

CHAPTER-VII

CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE MOVEMENT

Introduction:

When Non-cooperation buckled under in 1922 the agitational links across regions, between local arenas of politics, and between them and an all-India campaign, snapped. Within the context of the Montagu-Chelmsford constitution, the relationship between India's different types of politics settled into a new pattern. Since the 1919 reforms offered substantial power and stature to Indians who would collaborate with the British in the new constitutional structures, the force of much local political awareness and ambition were soon channeled through the new structures in anticipation that they would be fulfilled by the fruits of legislation and influence in the administration.

Salt being a very common issue became the point of confrontation. Perhaps it was Salt, which solved many dilemmas of Gandhi after Lahore session. Though it was not a major threat to the British Empire, still it proved very successful in reuniting Indian masses and helped in inculcating true spirit of mass struggle based on Satyagraha principle. This particular Satyagraha movement injected fresh blood and a new ray of hope in achieving India's independence.

Stages and Developments of Civil Disobedience Movement:

The years 1922-8 were for Gandhi a time of stocktaking, during which he was forced by government and his countrymen to reorganize his role in public affairs. The first stage in this course was his two-year spell in jail. His daily routine was similar to that which he laid down for his ashram, though in Yeravda jail near Poona, uninterrupted by the demands of public life, he was able to give six hours a day to reading and four to spinning and carding. He read over 150 books; reading for the first time the whole of the Mahabharata and the six systems of Hindu philosophy in Gujarati, he steeped himself afresh in his Hindu heritage. Reading and the solitary reflection promoted by rhythmic handwork merely conformed his views on religion and politics, as he admitted on his release.¹ He reemerged from Yeravda with clearer priorities and a stronger conviction that he must track his own path even if he could find no companion to share it. He had become a man with a much surer sense of himself and his potential public role than the fumbling pragmatist of his first years back in India.

In February 1924 Gandhi emerged from his forced isolation in jail, convalescent after an emergency appendectomy; he faced a political world noticeably different from the one he had left in 1922 as architect of Non-cooperation. After his let go from jail Gandhi had increasingly devoted himself to constructing the social foundations of Swaraj, holding detached from the politics of councils and Congress because his priorities and expertise did not fit

or forward the felt needs of Indians concerned with their constitutional relationships with each other and the British, or of the British in their search for Indian allies. Nevertheless in 1928 two episodes thrust Gandhi into the political limelight. The Bardoli Satyagraha and the 1928 Congress session heralded his come back to all-India leadership, though they came to him undesirably. Both were occasions when others in public life calculated that they needed the Mahatma: he responded because he felt he could satisfy those needs with his particular expertise, on terms which were acceptable to him, promising to promote his wider vision of Swaraj.

Bardoli Satyagraha:

The campaign against enhancement of the land revenue demand was led by Vallabhbhai Patel in Bardoli, a Gujarat taluka where the locally leading Patidar community was well organized and knowledgeable in disciplined protest under the Congress banner. Had it not been for the Chauri Chaura violence in 1922, Bardoli would have been one of Gandhi's preferred areas for Civil disobedience. The campaign of civil resistance to the tax demand lasted from February to August 1928 and succeeded in its effort to extract from the Bombay government an enquiry into the level of enhancement.² This success depended on the efficient organization of the district for resistance by Vallabhbhai and a group of prominent Bardoli Patidar, and on the publicity which produced a wave of popular support in Bombay and throughout India for the Bardoli defaulters. This caught the Bombay government at a time when it

was vulnerable to local unrest: it also exposed it to pressure from the Government of India with its continental viewpoint.

The local government was hindered by the early inaction of the Surat Collector, and the circumstances of the assessment itself. Settlement Commissioner, whose proposal of 29% had in turn been reduced by the Bombay government to 20%, had rejected the initial reassessment of 30% by an inexperienced Indian revenue officer. The Government of India for its part was convinced that the whole settlement issue had been grossly mismanaged.

Bardoli was indeed one of Gandhi's Satyagrahas although Vallabhbhai did the main organizational and directive work in the district. Vallabhbhai sent the Bardoli spokesman to secure Gandhi's consent before he himself would lead the campaign, and thereafter Gandhi was constantly behind Vallabhbhai. He stated in *Navajivan*: "Let it be known to the readers that I have associated myself with the Bardoli Satyagraha from its very beginning. Its leader is Shri Vallabhbhai and he can take me to Bardoli whenever he needs me. He does all the work whether small or big on his own responsibility. I do not go to attend the meetings etc., but this is an understanding reached between him and me before the struggle began. My health does not permit me to carry on all kinds of activities".³ Gandhi's surviving letters to Vallabhbhai confirm the importance of Gandhi's advisory role; so does the shuttle service between Bardoli and Sabarmati maintained by Mahadev Desai as Gandhi's private secretary.

Finally at the beginning of August he went to Bardoli at Vallabhbhai's request in preparation for the latter's expected arrest.⁴ Apart from these personal interventions Gandhi's main assistance in the Bardoli campaign took the shape of continuous publicity, encouragement and instructions in the columns of *Young India* and *Navajivan*; while some of his hand-picked workers from Sabarmati such as Desai went to help Vallabhbhai on the spot.

Gandhi's press articles on Bardoli indicate why he was prepared to accept the burden of leadership on this particular issue. For him it was not just a local Satyagraha for the redress of a particular grievance, such as he had conducted in Champaran in 1917. It was a decisive demonstration of the road to Swaraj, just as the Lucknow meeting of the All-Parties Conference had, he believed, opened the way to purely constitutional Swaraj. Right at the start of the struggle he had asserted that although the object of the Satyagraha was specific and local, not the attainment of Swaraj, yet it had 'an indirect bearing on Swaraj. Whatever awakens people to a sense of their wrongs and whatever gives them strength for disciplined and peaceful resistance and habituates them for corporate suffering brings us nearer Swaraj'.⁵

The repercussions of Bardoli on Gandhi's career were far-reaching. It publicized Gandhi and his methods throughout India: the Satyagraha's success in gaining an enquiry helped to offset the memory of Non-cooperation's sputtering end. More important still, Bardoli lifted Gandhi out of the sadness into which he had sunk in 1927 because of ongoing communal tension and the slow progress of khadi. Once more he began to see a role for himself as the

leader of a movement, which was non-violent yet rooted in popular support, even if he had failed to switch the majority to non-violence as a creed.

The Calcutta AICC session:

By September 1928 Motilal, as president-elect, was pressing Gandhi to take a fuller part in Congress affairs. Gandhi replied that he did not want to attend the AICC and was even contemplating absence from the Calcutta session. He still felt that what he termed constructive work, not constitution building, was his particular forte, and that India must generate her own strength of mind and power of confrontation. Moreover, he said, recent outbreaks of Hindu-Muslim violence unfitted him for planning constitutions. Yet a further reason for his unwillingness to go to Calcutta was the type of Swadeshi exhibition that Calcutta was laying on: he regretted the admission into it of mill-made cloth, and the AISA (All India Spinners Association) had decided not to exhibit there. Consequently, he did not want to place himself or his hosts in an embarrassing position by his presence in Calcutta in such circumstances. In mid-October he agreed to 'obey' Motilal's wish that he should go to Calcutta; and subsequent correspondence with B.C.Roy led to the Bengalis modifying the type of exhibition so that Gandhi was able to advise Khadi organizations to exhibit.⁶

When Gandhi arrived in Calcutta it was abundantly clear why Motilal had wanted him there. In the months after his election as President, the report, which bore his name and recommended a constitution envisaging Dominion

status for India, had been published and discussed at length. Divisions on the subject now gaped within Congress, while pressure from outside the Congress establishment against the report was increasing. Before Congress began, over 50,000 mill labourers occupied the pandal for nearly two hours and passed a resolution in favour of complete independence for India.

When Motilal realized the danger that Congress would reject his report, he made it known that he would resign as President if this was the case; and he looked to Gandhi to devise some formula of reconciliation. The Mahatma was peculiarly fitted to perform this function. His immense public repute outside the ranks of the politicians marked him out as a national figure whose conciliation might be acceptable to all parties. Since he had devoted his main efforts to constructive work in the earlier years he was not aligned with either Congress group. However he had reaffirmed his support for the Nehru Report in *Young India* early in December. The basis of that support was his belief that the report could provide a focus for unanimity, and that unanimity behind the call for Dominion Status, rather than independence, therefore made Dominion status a practical possibility.⁷

The assassination of an official in Lahore on 17th December by Bhagat Singh highlighted the depth of feeling among some younger political activists: Gandhi deplored this action and in his press articles there appeared a sense of impending crisis for the creed of non-violence. He must have wondered whether the time was imminent for renewed Satyagraha in order to 'sterilize' the violence visible in public life.

At Congress Gandhi's first essay was in the Subjects Committee on 26th December. He moved the resolution adopting the Nehru Report while abiding by the Madras declaration on complete independence, with the provision that if the British did not accept it by 31st December 1930 Congress would restart non-violent Non-cooperation by advising the country to refuse taxation and every aid to the Government.⁸ Two days later in the Subjects Committee Gandhi moved a new resolution of his own drafting which cut the time limit to 31st December 1929. This step was the result of intense private negotiations. Gandhi explained that he favoured the first resolution he had moved, but this one was essential to the national interest because it would hold all parties in Congress together in an acceptable compromise. His resolution was passed by 118 votes to 45. In answer to those who asked whether he would return to leadership of a national movement as in 1920 if they voted for his resolution, Gandhi had said that he would only return if they subjected themselves to his discipline. The session's opportunity for Gandhi and response he made set the seal on his recreation as an all-India political leader which had been in process since the crumple of Non-cooperation.

