

## Civil Disobedience Movement and Round Table Conferences

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### The Run-up to Civil Disobedience Movement

#### ■ Calcutta Session of Congress

It was at the Calcutta session of the Congress in December 1928 that the Nehru Report was approved but the younger elements led by Jawaharlal Nehru, Subhash Bose and Satyamurthy expressed their dissatisfaction with dominion status as the goal of Congress. Instead, they demanded that the Congress adopt *purna swaraj* or complete independence as its goal. The older leaders like Gandhi and Motilal Nehru wished that the dominion status demand not be dropped in haste, as consensus over it had been developed with great difficulty over the years. They suggested that a two-year grace period be given to the government to accept the demand for a dominion status. Later, under pressure from the younger elements, this period was reduced to one year. Now, the Congress decided that if the government did not accept a constitution based on dominion status by the end of the year, the Congress would not only demand complete independence but would also launch a civil disobedience movement to attain its goal.

### ■ Political Activity during 1929

Gandhi travelled incessantly during 1929 preparing people for direct political action—telling the youth to prepare for the fiery ordeal, helping to organise constructive work in villages and redressing specific grievances (on lines of the Bardoli agitation of 1928).

The Congress Working Committee (CWC) organised a Foreign Cloth Boycott Committee to propagate an aggressive programme of boycotting foreign cloth and public burning of foreign cloth. Gandhi initiated the campaign in March 1929 in Calcutta and was arrested. This was followed by bonfires of foreign cloth all over the country.

Other developments which kept the political temperature high during 1929 included the Meerut Conspiracy Case (March), bomb explosion in Central Legislative Assembly by Bhagat Singh and B.K. Dutt (April) and the coming to power of the minority Labour government led by Ramsay MacDonald in England in May. And Wedgewood Benn became the Secretary of State for India.

### ■ Irwin's Declaration (October 31, 1929)

Before the Simon Commission report came out, the declaration by Lord Irwin was made. It was the combined effort of the Labour government (always more sympathetic to Indian aspirations than the Conservatives) and a Conservative viceroy. The purpose behind the declaration was to “restore faith in the ultimate purpose of British policy”. The declaration was made in the form of an official communique in the Indian Gazette on October 31, 1929. It said:

“In view of the doubts which have been expressed both in Great Britain and in India regarding the interpretations to be placed on the intentions of the British government in enacting the statute of 1919, I am authorised on behalf of His Majesty's Government to state clearly that in their judgement it is implicit in the Declaration of 1917 that the

natural issue of India's constitutional progress as they contemplated is the attainment of Dominion status."

However, there was no time scale. The dominion status promised by Irwin would not be available for a long time to come. There was in reality nothing new or revolutionary in the declaration.

Lord Irwin also promised a Round Table Conference after the Simon Commission submitted its report.

### ■ **Delhi Manifesto**

On November 2, 1929, a conference of prominent national leaders issued a 'Delhi Manifesto' which put forward certain conditions for attending the Round Table Conference:

1. that the purpose of the Round Table Conference should be not to determine whether or when dominion status was to be reached but to formulate a constitution for implementation of the dominion status (thus acting as a constituent assembly) and the basic principle of dominion status should be immediately accepted;
2. that the Congress should have majority representation at the conference; and
3. there should be a general amnesty for political prisoners and a policy of conciliation;

Gandhi along with Motilal Nehru and other political leaders met Lord Irwin in December 1929 (after the viceroy had narrowly escaped after a bomb was detonated meaning to hit the train he was travelling in). They asked the viceroy for assurance that the purpose of the round table conference was to draft a constitutional scheme for dominion status. That was not the purpose of the conference, said Irwin. Viceroy Irwin rejected the demands put forward in the Delhi Manifesto. The stage for confrontation was to begin now.

