools, police services, the military, and the civil service, and lawyers were asked to leave the Raj's courts. Public transportation and English-manufactured goods, especially clothing, was boycotted.

Veterans like Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Bipin Chandra Pal, Mohammad Ali Jinnah, Annie Besant, and Sammed Akiwate opposed the idea outright. The All India Muslim League also criticized the idea. But the younger generation of Indian nationalists were thrilled, and backed Gandhi. The Congress Party adopted his plans, and he received extensive support from Muslim leaders like Maulana Azad, Mukhtar Ahmed Ansari, Hakim Ajmal Khan, Abbas Tyabji, Maulana Muhammad Ali and Maulana Shaukat Ali.

The eminent Hindi writer, poet, play-wright, journalist, and nationalist Rambriksh Benipuri, who spent more than eight years in prison fighting for India's independence, wrote:

When I recall Non-Cooperation era of 1921, the image of a storm confronts my eyes. From the time I became aware, I have witnessed numerous movements, however, I can assert that no other movement upturned the foundations of Indian society to the extent that the Non-Cooperation movement did. From the most humble huts to the high places, from villages to cities, everywhere there was a ferment, a loud echo.^[1]

Success and suspension

The success of the revolt was a total shock to British authorities and a massive encouragement to millions of Indian nationalists. On 5th February, 1922 a clash took place at Chauri Chaura, a small town in the district of Gorakhpur, Uttar Pradesh. A police officer had beaten some volunteers picketing a liquor shop. A whole crowd of peasants that had gathered there went to the police *chowki* (pron.-chau key) (station). The mob set fire to the police chowki with some 22 police men inside it.

Mahatma Gandhi felt that the revolt was veering off-course, and was disappointed that the revolt had lost its non-violent nature. He did not want the movement to degenerate into a contest of violence, with police and angry mobs attacking each other back and forth, victimizing civilians in between. Gandhi appealed to the Indian public for all resistance to end, went on a fast lasting 3 weeks, and called off the non-cooperation movement.

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 March 10, 1922, Gandhi was arrested. On March 18, 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.

Savings

Gandhi's commitment to non-violence was redeemed when, between 1930 and 1934, tens of millions again revolted in the Salt Satyagraha which made India's cause famous worldwide for its unerring adherence to non-violence. The Satyagraha ended in success the demands of Indians were met, and the Congress Party was recognized as a representative of the Indian people. The Government of India Act 1935 also gave India its first taste in democratic self-governance.

See also

- Quit India Movement

References

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