Gandhi's ability and willingness to act as a compromiser provided him with a crucial functional role. His programme, moreover, offered a new way of relating to the government and of extending their conditions with other sections of society. The constructive programme was to be the preparation for a confrontation with the British in which unity and mass contact were essential.

Fifteen months elapsed after Calcutta Session before it was clear what Gandhi's compromise resolution in Congress would mean in practice for India's relationship with the British Government. In both Congress and in the country Gandhi's main problems were consistency and control. Only a united and disciplined movement stood a chance of success, whether in the political sense of putting pressure on the Government or in Gandhian terms of achieving true Swaraj. Throughout the period of waiting and preparation for possible civil disobedience Gandhi made it plain that he hoped for a peaceful settlement which would enable India to remain in the Empire.

At the end of February when Gandhi and Irwin met at a tea party given by Vithalbhai they talked of missions, diet and communal tension. On the Calcutta Congress Gandhi had, according to Irwin, 'nothing very exciting' to say. Soon after fraternizing with Irwin, Gandhi was in court in Calcutta for burning foreign cloth in a public park. But even at the illegal bonfire he warned his audience that the time for Civil Disobedience had not come. Gandhi constantly reminded those who flocked to hear him or read his papers that Swaraj would not come to them as a gift; it could only be created by working out the triple constructive programme of foreign-cloth boycott through Khadi, temperance (self-control) and the abolition of Untouchability.⁹

During the months of waiting for the Government Gandhi spent considerable time and energy on trying to reinforce the delicate unity of Congress and to redecorate it as an organization capable of embarking on effective resistance. Although countrywide contact and sympathy were

essential to him, he realized that his plans were impracticable unless Congress itself was united and organized. Three Committees had been set up after Calcutta Session, the Foreign Cloth Boycott under himself and Jairamdas, one for prohibition under Rajagopalachariar and one for anti-untouchability work under Jamnalal Bajaj; but their work was impossible without an effective countrywide Congress organization, as Gandhi had pointed out in his cloth boycott scheme. He set himself to publicize the inadequacies of the Congress organization and to nudge it into reform. The Congress organization was not the living reality he wanted, and politics still seemed to him lighthearted and uncontrollable compared with the hard labour for Swaraj he recommended. There were increasing signs of violence and the resurgence of terrorism, particularly among students; the bombs thrown by Punjabi students in the Assembly in April was but one example. Faction in several regions split Congress and Gandhi was ineffective to intervene in local disputes.

Irwin's Declaration and the Lahore Congress:

Meanwhile Irwin bent his mind to the problem of conciliation. His aim was not merely to prevent a possibly violent confrontation with Congress, but to attract the active co-operation of educated India's main political association in plans for constitutional reform set in train by the appointment of the Simon Commission. Even before the Calcutta Congress Irwin had been considering a conference between representatives of Parliament, British India and the Princely states, as a means of attracting wide support for whatever reforms

emerged, and of neutralizing Indian resentment to the Simon commission. By April 1929, after listening to reports of the similar trend of opinion among liberals and moderate Congressmen, he had connected the conference plan with the idea of a declaration that the aim of British India was Dominion Status.

Irwin and his governors had seen prominent Indians in the week before the announcement was due, to pave the way for a cooperative response. From Jinnah and Sapru he gathered that Gandhi and Motilal would respond favourably and agree to go to London. On 26th October he wrote personally to a selection of leaders including Sapru, M.M.Malaviya, Motilal, Vithalbhai Patel, Shafi, Jayakar and Purshottamdas Thakurdas-but not Gandhi- announcing the claim of the declaration. M.A.Ansari considered Irwin's statement 'a god sent' and went with Vallabhbhai to Meerut to discuss it with Gandhi, whom they found 'less enthusiastic, more cautious, but on the whole, taking a very favourable view of the announcement'.¹⁰

Congress response to the imperial proposal was decided in two type of gathering-the inner group of the Working Committee meeting with prominent Liberals, and then the annual session. Here was a new test of Gandhi's all-India leadership. He had to 'lead' in intensive discussion and negotiation once a actual proposal was on the table; and sell the decision of the inner group to the open Congress.

The first round of discussion, between the working Committee and interested Liberals, occurred in November. In this setting the interaction of Gandhi, the two Nehrus and Sapru was of prime importance. However, each of

them had to look beyond their immediate circle of negotiators to those whom their decision would influence and on whose reaction depended the practicability of any course they chose. Shades of the Liberals, Mahasabha Hindus, Muslims and of the Independence-wallahs who would flock to Lahore, hovered over the main decision makers, reminding them of the parameters within which they could act.

Their informal meeting in Delhi on 1st & 2nd November produced a joint statement appreciating Irwin's declaration and the government's 'desire...to placate Indian opinion'; and hoping that they would be able to cooperate in their effort to evolve a scheme of 'Dominion Constitution suitable for India's needs'. The signatories noted that they interpreted the declaration as meaning 'that the Conference is to meet not to discuss when Dominion status is to be established but to frame a scheme of Dominion Constitution'; and that they felt that before such a conference could succeed it was essential that certain steps should be taken to inspire trust and ensure the cooperation of Indian political organizations. The points they listed were:

- 1) A policy of general conciliation,
- 2) A general amnesty for political prisoners, and
- 3) The effective representation of progressive political organizations at the conference, the largest contingent being that of Congress.

They also hoped that India would be administered in a more liberal spirit before the new constitution came into being.¹¹



It looked as though unanimity had been reached: but behind the joint statement there was serious discord. Gandhi had told V. S. Srinivas Sastri that he knew that the new constitution could not embody full Dominion Status, but he wanted limitations on such topics as the army and the Princely states to be removable automatically on a specified date, and to be laid down with Indian's full consent. Liberal leaders with the support of Ansari and most of the prominent Congress Muslims pressed for an unconditional acceptance of Irwin's offer. Bose opposed acceptance, in company with Jawaharlal who believed that it gave no assurance of Dominion Status in the near future. Gandhi had to put extreme pressure on Jawaharlal to sign, arguing that he could not go against the wishes of the Working Committee when he was a member, and that it was wisest to accept whatever was given and fight on from there.

However, the unity of the Delhi statement was short-lived. On the same day Bose resigned from the working Committee to free himself for public criticism of the statement; and Jawaharlal followed suit on 4th November, resigning from the Working Committee and as General Secretary of the AICC.¹² He wrote in anguish to Gandhi defending his resignation in view of his opposition to the statement. Gandhi realized that if Jawaharlal broke with him openly and refused to preside at Lahore his own refusal of the Congress Presidency in favour of Jawaharlal would be rendered useless and his plan to incorporate younger men into the Congress establishment and draw the fire of their opposition shattered. He wrote and wired at once to calm Jawaharlal, urging him not to resign because it would affect the national cause and there

was in any case no principle at stake. Motilal, too, weighed in. He urged him not to rush into resignation, and when he heard news of the House of Lords debate on Irwin's Declaration he wrote, 'Congrats... There is no question of resignation now. The dustbin is the only safe place for the Delhi statement. The matter for immediate consideration is the mobilization of our own forces'. An open crack between Jawahar and Gandhi was averted.

Two days before the Working Committee met Gandhi stated that he still wished to co-operate. 'I can wait for the Dominion Status constitution, if I can get the real Dominion status in action, if, that is to say, there is a real change of heart, a real desire on the part of the British people to see India a free and self-respecting nation and on the part of the officials in India a true spirit of service.' He included in his conception of Dominion status the ability to end the British connection and noted that it was 'highly likely that the Labour Government had never meant all the implications mentioned by me'. He also told the M.P., Fanner Brockway, that the Parliamentary debates did not reassure him that the conference might not prove a dangerous trap, and he proposed to do what he had done with Smuts in South Africa, require an assurance before co-operating.¹³

The Working Committee on 16th & 19th November was attended by the two Nehrus, Gandhi, Malaviya, A.K. Azad, M.A. Ansari, J.Bajaj, J.M.Sen Gupta, P.Sitaramayya and Subhas Bose- despite his resignation. They were joined on 18th November by a group of signatories to the Delhi Statement. Among these was Sapru who gathered from meetings with Gandhi, Motilal,

and Malaviya on the previous two days that they did not want to spoil the proposed conference. He had influenced Gandhi that they should give the government a chance to show itself in earnest over Irwin's Declaration. However, Gandhi had indicated to him that his leadership position was delicate: he needed something from the government to enable him to put the younger men into 'a reasonable and hopeful frame of mind'. This meant, for example, the release of political prisoners not charged with violence.

Gandhi appeared quite and gentle, but he was not looking for a compromise and reiterated the four points of the Delhi Statement as his last word. He thought that although Irwin and the Labour Prime Minister and Secretary of State were eager to grant dominion status in a reasonable time the Labour Cabinet was divided and backed power in parliament to carry through a programme, which would satisfy India. He would advocate independence as India's goal and would be ready to see Irwin with Motilal if there was discussion on the four points, though he had little hope of agreement.¹⁴ Gandhi's unwillingness to slam the door to negotiation even at this late stage, combined with a tough stance on the Delhi 'conditions' reflected his wish to keep Congress united. Outright rejection of Irwin's offer or outright acceptance would split the Congress, and the Mahatma maintained a fine middle course.