### ■ **Lahore Congress and Purna Swaraj**

Jawaharlal Nehru, who had done more than anyone else to popularise the concept of *purna swaraj*, was nominated the

president for the Lahore session of the Congress (December 1929) mainly due to Gandhi's backing (15 out of 18 Provincial Congress Committees had opposed Nehru). Nehru was chosen

- because of the appositeness of the occasion (Congress' acceptance of complete independence as its goal), and
- to acknowledge the upsurge of youth which had made the anti-Simon campaign a huge success.

Nehru declared in his presidential address, "We have now an open conspiracy to free this country from foreign rule and you, comrades, and all our countrymen and countrywomen are invited to join it."

Further explaining that liberation did not mean only throwing off the foreign yoke, he said: "I must frankly confess that I am a socialist and a republican, and am no believer in kings and princes, or in the order which produces the modern kings of industry, who have greater power of the lives and fortunes of men than even the kings of old, and whose methods are as predatory as those of the old feudal aristocracy."

Spelling out the methods of struggle, he said, "Any great movement for liberation today must necessarily be a mass movement, and mass movements must essentially be peaceful, except in times of organised revolt..."

The following major decisions were taken at the Lahore session.

- The Round Table Conference was to be boycotted.
- Complete independence was declared as the aim of the Congress.
- Congress Working Committee was authorised to launch a programme of civil disobedience including non-payment of taxes and all members of legislatures were asked to resign their seats.
- January 26, 1930 was fixed as the first Independence (*Swarajya*) Day, to be celebrated everywhere.

**December 31, 1929**

At midnight on the banks of River Ravi, the newly adopted tricolour flag of freedom was hoisted by Jawaharlal Nehru amidst slogans of *Inquilab Zindabad*.

**■ January 26, 1930: the Independence Pledge**

Public meetings were organised all over the country in villages and towns and the independence pledge was read out in local languages and the national flag was hoisted. This pledge, which is supposed to have been drafted by Gandhi, made the following points:

- It is the inalienable right of Indians to have freedom.
- The British Government in India has not only deprived us of freedom and exploited us, but has also ruined us economically, politically, culturally and spiritually. India must therefore sever the British connection and attain *purna swaraj* or complete independence.
- We are being economically ruined by high revenue, destruction of village industries with no substitutions made, while customs, currency and exchange rate are manipulated to our disadvantage.
- No real political powers are given—rights of free association are denied to us and all administrative talent in us is killed.
- Culturally, the system of education has torn us from our moorings.
- Spiritually, compulsory disarmament has made us unmanly.
- We hold it a crime against man and God to submit any longer to British rule.
- We will prepare for complete independence by withdrawing, as far as possible, all voluntary association from the British government and will prepare for civil disobedience through non-payment of taxes. By this an end of this inhuman rule is assured.

- We will carry out the Congress instructions for purpose of establishing *purna swaraj*.

## Civil Disobedience Movement—the Salt Satyagraha and Other Upsurges

### ■ Gandhi's Eleven Demands

To carry forward the mandate given by the Lahore Congress, Gandhi presented eleven demands to the government and gave an ultimatum of January 31, 1930 to accept or reject these demands. The demands were as follows.

#### Issues of General Interest

1. Reduce expenditure on Army and civil services by 50 per cent.
2. Introduce total prohibition.
3. Carry out reforms in Criminal Investigation Department (CID).
4. Change Arms Act allowing popular control of issue of firearms licences.
5. Release political prisoners.
6. Accept Postal Reservation Bill.

#### Specific Bourgeois Demands

7. Reduce rupee-sterling exchange ratio to 1s 4d
8. Introduce textile protection.
9. Reserve coastal shipping for Indians.

#### Specific Peasant Demands

10. Reduce land revenue by 50 per cent.
11. Abolish salt tax and government's salt monopoly.

With no positive response forthcoming from the government on these demands, the Congress Working Committee invested Gandhi with full powers to launch the Civil Disobedience Movement at a time and place of his choice. By February-end, Gandhi had decided to make salt the central formula for the movement

### ■ Why Salt was Chosen as the Important Theme

As Gandhi said, “There is no other article like salt, outside water, by taxing which the government can reach the starving millions, the sick, the maimed and the utterly helpless... it is the most inhuman poll tax the ingenuity of man can devise.”