Irwin knew that he could do nothing to assure Congress on the major points raised at Delhi. The proposed conference could not frame a Dominion Constitution; Indian representatives would have to come from all groups and

shades of opinion, and therefore Congress could not expect the lion's share; and there could be no amnesty. However he tried to handle the situation delicately.

On 23rd November, Gandhi approached the meeting with Irwin without any hopes of a compromise. He opened the discussion politely by expressing horror at the bomb attack on the Viceroy's train that morning; but then plunged straight into the controversy by saying that it was pointless to have discussions until it was clear that the function of the proposed conference was to frame a Dominion Constitution. Irwin stood by his declaration: the conference was free to discuss any proposals put before it but they could not lie down beforehand that it was to draft a particular constitution. Gandhi maintained that he could not participate in it unless Irwin assured him that the Cabinet would back his demand for immediate Dominion status at the conference and in Parliament. As the discussion appeared to get bogged down, Irwin said that the real test was whether Gandhi and his colleagues believed in the British purpose. Gandhi replied that he recognized the sincerity of individuals but doubted broadly the sincerity of British intentions. After two and a half hours the discussion closed, without touching on the other points of the Delhi statement such as the amnesty and the personnel of the conference.

During this encounter Gandhi was the main Congress spokesman. For him and Motilal the heart of the matter was the degree to which power would be transferred from Britain to India as a result of the conference. For Gandhi this was tied to the question of Indian weakness, which stemmed largely from Indian disunity. Throughout the 1920's he had preached self-strengthening and

unity as the only road to Swaraj. Now when offered a conference he knew that his negotiating hand would be weak as Indians had not responded to his exhortations.

In the two months between Irwin's Declaration and the Lahore Congress Gandhi was the central figure in Congress deliberations. Contemporaries among Liberals and in government thought that the way Gandhi threw his weight would be crucial: they angled for his support and attempted to strengthen his hand. Gandhi gained a unique position of control in the face-to-face negotiations of November and December because the different groups involved needed him to ease their relations with each other.

Communal division also restricted the Mahatma's management space. As the meeting with Irwin indicated, the logic and opportunities of confrontation made more sense than negotiation from a divided base. Within Gandhi himself there was a further force making for conflict rather than compromise. In the worrying political scene of communal demands, provincial differences and erupting violence, Satyagraha was the only weapon he could consider of as purifying public life and neutralizing violence. In the darkest hour Satyagraha and its devotees must prove themselves. As V.S.S Sastri had realized, this was Gandhi's mighty weapon and as a Satyagrahi he resorted to it when the conditions for conference did not appear to ensure success.¹⁵

Late in December the center of the political scene shifted to Lahore, where Gandhi's leadership was tried in a different kind of gathering. Before delegates met in Lahore the problems of consistency and control promised to

be grave. Evidence from the provinces suggested that there was little unanimity among Congressmen or willingness to submit to continental discipline. Gandhi therefore came to Lahore with several urgent priorities. He had to soothe those who pressed for peace and prevent a revolt on their part, which would smash the unity he considered so vital.

On 27th December 1929 in the Subjects Committee Gandhi supported the resolution, which endorsed the Working Committee's action on the Delhi statement, but now rejected the conference proposal and declared that Swaraj in the Congress creed should mean complete independence, Purna Swaraj. The resolution appealed for communal co-operation now that the communal solution proposed in the Nehru Report was no longer at issue since the report had lapsed; and Gandhi underlined this in his speech. He also urged boycott of the legislatures as envisaged in the resolution, as a preparation for Civil Disobedience which the AICC would be authorized to start when it deemed fit.

While Gandhi did battle in Committee, the Congress opened on 29 December 1929. The welcome speech from S. Kitchlew as Chairman of the Reception Committee indicated that in this arena Gandhi could face pressure from those who still felt him to be too moderate. Kitchlew demanded a good fighting programme against alien domination, which would mobilize peasants and workers and take the form of well-organized mass and Individual Civil Disobedience in selected areas. He hoped that Congress would make independence its goal, and appealed to Gandhi to lead and the young to follow him and bear the impact of the battle. 'My appeal is... to mahatmaji. He is the

one leader in whom the masses have faith. He is the one leader who commands nation-wide respect and affection. I appeal to Mahatmaji to lead us in our struggle for National Independence'. Significantly he added that there should be no suspension of Civil disobedience like that which Gandhi imposed after Chauri Chaura violence in 1922 'which severely disappointed the workers and the country and played havoc with morale'. Jawaharlal followed with this up with a presidential call for the goal of Complete Independence and a struggle through economic and political boycotts.¹⁶

On 31st December the temper of the open session showed itself. Gandhi moved the resolution deploring the bomb attack on the Viceroy's train, realizing that he was flying in the face of most youthful opinion in Congress. Most provinces were fairly evenly divided in the vote, but Bengal and Punjab were heavily against Gandhi's resolution, while a large majority within the Gujarat, Andhra, Bihar and Hindi C.P. delegations supported him. Gandhi then moved the main resolution on independence and Civil Disobedience: Motilal seconded it. There followed two and a half hours of opposition from various angles, during which a cross section of Congressmen moved amendments. Malaviya, for example, repeated his appeal to postpone any decision until the All-Parties Conference had reconvened and considered the prospect of a Round Table Conference. M.S. Aney wanted Congress to accept the conference invitation and postpone any change of its creed. Kelkar argued that they should try to capture all the power offered in the legislatures: Satyamurti favoured council entry as part of a wide anti-government campaign. At the end of the

spectrum Bose called for a far more adequate campaign than the one Gandhi proposed, involving peasants, workers and young people, and backing civil disobedience and general strikes with an attempt to form a parallel government. He also opposed backing of the Working committee's support for the Delhi statement. Alam argued against expressing appreciation of Irwin's efforts for a settlement. After listening to the outburst against Gandhi's resolution two men got up to support it, Vishwanath from Andhra and J.M. Sen Gupta, Bose's local Bengali rival. Their main point was that only by supporting this resolution could they win Gandhi to the side of independence and secure his leadership. Sen Gupta's question, 'Do you have in India today any other leader who can lead the country to victory than Mahatma Gandhi?' Was greeted with cries of 'No, No'.

Gandhi was not present during the debate, but when he returned he spoke at length rebutting the amendments and asking Congress to accept the resolution. Jawaharlal declared that twelve amendments were admissible and should be voted on. All were lost, but the vote on Alam's (802 for and 987 against) showed that Gandhi's margin of victory was narrow. The resolution congratulating Irwin on his escape from the bomb attack was also narrowly passed, by 904 to 823: but Gandhi's resolution went through with only a handful of opponents amid cries of 'Mahatma Gandhi-ki-jai'.¹⁷ Gandhi crowned this victory with an eye to the future campaign by insisting on a Working Committee of his choice, arguing that it must be of one mind. Opposition to Gandhi at Lahore, voiced and muted, indicated that his leadership position did

not rest on the support of a solid bloc of adherents. He was accepted because of the degree of unity his resolution permitted, and because a mass campaign without him appeared impossible.

There was little thought and even less unanimity in Congress about the goal of civil disobedience. A few had firm ideas. Bose envisaged it as a step towards establishing a parallel government, while Motilal assumed that they were working for the collapse of the administration.¹⁸ But for most Congressmen it was merely a dramatic means of protest. Gandhi's perception of the object of Civil Disobedience, therefore, assumed particular significance. He spoke of civil disobedience for establishing Purna Swaraj, complete independence. His more careful exposition of his thoughts showed that he did not intend or envisage a total collapse of the British Government. His aim was through the corporate action of Satyagraha to generate among Indians the interdependent qualities of strength and unity, fundamentals to his ultimate goal of Swaraj but vital also in the short term to enable some of them to go the conference table to negotiate as national representatives, accepted as such by their rulers and their compatriots. The connection in Gandhi's mind between civil disobedience and attendance at a constitutional conference on the right terms, was evident at the Calcutta Congress and immediately after Lahore.¹⁹

In March-April, as he perfected his plan, he described civil disobedience as 'a process of developing internal strength', 'not designed to establish independence but to arm the people with the power to do so'. Moreover in July 1930 when negotiation with the British Government was on the cards, he told

Jaykar that he was not fighting for victory but to create an intensity of feeling as a demonstration-presumably directed at both British and Indians, combatant and non-combatant.²⁰ For Gandhi, therefore, civil disobedience was designed to affect Indians equally or more than the British. This was consistent with two constant themes in his teaching; that Satyagraha was both means and ends because of the moral revolution it worked in its exponents, and that real Swaraj must grow from within Indian society and could not be wrested from or distributed by an alien power. The precise form of Satyagraha had to be adapted to those it was intended to influence. Since Gandhi's primary subjects were his countrymen, he had to plan a campaign which would solder them together in a disciplined unity, gather the maximum support and ensure at least the generous detachment of non-participants.

Gandhi's new Working Committee, meeting on 2nd January 1930, had taken immediate steps to implement the boycott decision, and on 6th January Jawaharlal sent a presidential directive to all PCCs that they should ask MLAs and MLCs in their province to resign from the legislatures, and should report the response to the AICC office immediately. When the Working Committee met on 14-16 February it decided to call for the resignation from Congress elective bodies of all those who had disobeyed the boycott mandate or resigned from councils only to seek re-election. This decision, backed by the threat of disciplinary action, was circulated to PCC secretaries and offenders.²¹

As a result of Working Committee pressure 33 members of the Central Legislatures had resigned by the end of January. In Bombay by mid-February

only 7 provincial legislatures had resigned. Responsivists such as Kelkar and Jaykar stuck to their guns, and Jamnadas Mehta resigned as President of the Bombay PCC and then from the provincial assembly, to seek re-election as an independent Nationalist. The Bombay PCC had on 11th January called on all Congressmen to carryout the boycott, but on 12 January the Maharashtra PCC resolved in favour of participation in the Round Table Conference on the terms of the Delhi Statement and asked Congress not to emphasize Council boycott as this would only create bitterness within Congress. Madras Congressmen were divided, Andhra men favoured boycott while Srinivas Iyengar and Satyamurti opposed it. Eventually 17 MLCs resigned in Madras, including Satyamurti, though several were re-elected as independents. In Bengal 40 out of 47 Swarajist MLCs resigned - all of them were Hindus. In U.P 17 out of 23 Swarajists MLCs resigned, though in some cases with considerable unwillingness: and there was no shortage of replacements. In Bihar and Orissa, 30 resigned being almost the whole Swarajist contingent. Again there was no lack of new candidates, and two of the five Orissa Congressmen stood for re-election. In C.P 15 Congress MLCs resigned, though apparently with little conviction that their gesture was useful. In Assam 12 out of 16 Swarajists resigned, but Punjab produced only a single resignation.²² These rifts among Congressmen meant that certain types of civil disobedience were almost certainly not viable on a large scale, and that Gandhi in turning away from any attempt forcibly to bring down the British Government was only facing reality. They meant, too, that he would have to select issues and styles of action, which

would heal as far as possible the breaches in Congress caused by council boycott.

More serious than the resentments of anti-boycotters within Congress were the signs of opposition among Congress Muslims to the Lahore resolutions and the Mahatma's glide from co-operation with the British. Gandhi needed to keep these men above all if Congress was to gain credibility as a nationally representative body. M.A. Ansari resigned as President of the Delhi PCC because of his opposition to the Lahore policy, but refused to leave Congress or weaken it by overt hostility.

Ansari had hoped to attend the Working Committee at Sabarmati on 14-16 February when the plans for Civil Disobedience were to be laid: but his medical services were required in Jhona State by a sick Begum. He wrote a quick note to Gandhi on 10th February urging him to remember the advice he had given Motilal in Delhi and Gandhi himself in Lahore, and not to think that the response to Independence Day on 26th January was a true guide to the support they could expect for real action. In his view the country was not ready for civil disobedience. Compared with 1920 when there was much anti-government feeling, many people now believed in the goodwill of the Labour Government and Irwin's sincerity; Hindu-Muslim unity had reached its 'lowest water-mark' by contrast with the communal alliance of 1920, and Sikhs were almost entirely against Congress where as then they had been firm supporters. Moreover there was within Congress disunity, even overt revolt, 'diversity of purpose, complete lack of enthusiasm among the workers', and the practical

certainty of violent outbreaks. He argued that to embark on civil disobedience in such a situation would 'do an incalculable damage', and they should concentrate on enrolling members and volunteers, collecting funds, and the cardinal need-achieving communal unity.

Such an appeal must have hurt Gandhi to the quick; it reiterated the precise doubts and criticisms of Congress and Indian disunity he had voiced throughout 1929. But he merely replied on 16 February after the civil disobedience plan was laid that he could not turn back now. Although he agreed that the Hindu-Muslim problem was fundamental, he believed that it must be dealt with in a new way.

However Gandhi faced a critical question. In the event of an outbreak of violence equivalent to Chauri Chaura in 1922 during a non-violent campaign should he call off civil disobedience? His refusal to continue in 1922 had disturbed many supporters and cast doubts on the Satyagraha technique; for as Jawaharlal reasoned; 'if Gandhi's argument for the suspension of civil resistance was correct, our opponents will always have the power to create circumstances which would necessarily result in our abandoning the struggle'. In the last weeks of 1929 Gandhi wrestled with the possibility of repetitions of Chauri Chaura, and his personal dilemma of reconciling such with his commitment to non-violence. He sought a formula which would permit the movement to continue in such an event, though even after Lahore he had no concrete plan in mind.²³ Significantly, by mid-January he proclaimed, 'Votary as I am of non-violence, if I was given a choice between being a helpless

witness to chaos and perpetual of slavery, I should unhesitatingly say that I would far rather be witness to chaos in India.....to Hindus and Musalmans doing one another to death than I should daily witness our gilded slavery'.²⁴

Having marked out a very broad area of confrontation Gandhi tackled the problem of an exact mode of civil disobedience. The Working Committee met in the Sabarmati ashram from 14 to 16 February behind closed and guarded doors. The formal outcome was a resolution endorsing Gandhi's proposal that since different attitudes to non-violence co-existed in Congress, only those who believed in non-violence as an article of faith rather than an expedient policy should initiate and control civil disobedience. Under its terms Gandhi and his associates were authorized 'to start civil disobedience as and when they desire and in the manner and to the extent they decide'.

In formal discussions at Sabarmati produced a decision on the issue on which civil disobedience should be offered. This, like the timing and the personnel, was crucial if Gandhi was to avoid violence and attract wide support and sympathetic neutrality. One of his eleven points had been the abolition of salt tax, and even before the Working Committee met, rumours circulated in the press that the government's salt monopoly and tax were to be the initial point of conflict. On 27th February he confirmed the rumours in *Young India* with a stringent attack on taxing 'the starving millions, the sick, the maimed and the utterly helpless'²⁶

Salt, apparently such a side issue beside the great claim for independence was a superbly creative choice, solving many of the dilemmas,

which faced Gandhi after Lahore. In the first place it was not a major threat either to government finances or the Indians vested interests. Consequently it would not disaffect non-Congressmen who feared attacks on their pockets or a tough fight with the British Government. Since it would not suggest Strong repressive measures it would serve as an educative tactic, initiating large numbers into the movement without fear of great trouble or harsh reprisals. But it could be made into a highly emotional issue. Condemnation of a tax on a necessity of life for all by an exploitive foreign government could serve as a mass-rallying cry and would probably stir sympathy in England and America, elevating the whole campaign to a moral plane, which would embarrass the British Government. There was a long tradition of opposition to the salt tax, but most particularly Gandhi's stand would remind for many politically minded Indians of all shades memories of a confrontation with the government over the tax in 1923. Reading's government had felt it essential to double the tax to balance the budget, and when the legislative assembly had refused to sanction this Reading used his power of certification.

The issue for civil disobedience was settled at Sabarmati, but there was still no accurate plan of campaign. Thus Gandhi removed the independence goal from the realm of political definition where it had destroyed Congress unity and separated non-Congressmen, and used trustworthy instruments in place of those he had failed to create in 1929.

The Salt Satyagraha:

From time immemorial the people had been accustomed to manufacture salt from seawater or from the soil. The British Government had taken that right away from the people. It prohibited the people from utilizing the salt, which had been given by nature and forced them to import it from abroad.²⁷

The Salt tax had a long and an ugly history. With the establishment of the rule of the East India Company in India, it was considered to be a good source of income. At first, this tax was imposed in the form of 'land rent' and 'transit charges', and in 1762, this was consolidated into duty. Thus India, in particular Bengal and the surrounding provinces were, dependent upon imported salt from Liverpool, Spain, Romania, Aden and Mussawah.²⁸ Oppressed with the burden of excessive charges, the native industry soon found itself unable to compete with its English rival which was making determined efforts to capture the market. The official figures of the imports of British salt into Calcutta reveal the predictable result.²⁹

In 1835, a Salt Commission was appointed to review the policy of the government in respect of the salt tax. It recommended that Indian salt should be taxed to enable the sale of imported English salt from Liverpool to India. Consequently, the salt price increased. Subsequently, the Salt Act set up government domination on the manufacture of salt and its violation was made punishable with confiscation of salt and six month's imprisonment. In 1888,

Lord Dufferin, not as a permanent fiscal measure, but only as a temporary expedient.³⁰, enhanced the salt tax.

The salt-revenue officials strictly enforced the Penal Sections of the Salt Act. Section 39 of the Bombay Salt Act that was practically the same as section 16-17 of the Indian Salt Act (XII of 1882) empowered a salt-revenue officer to enter any place where illicit manufacture was going on. In case of resistance, he could break open any door and remove any other obstacle to his entry upon or into such land, building, enclosed place or premises and take possession of or destroy salt illegally manufactured. He was empowered to seize in any open space, or in transit, any article which he had reason to believe to be contraband salt and any package or covering in which such article was found and the other contents, if any, of such package or covering in which the same was found, any animal, vessel or conveyance used or intended to be used in carrying the same.³¹

The mode of taxing salt varied from province to province. In Bombay, the tax took the form of an excise duty; in Bengal, it was levied chiefly as customs duty on imported salt, and in Madras, North India and Punjab, it was included in the price fixed by the government on its own production.³²

Besides, at several annual sessions of the Indian National Congress, particularly in 1885, 1888, 1892 and 1902, the prominent Congress Leaders subjected the Salt tax to criticism. In the first session of the Indian National Congress held in 1885 in Bombay, a prominent Congress Member,

S.A.Swaminatha Iyer pleaded against the salt tax. In 1888, at the Allahabad Congress, Narayan Vishnu Bam, a delegate from Poona, criticized the salt tax.