Salt in a flash linked the ideal of swaraj with a most concrete and universal grievance of the rural poor (and with no socially divisive implications like a no-rent campaign).

Salt afforded a very small but psychologically important income, like khadi, for the poor through self-help.

Like khadi, again, it offered to the urban populace the opportunity of a symbolic identification with mass suffering.

### ■ Dandi March (March 12-April 6, 1930)

On March 2, 1930, Gandhi informed the viceroy of his plan of action. According to this plan (few realised its significance when it was first announced), Gandhi, along with a band of seventy-eight members of Sabarmati Ashram, was to march from his headquarters in Ahmedabad through the villages of Gujarat for 240 miles. On reaching the coast at Dandi, the salt law was to be violated by collecting salt from the beach.

Even before the proposed march began, thousands thronged to the ashram. Gandhi gave the following directions for future action.

- Wherever possible civil disobedience of the salt law should be started.
- Foreign liquor and cloth shops can be picketed.
- We can refuse to pay taxes if we have the requisite strength.
- Lawyers can give up practice.
- Public can boycott law courts by refraining from litigation.
- Government servants can resign from their posts.
- All these should be subject to one condition—truth

and non-violence as means to attain swaraj should be faithfully adhered to.

- Local leaders should be obeyed after Gandhi's arrest.

The historic march, marking the launch of the Civil Disobedience Movement, began on March 12, and Gandhi broke the salt law by picking up a lump of salt at Dandi on April 6. The violation of the law was seen as a symbol of the Indian people's resolve not to live under British-made laws and therefore under British rule. Gandhi openly asked the people to make salt from sea water in their homes and violate the salt law. The march, its progress and its impact on the people was well covered by newspapers. In Gujarat, 300 village officials resigned in answer to Gandhi's appeal. Congress workers engaged themselves in grassroot level organisational tasks.

### ■ Spread of Salt Disobedience

Once the way was cleared by Gandhi's ritual at Dandi, defiance of the salt laws started all over the country. Nehru's arrest in April 1930 for defiance of the salt law evoked huge demonstrations in Madras, Calcutta and Karachi. Gandhi's arrest came on May 4, 1930 when he had announced that he would lead a raid on Dharasana Salt Works on the west coast. Gandhi's arrest was followed by massive protests in Bombay, Delhi, Calcutta and in Sholapur, where the response was the most fierce. After Gandhi's arrest, the CWC sanctioned:

- non-payment of revenue in ryotwari areas;
- no-chowkidara-tax campaign in zamindari areas; and
- violation of forest laws in the Central Provinces.

### Satyagraha at Different Places

A brief survey of the nature of Civil Disobedience Movement in different parts of the subcontinent is given below.

- **Tamil Nadu** In April 1930, C. Rajagopalachari organised a march from Thiruchirapalli (Trichinopoly as it

was called by the British) to Vedaranniyam on the Tanjore (or Thanjavur) coast to break the salt law. The event was followed by widespread picketing of foreign cloth shops; the anti-liquor campaign gathered forceful support in interior regions of Coimbatore, Madura, Virdhanagar, etc. Although, Rajaji tried to keep the movement non-violent, violent eruptions of masses and the violent repressions of the police began. To break the Choolai mills strike, police force was used. Unemployed weavers attacked liquor shops and police pickets at Gudiyattam, while the peasants, suffering from falling prices, rioted at Bodinayakanur in Madura.

- **Malabar** K. Kelappan, a Nair Congress leader famed for the *Vaikom Satyagraha*, organised salt marches. P. Krishna Pillai, the future founder of the Kerala Communist movement, heroically defended the national flag in the face of police lathi-charge on Calicut beach in November 1930.