Besides Gandhi, the issue of salt tax was taken up by the leaders like Dadabhai Naoroji, one of the notable Congress leaders of his times and the first economic historian of the nineteenth century. He echoed his sentiments against the salt tax in his famous speech in the House of Commons in London, on 14th August 1894 in which he leveled sharp criticism against the salt tax.

Gandhi clearly understood that salt was the only relish which the teeming poor in Indian villages could afford to their monotonous diet. Next to water and air, it was perhaps the greatest necessity of life, the only condiment of the masses and indispensable for land, life and several industries. Thus by choosing the salt law for his act of defiance of British laws, Gandhi exhibited his political mastermind and shrewdness.

Inauguration of Salt Satyagraha:

Before the launch of Salt Satyagraha at an all-India level, Gandhi made it a point to open a dialogue with the Viceroy. Gandhi stated that he and many of his countrymen hope that the proposed Round Table Conference might furnish a political solution agreeable to the long-awaited demand of the Congress leadership. But when the Viceroy said plainly that he could not give any assurance that he or the British Cabinet would promise to support a scheme of full Dominion Status.

Elaborating his point categorically, Gandhi stated that India was to live as a Nation. If the slow death of her people by starvation was to stop, some remedy must be found for immediate relief. The proposed conference was certainly not the remedy. He also stated that "... I shall proceed with such co-workers of the Ashram as I can take, to disregard the provisions of the salt laws. I regard this tax to be the most iniquitous of all from the poor man's stand point. As the Independence movement is essentially for the poorest in the land, the beginning will be made with this evil."

Lord Irwin's reply was brief and was simply an expression of regret that Gandhi would be 'contemplating a course of action which is clearly bound to involve violation of the law and danger to the public peace.'³³

Left with no other alternative after the Viceroy's brief, blunt and unsupportive reply, Gandhi made up his mind to make preparations for the historic march with a band of devoted workers. In a prayer meeting at the

Sabarmati Ashram on 5th March, he fixed up 12th March for the Campaign and asked the ashram inmates to get ready in five days. They were asked not to worry about the place to which they were to march, Gandhi said, "We shall march in the direction of Pethapur." When it was suggested that four or five women might be allowed to go along, Gandhi who did not wish to take women in the march, explained, "Only men will accompany us. Women and others will stay in the Ashram. Women and others will have enough opportunity to offer Satyagraha. Just as Hindus do not harm a cow, the British do not attack women as far as possible. For Hindus it would be cowardice to take a cow to the battlefield. In the same way it would be cowardice for us to have women accompany us."³⁴

Five days before the historic march, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel was arrested at Ras and he was convicted. The next day, in a speech at Ahmedabad Gandhi explained to his audience that the time had come when they and he would be finally tested.

The choice for the route of the historic march was made with due considerations to various options. Some constructive workers from the Surat district told Gandhi that there were many facilities in this area for easy manufacture of salt. Due to these considerations, the choice fell on Jalalpur taluka for the marching column.

Gandhi issued some instructions to be strictly carried out by the marchers during their long journey on foot. The Satyagrahi party was expected to reach each place by 8'o clock in the morning and to sit down for lunch

between 10.00 and 10.30 A.M. No rooms would be needed for rest at noon or night, but a clean, shaded place with bamboo-and grass covering would be enough.³⁵ It was assumed that the people in the villages would provide the Satyagraha volunteers with food, cooked or uncooked. It would be the simplest food. Neither more than roti or rotla or kedgerree with vegetables and milk or curds, would be required. As a principle, sweets if presented, would be declined. Vegetables were to be merely boiled, on no oil, spices and chilies, whether, green or dry, whole or crushed, would be added or used in the cooking. To him he said 'for me goat's milk, if available, in the morning, at noon and at night, and raisins or dates and three lemons will do.'³⁶

Mahatma Gandhi advised the marchers to lug their own bedding, so that the villagers would have to provide nothing except a clean place for resting in. The villagers were not to incur any expense on account of betel-leaves, betel nuts or tea for the party.

Gopal Krishna Gokhale is reported to have said that Gandhi was capable of turning heroes out of clay.³⁷ Indeed; Gandhi was very particular about the dates, directions, locale, objectives, participants, leadership, strength of opponents and above all, the results.

The Commencement of the Historic March:

The March on foot undertaken by Gandhi and seventy-eight Congress Volunteers was the most significant event in the history of the breach of salt law in our country. It was commenced in accordance with a fixed schedule to be carried on by them during the long journey ending at Dandi. Undoubtedly, it was a disciplined band of non-violent Satyagrahis who were to present a new model of Satyagraha which later on was to be converted into a bigger movement at all- India level.

On 12th March 1930 at 6 -10 a.m. Gandhi came out of his room, calm and composed, accompanied by Prabhashankar Patani, Mahadev Desai and Pyarelal, his secretary. He offered prayers, looked at his watch and exactly at 6-30 a.m. commenced his march with seventy-eight volunteers.³⁸

When Gandhi started his march, he took a vow that he would return to the ashram after the attainment of Swaraj or not at all. He kept this promise, for he never returned to the Sabarmati Ashram. After the Civil Disobedience Movement, he went to Wardha, where he spent some time before moving on to a village nearby, which came to be known as Sevagram.³⁹

Following the commencement of the epic Dandi march, an amazing wave of enthusiasm swept over the entire country. The historic day was celebrated all over India. Calcutta woke that morning amidst sounds of conch-shells and shouts of 'Gandhiji ki jai'. J.M. Sen Gupta appealed to all men and women of the province to enroll themselves as volunteers for the Civil

Disobedience Movement. In Bombay, a public meeting was held under the presidentship of K.F. Nariman. He exhorted the audience to get ready for the fight. In Madras, at a public meeting at Tilak Ghat, the Madras District Congress Committee, Andhra Congress Committee, the Triplicane Congress Sabha and the political section of the Youth League offered prayers for the success of Civil Disobedience Campaign. In Lahore, a band of Congress Volunteers paraded the streets and raised shouts of "Mahatma Gandhi ki Jai." In Peshawar, taking out a procession and holding a public meeting observed the 'Satyagraha Day'. Civil Disobedience Day was celebrated in Delhi in a meeting attended by about 10,000 persons, including a large number of ladies. Devdas Gandhi gave the detailed history of the salt tax and called it the most 'barbarous' tax which affected the poor classes, and pleaded for its abolition immediately. Allahabad, the nerve center of U.P politics, witnessed scenes of enthusiasm in connection with the celebration of the commencement of the Satyagraha Campaign. In Ahmedabad, a meeting of the Youth League was held in which a resolution was passed empowering the secretaries to enlist volunteers for Civil Disobedience Movement. The 'Dandi March Day' was observed in Nagpur by hoisting the national flag. A procession passed through the main bazaars of the town, and, thereafter, a public meeting was also held. Similar celebrations were held all over the country and considerable enthusiasm was aroused in people for participating in the Civil Disobedience Movement.⁴⁰

The same day Gandhi and his Satyagrahis reached a small village, Aslali, where they were received well by the villagers. Gandhi emphasized the importance of salt and criticized the salt tax levied by the government.

The Second halt of the Dandi marchers was at Bareja, a village with a population of 2,500. He emphasized the importance of Khadi; its production and use by the villagers.

As Gandhi entered the Kheda district, memories some sweet, some bitter-filled his mind. It was while working in this district that he became one with the lives of people. When some headmen and matadars of Kheda district submitted their resignations as a protest against the oppressive policy of the government, Gandhi advised them, 'Remember that in the resignations you have handed in, I see God's hand. The Kheda district has made an auspicious beginning.'⁴¹

At Vasana, where the villagers gathered to accord reception to the marchers and listen to their leader, Gandhi explained that abolition of the salt tax or remission of some other taxes would not mean Swaraj for them. Winning of Swaraj was not going to be so easy as they might think.

At Nadidad, a town with a population of 31,000, Gandhi reminded the people: 'Bond by the chains of slavery, we are being crushed at present and we want to shake them off.'⁴²

The student's services to the national cause were also highly praised. They were advised to suspend their studies for as long as this struggle continued. He pleaded that whenever revolutions had taken place, that is, in

Japan, China, Egypt, and Ireland and in England, students and teachers had played a prominent role. It was thus a 'sacred pilgrimage'. Each marcher was advised to spin a particular quota and also write his own diary. Besides, they were to spend a well-disciplined life during the march.

At Borsad, the reception of Gandhi and his Satyagrahis was celebrated with the immediate announcement of the resignations of headmen, matadars and ravanias of twenty villages of the taluka.

On 19th March, the party of Satyagrahis reached Ras taluka. During the short stay of Gandhi, some of the headmen and matadars had handed over resignations. But Gandhi expressed discontent on the small number of resignations at Ras.

Meanwhile, the A.I.C.C held a meeting on the banks of the Sabarmati on 20th March. Besides the President, Jawaharlal Nehru, it was attended by the prominent leaders like Maulana Azad, Sarojini Naidu, P.D.Tandon, Abbas Tyabji, Darbar Gopaldas, J.B.Kripalani, N.C.Kalelkar, Kasturba Gandhi, Anasuyabehn and Mrs. Ambalal.⁴³ By its principal resolution, the A.I.C.C confirmed the working Committee's resolution authorizing Gandhi to begin Civil Disobedience Movement. It laid down the conditions under which the various provinces should start, Satyagraha on a mass scale.⁴⁴ In case Gandhi was arrested, the Provincial Congress Committees should immediately determine to start Civil Disobedience, and if he was not arrested, they should await instructions, which he might issue on reaching his destination.

As the march proceeded, so the pressure of publicity and social boycott was built up and resignations began to occur in large numbers. By 22nd March, estimated numbers of resignations were four from Ahmedabad district: 27 from Kaira (of whom 16 were from Borsad taluka) 17 from Broach, and 2 from Surat. But Surat soon became the most affected district by 5th April. 140 headmen had resigned and ten days later, the figure had risen to 227.⁴⁵ Gandhi warned them, 'It will be regarded as cowardice to hand in one's resignation and then to withdraw it.'

The speech delivered by Gandhi at Broach on 26th March dealt with the communal question.⁴⁶ He explained that he had never dreamt that he could win Swaraj merely through his effort or assisted only by the Hindus. He sought the assistance of Muslims, Parsees, Christians, Sikhs, Jews and all other Indians. He needed the assistance even of Englishmen.⁴⁷

At Jambusar, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya arrived to see Gandhi to remove the general impression that had gone abroad that as he had not included women in his first batch of volunteers, they might not be taken up at all. Gandhi told her, 'If impatient mothers will be little patient they will find ample scope for their zeal and sacrifice in this national struggle for freedom.'⁴⁸

At Surat where Gandhi and the Satyagrahis reached on 1 April, they received a warm welcome. He called the salt tax as beastly, inhuman and a Satanic Law.

In a message to the nation in the issue of young India dated 3rd April 1930, Gandhi exhorted the people 'Remember 6th April', and start mass Civil

Disobedience regarding the salt laws. He advised them to observe non-violence in the fullest sense of the term. This was to be the spontaneous action. The workers were required to merely guide the masses in the initial stages. Later, the masses would regulate the movement themselves.⁴⁹ Those who were not engaged in Civil Disobedience were expected to occupy themselves and encourage others to be engaged in some national service, such as Khadi work, liquor and opium picketing, foreign cloth exclusion, village sanitation, assisting the families of civil resistance-prisoners in a variety of ways.⁵⁰

Thus at each village, where the party stopped, Gandhi spoke briefly, telling the villagers that a great ordeal was at hand. He filled his political appeal with exhortation relevant to village life, such as Khadi, cow protection, cleanliness and untouchability. Out of 25 days, which the journey took, the party of Satyagrahis had walked for twenty-two days, excluding three days of Gandhi's silence. On his way, Gandhi passed by forty villages and towns and everywhere he addressed the audience. The whole countryside was awake to the call of the Mahatma.

The Satyagrahis reached Dandi on 5th April. Sarojini Naidu had already arrived there to welcome them. When interviewed by the special correspondent of *The Bombay Chronicle*, Gandhi said, 'Government, perhaps, deserves congratulations for their policy of non-interference which is not exactly in keeping with their proved capacity of provoking popular sentiment.'⁵¹

Next day he was to break the salt tax law. If the Civil Disobedience Movement became widespread in the country and the government tolerated it,

the salt law, Gandhi declared, might be taken as abolished. Gandhi advised the people to make salt freely in every home, as our ancestors used to, and sell it from place to place, and they should continue doing so wherever possible till the government yielded, so much so that the salt in government stocks would become excessive. Gandhi highlighted the importance of Dandi and praised the people of the taluka.

Gandhi and his volunteers broke the salt law at 8-30 A.M on 6th April 1930 by taking a lump of natural salt which was deposited in a small pit. Hundreds of persons witnessed this scene. Sarojini Naidu stood by Gandhi's side, cried, 'Hail, Deliverer.' Gandhi, while picking up a lump of salt in his hand, said, 'with this, I am shaking the foundations of the British Empire.' Not a single policeman or excise officer was present there.

After Gandhi had addressed the meeting on 6th April about two tolas of salt which was taken by him in the morning and also cleaned by him, was auctioned for Rs.525/- to Seth Ranchhodlal Shodhan, a mill-owner of Ahmedabad.⁵²

The salt became the symbol of India's will to freedom. The same day the salt laws were broken throughout India at least by five million people at over 5,000 meetings. The entire countryside became deeply conscious of the struggle for Swaraj, which was intensifying. The Dandi March received worldwide publicity. Soon the Civil Disobedience Movement spreads concurrently in western, northern, central, eastern and southern regions of India.

Breach of Salt Law and Government Response:

The historic march of Gandhi and his seventy-eight Satyagrahis captivated all attention of the government of Bombay Presidency and the government of India. The nationalist press, especially The Bombay Chronicle, The Tribune and The Leader thoroughly covered the march in their columns and reviewed the whole situation in their editorials as well as main articles. Thus the march had become a sort of frightening for the government machinery and it was no less effective on the Viceroy's mind.⁵³

Section 117 of the Indian Penal Code, under which Gandhi's arrest was proposed, being bailable, there was nothing to prevent him from continuing to march if he chose to be bailed out. In the event of his arrest, the government of Bombay had always been disposed to think that a long sentence would be preferable.' If Gandhi should go on hunger strike, he must be released rather than allowed to die in custody. A short sentence would have no value.⁵⁴

It was at length decided that Gandhi should be detained under Regulation XXV of 1827 which allowed persons engaged in unlawful activities to be placed under surveillance at the discretion of the authorities.⁵⁵ On 5th May, the District Magistrate reached Gandhi's camp at Karadi along with the Superintendent of Police and a party of twenty armed constables at 12-45 a.m. when he was asleep. He woke him up and told him, 'I have a warrant for your arrest, Mr. Gandhi.' Gandhi was found smiling when the warrant was being read out to him.⁵⁶



Following the arrest of Gandhi, the response to the call for the breach of salt law was spontaneous. It was inaugurated in the coastal area and on the banks of rivers, the day of commencement being 6th April. The 'National Week' from 6-13 April witnessed peaceful manufacture of salt by the Congress leaders of all-India fame. The contraband Salt was auctioned at fancy prices and also sold in the streets by the volunteers. The participation in this mission was by men, women, teachers, lawyers, doctors, members of commerce and industry and last but not least by those who had faith in Gandhian Philosophy and leadership.

Consequently salt Satyagraha was inaugurated in cities and towns, in all the provinces of India. In Bombay presidency men and women in breaking the salt law showed much enthusiasm. Impressive scenes were witnessed at Hajiali Point and Mahalaxmi on 7th April, when the first batch of the Bombay civil resisters led by K.F.Nariman broke the salt law in the presence of 10,000 spectators. There was a large force of mounted and foot police, armed with lathis, on the final scene, but they remained passive spectators throughout. Similarly, salt law was broken at Ville Parle, Santa Cruz, Khar, Bandra, Borivili, Naogon, Muhund, Dewa and Bhanduk.⁵⁷

The Suburban Police raided the Satyagraha camp at Ville Parle on the same day and destroyed the Saltpans there. They confiscated the contraband salt and arrested Nariman, Jamanalal Bajaj, Mashruwala, and Kishorilal Bhat, Secretary of the Bombay Suburban District Congress Committee, under the salt Act.⁵⁸ True to their resolve, batches of volunteers offered Satyagraha on 9th

April at different centers. Volunteers after breaking the law and with lotas (cups) full of seawater went about in streets shouting slogans like “Mahatma Gandhi ki Jai” and “Bande Mataram”.

Similarly, the sale of contraband salt was organized in every part of Ahmedabad city unrestricted by the police in the initial stage. The volunteers song in chorus, “We have broken the salt law which will wreck the Empire”.⁵⁹

Massive raids by Satyagrahis on government salt works in several parts of west India were operated upon. The most important places raided were Dharasana Salt works and the Wadala salt works. As a result of these operations, the volunteers suffered massively at the hands of the government machinery.

On 7th May 1930, Abbas Tyabji, who had taken the place of Gandhi as leader of the volunteers, addressed a meeting in which he stated, ‘Let it not be thought that after Mahatmaji’s arrest, the movement will be slackened and that the idea about raiding the government salt works at Dharasana would be dropped’.⁶⁰ Abbas Tyabji and 58 Satyagrahis were arrested on 12th May 1930 within one furlong of the commencement of their march from Karadi Satyagraha Ashram. The authorities also arrested Jugatram Dave, Secretary Surat Congress Committee, who accompanied the party. Tyabji called upon Mrs. Sarojini Naidu to take charge of Satyagraha volunteers after his arrest as decided earlier by Gandhi.