- **Andhra Region** District salt marches were organised in east and west Godavari, Krishna and Guntur. A number of *sibirams* (military style camps) were set up to serve as the headquarters of the Salt Satyagraha. The merchants contributed to Congress funds, and the dominant caste Kamma and Raju cultivators defied repressive measures. But the mass support like that in the non-cooperation movement (1921-22) was missing in the region.

- **Orissa** Under Gopalbandhu Chaudhuri, a Gandhian leader, salt satyagraha proved effective in the coastal regions of Balasore, Cuttack and Puri districts.

- **Assam** The civil disobedience failed to regain the heights attained in 1921-22 due to divisive issues: the growing conflicts between Assamese and Bengalis, Hindus and Muslims, and the tensions developing from the inflow of Muslim peasants from the densely populated east Bengal. However, a successful student strike against the Cunningham Circular, which banned students' participation in politics, was seen in May 1930. Chandraprabha Saikiani, in December 1930, incited the aboriginal Kachari villages to break forest

laws, which was, however, denied by the Assam Congress leadership.

- **Bengal** The Bengal Congress, divided into two factions led by Subhas Bose and J.M. Sengupta, was involved in the Calcutta Corporation election. This resulted in alienation of most of Calcutta *bhadralok* leaders from the rural masses. Also, communal riots were seen in Dacca (now Dhakha) and Kishoreganj, and there was little participation of Muslims in the movements. Despite this, Bengal provided the largest number of arrests as well as the highest amount of violence. Midnapur, Arambagh and several rural pockets witnessed powerful movements developed around salt satyagraha and chaukidari tax. During the same period, Surya Sen's Chittagong revolt group carried out a raid on two armouries and declared the establishment of a provisional government.

- **Bihar** Champaran and Saran were the first two districts to start salt satyagraha. In landlocked Bihar, manufacture of salt on a large scale was not practicable and at most places it was a mere gesture. In Patna, Nakhas Pond was chosen as a site to make salt and break the salt law under Ambika Kant Sinha. However, very soon, a very powerful no-chaukidari tax agitation replaced the salt satyagraha (owing to physical constraints in making salt). By November 1930, sale of foreign cloth and liquor dramatically declined, and administration collapsed in several parts like the Barhee region of Munger.

The tribal belt of Chhotanagpur (now in Jharkhand), saw instances of lower-class militancy. Bonga Majhi and Somra Majhi, influenced by Gandhism, led a movement in Hazaribagh which combined socio-religious reform along 'sanskritising' lines, in which followers were asked to give up meat and liquor, and use khadi. However, the Santhals were reported to be taking up illegal distillation of liquor on a large scale under the banner of Gandhi! It was observed that while most big zamindars remained loyal to the government, small

landlords and better-off tenants participated in the movement. But several times, increased lower-class-militancy lowered the enthusiasm of the small landlords and better-off tenants.

**Peshawar** Here, Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan's educational and social reform work among the Pathans had politicised them. Gaffar Khan, also called **Badshah Khan** and **Frontier Gandhi**, had started the first Pushto political monthly *Pukhtoon* and had organised a volunteer brigade 'Khudai Khidmatgars', popularly known as the 'Red-Shirts', who were pledged to the freedom struggle and non-violence.

On April 23, 1930, the arrest of Congress leaders in the NWFP led to mass demonstrations in Peshawar which was virtually in the hands of the crowds for more than a week till order was restored on May 4. This was followed by a reign of terror and martial law. It was here that a section of Garhwal Rifles soldiers refused to fire on an unarmed crowd. This upsurge in a province with 92 per cent Muslim population left the British government nervous.

**Sholapur** This industrial town of southern Maharashtra saw the fiercest response to Gandhi's arrest. Textile workers went on a strike from May 7 and along with other residents burnt liquor shops and other symbols of government authority such as railway stations, police stations, municipal buildings, law courts, etc. The activists established a virtual parallel government which could only be dislodged with martial law after May 16.