Sarojini Naidu, with a batch of fifty Satyagrahis resumed the march. All the volunteers were pledged to perfect non-violence. The police force

surrounded the Satyagrahis and completely isolated them from one another; the people who were following were warned off and the pressmen were also told to leave the spot.⁶¹ Mrs. Naidu was nominally placed arrest and then released. She paid tribute to the wonderful discipline of her Satyagrahis who remained fixed to the spot for twenty-eight hours without a drop of water or food.⁶²

The Dharasana Satyagraha took on unprecedented turn when about 150 'Sainiks' offering Satyagraha took the police unawares and rushed into salt pans, since many of the policemen had gone to take their meals. They had nearly reached the salt mounds, which were protected by fencing. The police reached after them and made a lathi charge as a result of which several Satyagrahis received serious injuries.⁶³ Volunteer after volunteer was following on the ground after bravely withstanding lathi blows. The officials were giving orders, 'beat them, beat them; maaro, maaro.' No shrieking, no sighing were heard from the volunteers.⁶⁴ Fresh batches of volunteers arrived from Bulsar, Viramnagar and Kaira to take their place. The wounded volunteers were removed to the Untadi camp.⁶⁵

After the Satyagrahis were driven out of the bounds of salt works, mounted European sowars rode at full mad dash with lathis in their hands beating arbitrarily everybody, they saw anywhere between the spot and the village. They also galloped at full speed through the streets of the village, scattering men, women and children and terrorizing them. The villagers rushed into the lanes and closed themselves in the houses.⁶⁶ The police also resorted to inhuman tortures of its victims. Those who fell unconscious were thrown into

the saline mud. The arrested ones were stripped naked and sticks were thrust into their anus.⁶⁷

On 20th May, Web Miller, the United Press Correspondent, heard reports of the demonstrations of the volunteers at Dharasana, and the government took steps to prevent persons coming to, and the news going out of the place. Web Miller saw Sarojini Naidu leading the Satyagrahis who commenced the half-a-mile march to salt deposits slowly and in silence. Manilal Gandhi, the second son of Mahatma Gandhi, also accompanied them.

When the first column of Satyagrahis advanced, they were warned to disperse. On their refusal to do so, the police rushed upon them and rained blows on their heads with their steel-shod lathis. Not one of the marchers raised an arm to fend off the blows. In 2 or 3 minutes, the ground was quilted with bodies. Thus, group after group, walked forward, sat down and submitted to being beaten into insensibility without raising an arm to protect themselves.⁶⁸ The Police became enraged by the non-resistance of the Satyagrahis. They commenced savagely kicking the seated men in the abdomen and testacies. They also dragged the sitting Satyagrahis by the arms or feet, sometime for a hundred yards and throwing them into ditches. The stretcher-bearers carried back a stream of immobile bleeding bodies.⁶⁹

Miss Madeleine Slade, a disciple of Gandhi, paid a visit to Bular on 6th June to see how the police at the Dharasana salt depot was treating Satyagraha volunteers. In her report published in *Young India*, she gave evidence of the injuries perpetrated on Satyagraha volunteers, i.e., lathi blows on head, chest,

stomach and joints; stripping of men naked before beating; tearing of loin-cloth and thrusting of sticks into anus; pressing and squeezing of testicles till a man become insensible; dragging of wounded men by legs and arms after beating them; throwing of wounded men into hedges or into salt water; raiding of horses over men as they lay or sat on the ground; thrusting of pins and thorns into men's bodies and using foul languages and blasphemy.⁷⁰

Mrs. Kasturba Gandhi visited the wounded volunteers in the hospital and was deeply shocked to see their condition. She consoled the victims by her crept comment that their suffering was for a right cause.⁷¹

Similarly, on 17th May, about 2,000 Satyagraha volunteers raided the Wadala Salt works, situated about eight miles away from Bombay under the leadership of Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya, Mrs. Lilavati Munshi and other local leaders. Satyagraha Volunteers rushed through police cordon and snatched away the salt. Many of them used their Khadi caps as bags for carrying the salt.⁷² On 19th May, one hundred Satyagrahis arrived from Dadar and Matunga and continued the raid. They split themselves in ten batches and raided the salt depot from different points.⁷³ About 300 policemen armed with lathis and rifles who were posted at the salt works after the incident of 17th May, resorted to lathi charge. Several volunteers were arrested and 12 were severely injured.⁷⁴ One of the volunteers had his skull fractured and fell down unconscious. The police dealt him with seven danduka blows and later on, threw him in the muddy soil.⁷⁵

About 1,500 Volunteers successfully attempted another raid on Wadala salt works on 1st June as a challenge to the 'British anarchy' in accordance with the Bombay Congress Bulletin of 31st May. 11 women including Mrs. Lilavati Munshi, seven Sikhs, one Gujarati and two Deccan women were placed under arrest and detained at Wadala. The Muslim volunteers were the first to break the police barrier, and in the lathi charge several Borahs received injuries. Parsis, Sikhs and Christians also participated in the raid and were lustily cheered by crowds of spectators, among the appearance of a 'regular battle-field' between the peaceful Satyagrahis and the police.⁷⁶

The preparations for Salt Satyagraha in Sindh were made in the first week of April. On 3rd April 1930, the citizens of Karachi assembled in thousands and their leaders Dr. Choitram Gidwani and Jairamdas Doulatram explained to them the significance of Salt Satyagraha. They appealed to the people to imitate the example of their mothers and sisters of Gujarat and join the struggle for freedom.⁷⁷ A procession of nearly 10,000 persons traversed the main thoroughfares of the city. A noteworthy facet of the procession was that 4,000 sweepers and 400 ladies joined the procession. The government felt alarmed by this developing situation and on 16th April 1930, the police raided the Swaraj Ashram and the Satyagraha camp from where some papers and salt making vessels were removed. A few prominent leaders like Swami Govindanand, Krishnanand, Dr. Gidwani, Naraindas, Tara Chand and Vishnu Sharma were arrested.

During their trial, armed police guarded the court but were soon overwhelmed by the onrush. The crowd was estimated to be 20,000. There was large-scale stone throwing and every window in the court was shattered. The crowd swarmed into the court, threw stones at the pleaders and others who had congregated therein and shouted revolutionary slogans.⁷⁸ The police opened fire on the mob as a result of which several persons were injured, one of whom was Jairamdas Doulatram who received a bullet wound in the thigh. Seven persons were seriously injured; 26 others received injuries from stones and lathi blows and one of the injured died.⁷⁹ Dr. Gidwani and Naraindas were sentenced to two years rigorous imprisonment; Vishnu Sharma and Swami Krishnanand to 18 months and Manilal Vyas 12 months. Tara Chand got six months simple imprisonment.⁸⁰

Salt was also manufactured in Satyagraha centers at Hyderabad and Sukkur. The novel feature was the mass disposal of mounds of salt collected by the volunteers. It was sold at a fancy price, i.e., one paise per seer.⁸¹ On 8th May, Larkana observed the Salt Satyagraha Day when about 4,000 persons including 30 ladies and several children attended a meeting under the presidentship of Jhamutmal. When preparations of salt were being planned, they were attacked with lathis indiscriminately by a British police officer and fifty policemen. Neither age old nor ladies, not even tender-aged children were spared. The total number of persons who suffered injuries was nearly one hundred. The Satyagrahis did not strike back.⁸²

The bonfire of foreign clothes was another feature in Sindh. In Karachi, some students and merchants dressed up three donkeys with European costumes, which they had collected for bonfire.⁸³ Ladies also participated in the movement with enthusiasm. They celebrated the Ladies' Week during which a huge procession of about 5,000 women passed through various bazaars of Karachi. About two hundred women enrolled themselves as active volunteers and 2,000 signed Swadeshi pledges.⁸⁴

In the Punjab, Lahore was the main center of salt-making activity by the Congress leaders and Satyagrahis. Dr. Mohammad Alam and Dr. Satyapal in this regard took the initiative. Thousands of men and women responded to their call for participation in Salt Satyagraha. Amritsar also became one of the strongholds of the movement. Impressive scenes were witnessed on 13th April in the city where people had gathered from far and near on the Baisakhi Day. Similarly, salt was manufactured at Rawalpindi, Jallundhar, Ludhiana, Hoshiarpur and other towns of the Punjab.⁸⁵ Everywhere there was tremendous peaceful excitement and enthusiasm to defy British laws and make the alien administration come to a standstill.

In U.P., the first day of the 'National Week' was celebrated with enthusiasm on 7th April 1930 at Allahabad. A procession was led by Satyagraha volunteers among whom were Kamala Nehru and Vijayalaxmi Pandit.⁸⁶ In the evening, Motilal Nehru presided over the meeting of the citizens of the city and explained the significance of the day. On 10th April, salt was manufactured in Allahabad, in the center of the city, by a batch of volunteers led by Jawaharlal

Nehru. Motilal Nehru, T.A.K Sherwani and others were also present. After it's manufacture, both father and son auctioned several lots of salt. One packet fetched Rs. 175/-. There was no police intervention. The proceedings took about an hour.⁸⁷

In Delhi, initiative for the commencement of the 'National Week' (6-13 April 1930) was taken by Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya, Devdas Gandhi and the local leaders like Lala Deshbandhu Gupta, Faridul Ansari and others. Their operations for breaking salt law started from Shahdara, a suburb of Delhi where they collected volunteers and trained them for the movement.⁸⁸

In Bengal, the Salt Satyagraha was inaugurated with much enthusiasm and patriotic fervour. Volunteers were enrolled in large numbers. To celebrate the first day of the 'National Week', a largely attended public meeting was held on 6th April 1930 at the Shradhanand Park in Calcutta. It's President, Lalit Mohan Das, in his inspiring speech, made an ardent appeal to the people to join the national movement and make it a grand success. The Amrita Bazaar Patrika reported the details of the salt Satyagraha under several banner headlines such as, 'Bengal Astir, Grim and Fearless Determination', 'Salt Preparation of Mahisbathan in Large Scale',⁸⁹ which created excitement all over the country in favour of the movement. On 15th April, there was much violence in Calcutta. The occasion was the arrest of Jawaharlal Nehru and J.M. Sengupta. Some furious persons provoked by the haphazard police violence burnt two tramcars and ruined a third one in South Calcutta. The members of the fire brigade, engaged in extinguishing the flames, were attacked causing serious injuries to

some of them. In vengeance, a European sergeant opened fire injuring two Sikhs and causing the arrest of thirteen others.⁹⁰

In Bihar, Rajendra Prasad prepared ground for a widespread Civil Disobedience Movement. In the first week of April, about 5,000 volunteers were enrolled and, subsequently, their numbers gradually went on swelling up. Champaran and Saran were the first to come in the field to start salt Satyagraha.