**Dharasana** On May 21, 1930, Sarojini Naidu, Imam Sahib and Manilal (Gandhi's son) took up the unfinished task of leading a raid on the Dharasana Salt Works. The unarmed and peaceful crowd was met with a brutal lathicharge which left 2 dead and 320 injured. This new form of salt satyagraha was eagerly adopted by people in Wadala (Bombay), Karnataka (Sanikatta Salt Works), Andhra, Midnapore, Balasore, Puri and Cuttack.

**Gujarat** The impact was felt in Anand, Borsad and Nadiad areas in Kheda district, Bardoli in Surat district and

### Views

Gandhiji's body is in jail but his soul is with you. India's prestige is now in your hands. You must not use any violence under any circumstances. You will be beaten but you must not resist, you must not even raise a hand to ward off blows.

—**Sarojini Naidu**, *on the eve of Dharasana Salt Satyagraha*

Although everyone knew that within a few minutes he would be beaten down, and perhaps killed, I could detect no signs of wavering or fear. They marched steadily with heads up....

—**Web Miller**, *an American journalist, reporting on Dharasana Salt Satyagraha*

Jambusar in Bharuch district. A determined no-tax movement was organised here which included refusal to pay land revenue. Villagers crossed the border into neighbouring princely states (such as Baroda) with their families and belongings and camped in the open for months to evade police repression. The police retaliated by destroying their property and confiscating their land.

**Maharashtra, Karnataka, Central Provinces** These areas saw defiance of forest laws such as grazing and timber restrictions and public sale of illegally acquired forest produce.

**United Provinces** A no-revenue campaign was organised; a call was given to zamindars to refuse to pay revenue to the government. Under a no-rent campaign, a call was given to tenants against zamindars. Since most of the zamindars were loyalists, the campaign became virtually a no-rent campaign. The activity picked up speed in October 1930, especially in Agra and Rai Bareilly.

**Manipur and Nagaland** These areas took a brave part in the movement. At the young age of thirteen, **Rani Gaidinliu**, a Naga spiritual leader, who followed her cousin Haipou Jadonang, born in what is now the state of Manipur, raised the banner of revolt against foreign rule. "We are free people, the white men should not rule over us," she declared.

She urged the people not to pay taxes or work for the British—in the tradition established by the freedom struggle in the rest of India. As the reformist religious movement steadily turned political, the British authorities caught Haipou Jadonang and hanged him on charges of treason in 1931. A manhunt was launched for Rani Gaidinliu. She outwitted the British till October 1932 when she was finally captured. She was later sentenced to life imprisonment. [It was the Interim Government of India set up in 1946 that finally ordered her release from Tura jail.]

### Forms of Mobilisation

Mobilisation of masses was also carried out through *prabhat pheries*, *vanar senas*, *manjari senas*, secret *patrikas* and magic lantern shows.

### ■ Impact of Agitation

1. Imports of foreign cloth and other items fell.
2. Government suffered a loss of income from liquor, excise and land revenue.
3. Elections to Legislative Assembly were largely boycotted.

### ■ Extent of Mass Participation

Several sections of the population participated in the Civil Disobedience Movement.

**Women** Gandhi had specially asked women to play a leading part in the movement. Soon, they became a familiar sight, picketing outside liquor shops, opium dens and shops selling foreign cloth. For Indian women, the movement was the most liberating experience and can truly be said to have marked their entry into the public sphere.

**Students** Along with women, students and youth played the most prominent part in the boycott of foreign cloth and liquor.

**Muslims** The Muslim participation was nowhere near the 1920-22 level because of appeals by Muslim leaders to stay away from the movement and because of active

government encouragement to communal dissension. Still, some areas such as the NWFP saw an overwhelming participation. Middle class Muslim participation was quite significant in Senhatta, Tripura, Gaibandha, Bagura and Noakhali. In Dacca, Muslim leaders, shopkeepers, lower class people and upper class women were active. The Muslim weaving community in Bihar, Delhi and Lucknow were also effectively mobilised.

**Merchants and Petty Traders** They were very enthusiastic. Traders' associations and commercial bodies were active in implementing the boycott, especially in Tamil Nadu and Punjab.

**Tribals** Tribals were active participants in Central Provinces, Maharashtra and Karnataka.

**Workers** The workers participated in Bombay, Calcutta, Madras, Sholapur, etc.

**Peasants** were active in the United Provinces, Bihar and Gujarat.

### ■ Government Response—Efforts for Truce

The government's attitude throughout 1930 was ambivalent as it was puzzled and perplexed. It faced the classic dilemma of 'damned if you do, damned if you don't', if force was applied, the Congress cried 'repression', and if little action taken, the Congress cried 'victory'. Either way, the government suffered an erosion of power. Even Gandhi's arrest came after much vacillation. But once the repression began, the ordinances banning civil liberties were freely used, including the press being gagged. Provincial governments were given freedom to ban civil disobedience organisations. The Congress Working Committee was, however, not declared illegal till June. There were lathi charges and firing on unarmed crowds which left several killed and wounded, while thousands of satyagrahis besides Gandhi and other Congress leaders were imprisoned.

The government repression and publication of the Simon Commission Report, which contained no mention of

dominion status and was in other ways also a regressive document, further upset even moderate political opinion.

In **July 1930** the viceroy, Lord Irwin, suggested a round table conference and reiterated the goal of dominion status. He also accepted the suggestion that Tej Bahadur Sapru and M.R. Jayakar be allowed to explore the possibility of peace between the Congress and the government.

In **August 1930** Motilal and Jawaharlal Nehru were taken to Yeravada Jail to meet Gandhi and discuss the possibility of a settlement. The Nehrus and Gandhi unequivocally reiterated the demands of:

1. right of secession from Britain;
2. complete national government with control over defence and finance; and
3. an independent tribunal to settle Britain's financial claims.

Talks broke down at this point.

### ■ **Gandhi-Irwin Pact**

On January 25, 1931, Gandhi and all other members of the Congress Working Committee (CWC) were released unconditionally. The CWC authorised Gandhi to initiate discussions with the viceroy. As a result of these discussions, a pact was signed between the viceroy, representing the British Indian Government, and Gandhi, representing the Indian people, in Delhi on February 14, 1931. This **Delhi Pact**, also known as the **Gandhi-Irwin Pact**, placed the Congress on an equal footing with the government.

Irwin on behalf of the government agreed on—

1. immediate release of all political prisoners not convicted of violence;
2. remission of all fines not yet collected;
3. return of all lands not yet sold to third parties;
4. lenient treatment to those government servants who had resigned;

5. right to make salt in coastal villages for personal consumption (not for sale);
6. right to peaceful and non-aggressive picketing; and
7. withdrawal of emergency ordinances.

The viceroy, however, turned down two of Gandhi's demands—

- (i) public inquiry into police excesses, and
- (ii) commutation of Bhagat Singh and his comrades' death sentence to life sentence.

Gandhi on behalf of the Congress agreed—

- (i) to suspend the civil disobedience movement, and
- (ii) to participate in the next Round Table Conference on the constitutional question around the three lynch-pins of federation, Indian responsibility, and reservations and safeguards that may be necessary in India's interests (covering such areas as defence, external affairs, position of minorities, financial credit of India and discharge of other obligations).

## ■ Evaluation of Civil Disobedience Movement

### Was Gandhi-Irwin Pact a Retreat?

Gandhi's decision to suspend the civil disobedience movement as agreed under the Gandhi-Irwin Pact was not a retreat, because:

- (i) mass movements are necessarily short-lived;
- (ii) capacity of the masses to make sacrifices, unlike that of the activists, is limited; and
- (iii) there were signs of exhaustion after September 1930, especially among shopkeepers and merchants, who had participated so enthusiastically.

No doubt, youth were disappointed: they had participated enthusiastically and wanted the world to end with a bang and not with a whimper. Peasants of Gujarat were disappointed because their lands were not restored immediately (indeed, they were restored only during the rule of the Congress

ministry in the province). But many people were jubilant that the government had been made to regard their movement as significant and treat their leader as an equal, and sign a pact with him. The political prisoners, when released from jails, were given a hero's welcome.