In Orissa, the Civil Disobedience Movement was launched under the leadership of the Utkal provincial Congress Committee. At Iram, when 2,500 persons including 700 women were coming back with salt earth, the police charged women with lathis inflicting blows on their legs and back. But the women did not surrender their salt earth. Then the policemen started snatching ornaments from their noses and ears, and ill-treated some of them.⁹¹ At Kherang, three Satyagrahis became senseless in a lathi charge. At Kharasapur and Athilabad, houses of two Satyagrahis were set on fire.⁹²

No less enthusiasm to participate in the salt Satyagraha for the cause of freedom was witnessed in South India. The people of all the regions of it under British rule such as modern Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, the coastal belt of Andhra Pradesh and Kerala, which constituted the Madras Presidency, fully responded to the call of Gandhi and joined the movement in the first week of April 1930. On 5th April the Tamil Nadu Congress Committee met at Trichinopoly and elected C. Rajgopalachari as President. The meeting passed a resolution

welcoming the Satyagraha resolution of the AICC, and authorizing the President to organize salt campaign in the province.

In Karnataka region, R.R. Diwakar, N.S. Hardikar, Gangadhar Rao Deshpande, Hanumanthrao Kaujalgi and a few others initiated the movement.⁹³ The Karnataka Provincial Congress Committee formed a Satyagraha committee to bring about awakening among the people and rouse them to the national effort. The committee issued pamphlets indicating its aims and non-violent methods to be used by the Satyagrahis during the struggle. It also appealed to the people to join the movement in large numbers. The response to this call was prompt. Young men came in large numbers to the Satyagraha centers established at Hubli, Belgaum and Mangalore.⁹⁴

The movement was inaugurated with full enthusiasm by the manufactures of salt at various places in the region. At Belgaum, Gangadhar Rao Deshpande manufactured salt before a huge gathering of volunteers on 6th April 1930, and later on, auctioned it at a fancy price. Narayan Rao Joshi, Jeevanrao Yalagi and Anant Dahade were the prominent Congress leaders who bought it in the auction. The government viewed their activities with concern and arrested all the four leaders the next day. As a result hartals, protest meetings and processions followed in many towns of Karnataka. The scope of Satyagraha, however, extended to the boycott of foreign cloth, picketing of liquor shops, disobeying the forest laws and non-payment of taxes.

In Madras, the 'National Week' celebrations commenced on 6th April 1930 with a huge procession organized under the joint auspices of the Andhra

and Tamil Nadu Congress Committees, the Hindu Vidyalaya and the Youth League. The procession marched through Sowarpet, Mint Street, Seven Wells and Kotwal Bazaar, singing national songs and carrying national flags.⁹⁵ The Salt Satyagraha campaign opened in Madras city on 13th April 1930 after giving intimation of it to the government.⁹⁶ A party of about 45 volunteers headed by T. Prakasam, K. Nageswara Rao and Kurupanidhi, including three ladies, left Swarajya office and marched in a procession through several parts of the city, carrying national flags and singing national songs. Soon after this episode of Satyagraha, T. Prakasam and K. Nageswara Rao were arrested under section 143 I.P.C read with Section 47 of the Salt Act, and both of them were fined Rs. 500/- each. On their refusal to pay their cars were attached.⁹⁷ This sensational conviction and dramatic attachment of the two prominent leader's cars created a blend in the city. The entire town observed hartal.

T. Prakasam and Nageswara Rao were lustily cheered on their arrival in the second meeting. The latter was asked to preside. He narrated the story of his conviction and attachment of his car and declared vigorously, "I will continue to manufacture salt. I won't mind if whole property is attached."⁹⁸ T. Prakasham, in his speech, congratulated the people on the spontaneous hartal, which he characterized as unique.

Like Gandhi's march in west India, C. Rajgopalachari undertook a protest march on foot from Trichy to Vedaranyam, in Tanjore district, to break the salt law in the coastal area wearing Gandhi caps and holding stoves in their hands, ninety-six Satyagrahis joined him in this 150 mile long march. They

traversed ten miles daily-five miles in the morning and five miles in the evening- and thus the march came to an end on 28th April, the 16th day. He was arrested at Vedaranyam and sentenced to six months rigorous imprisonment and a fine of Rs.200/- or three months in lieu thereof. He refused to pay the fine. The defiance of salt law, however, continued at Vedaranyam by other Satyagrahis.

The special contribution of Gandhi in Salt Satyagraha was to make the concept of ahimsa meaningful in the social and political spheres by molding tools of non-violent action to use as a positive force in the search for social and political truths. While calling upon illustrations from Indian mythology, Gandhi transformed ahimsa into the active social technique, which was to challenge both political authority and religious authority.⁹⁹

When the government started a regular reign of terror to suppress the Satyagraha movement, Gandhi felt that the best way to fight the cruel repression of the government was to intensify Civil Disobedience and to widen its scope and make it an all-India mass movement. For according to the science of Satyagraha, the greater the repression and lawlessness on the part of authority, the greater should be the suffering courted by the victims. Success is the certain result of suffering of the extremist character, voluntarily undergone.

The British beat the Indians with batons and rifle butts. The Indians neither cringed nor complained nor retreated. That made England powerless and India unshakable. The Salt Satyagraha made the British feel that they were brutally subjugating India. The policy of government was to pick off prominent

leaders at the first instance and send them to jail. Then the rank and file were not spared. The Congress had lists of volunteers who would take over the movement. Undoubtedly, the sacrifices made by the Congress leaders and Volunteers were unique in their character.

The raids on prominent salt depots were discontinued from July onwards when the monsoon began. The reason was that open-air evaporation of seawater was not possible at this season. Although the Salt Act was not repealed with signing of the Gandhi-Irwin Pact, it was reinterpreted in such a way as to make it less burdensome.

The government repression was cruel and brutal. Satyagraha everywhere was answered with firing and lathi charges. There was firing in Calcutta, Madras, and Karachi and police repression all over India. Processions and meetings were banned. While events were taking a sharp turn, the Viceroy promptly promulgated on 27th April an ordinance, reviving the Press Act of 1910. On 1st May, Gandhi wrote on 'Goonda Raj'. The result of the campaign and of the several arrests and imprisonments of prominent workers in the various provinces had been to give an enormous stimulus to the movement. Huge public meetings were held in cities like Bombay, Calcutta, Madras, Kanpur, Allhabad, Lucknow, Lahore and Karachi. A vigorous campaign for the violation of the salt law was conducted every day in numerous towns and cities.

Before the year 1930 was out, no less than a dozen ordinances were issued. These were days of stirring news, processions and charges and firings,

frequent hartals to celebrate the arrests of prominent Congress leaders and special observances, like Peshawar Day and Garhwal Day.

The Congress Working Committee met at Allahabad in June and expressed its unshakable faith in Civil Disobedience. It chalked out programmes to be followed in the coming weeks and recommended, in its resolution, continuation of the movement, complete boycott of all foreign Cloth, inauguration of a no-tax campaign, breaches of salt law, boycott of British banking, insurance, shipping and other institutions, breach of forest laws and picketing of liquor shops.

Conclusion:

The Salt Satyagraha was planned and executed by the Congress leaders and volunteers in a systematic and non-violent manner. Obviously, its impact proved effective on the minds of the masses, which resented against salt tax. Such a duty on an article of every-day use by the rich and poor was seriously taken up by thousands of men and women in many towns and cities, and they successfully broke the salt law by manufacturing salt on the sea-coast and the river-beds. Perhaps the law-breakers who were present on the sea shore at Dandi that day (6th April 1930) achieved much more than Indian independence.

Many components of Satyagraha were tried and tested successfully during Salt Satyagraha Movement. Beginning with Ceremonial March the movement took grip over entire nation followed by celebrating National 'Days' and 'Weeks' using Pamphlets and Views-papers. Hartals (closing of shops and

suspension of business), Strikes, and No-tax Campaign were common. Courting Imprisonment, Boycott, Peaceful Picketing, Peaceful Raids, and Protest Resignations constituted the order of the day. The movement was well composed and directed under the able leadership of Gandhi. It was a test time for Gandhi's all India leadership as well, in which he emerged victorious. All sections of society including women and students took active participation. The special feature of this movement was the non-violent resistance of the Satyagraha volunteers and their innumerable sufferings against the repression. Among all the Satyagraha movement so far conducted and headed by Gandhi, this salt Satyagraha stands tall, as it constituted and represented true spirit of Satyagraha concept.

When Gandhi launched the salt Satyagraha in the summer of 1930, the then Viceroy Lord Irwin mocked at his 'Crazy scheme of upsetting the government with a pinch of salt'. Yet this was what exactly the Dandi march achieved. True to the character of Satyagraha, a pinch of salt quakes an empire of might and prejudice.

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