### **Comparison to Non-Cooperation Movement**

There were certain aspects in which the Civil Disobedience Movement differed from the Non-Cooperation Movement.

1. The stated objective this time was complete independence and not just remedying two specific wrongs and a vaguely-worded swaraj.

2. The methods involved violation of law from the very beginning and not just non-cooperation with foreign rule.

3. There was a decline in forms of protests involving the intelligentsia, such as lawyers giving up practice, students giving up government schools to join national schools and colleges.

4. Muslim participation was nowhere near that in the Non-Cooperation Movement level.

5. No major labour upsurge coincided with the movement.

6. The massive participation of peasants and business groups compensated for decline of other features.

7. The number of those imprisoned was about three times more this time.

8. The Congress was organisationally stronger.

### **Views**

India is one vast prison-house. I repudiate this law.

**M.K. Gandhi to Lord Irwin**

Gandhi was the best policeman the British had in India.

**Ellen Wilkinson**

Dandi March is the 'kindergarten stage of revolution'..... based on the notion that King Emperor can be unseated by boiling sea-water in a kettle.

**Brailsford**, an English journalist

## Karachi Congress Session—1931

In March 1931, a special session of the Congress was held at Karachi to endorse the Gandhi-Irwin Pact. Six days before the session (which was held on March 29) Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev and Rajguru were executed. Throughout Gandhi's route to Karachi, he was greeted with black flag demonstrations by the Punjab Naujawan Bharat Sabha, in protest against his failure to secure commutation of the death sentence for Bhagat and his comrades.

### ■ Congress Resolutions at Karachi

- While disapproving of and dissociating itself from political violence, the Congress admired the 'bravery' and 'sacrifice' of the three martyrs.

- The Delhi Pact or Gandhi-Irwin Pact was endorsed.
- The goal of purna swaraj was reiterated.

- Two resolutions were adopted—one on Fundamental Rights and the other on National Economic Programme—which made the session particularly memorable. The

#### **Resolution on Fundamental Rights** guaranteed—

- \* free speech and free press
- \* right to form associations
- \* right to assemble
- \* universal adult franchise
- \* equal legal rights irrespective of caste, creed and sex
- \* neutrality of state in religious matters
- \* free and compulsory primary education
- \* protection to culture, language, script of minorities and linguistic groups

#### **The Resolution on National Economic Programme**

- \* control of usury
- \* better conditions of work including a living wage, limited hours of work and protection of women workers in the industrial sector
- \* right to workers and peasants to form unions
- \* state ownership and control of key industries, mines and means of transport

This was the first time the Congress spelt out what swaraj would mean for the masses—"in order to end exploitation of masses, political freedom must include economic freedom of starving millions."

The Karachi Resolution was to remain, in essence, the basic political and economic programme of the Congress in later years.

### The Round Table Conferences

The Viceroy of India, Lord Irwin, and the Prime Minister of Britain, Ramsay MacDonald, agreed that a round table conference should be held, as the recommendations of the Simon Commission report were clearly inadequate.

#### ■ First Round Table Conference

The first Round Table Conference was held in London between November 1930 and January 1931. It was opened officially by King George V on November 12, 1930 and chaired by Ramsay MacDonald.

This was the first conference arranged between the British and the Indians as equals.

The Congress and some prominent business leaders refused to attend, but many other groups of Indians were represented at the conference.

The **Indian princely states** were represented by the Maharaja of Alwar, Maharaja of Baroda, Nawab of Bhopal, Maharaja of Bikaner, Rana of Dholpur, Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir, Maharaja of Nawanagar, Maharaja of Patiala (Chancellor of the Chamber of Princes), Maharaja of Rewa,

Chief Sahib of Sangli, Sir Prabhaskar Pattani (Bhavnagar), Manubhai Mehta (Baroda), Sardar Sahibzada Sultan Ahmed Khan (Gwalior), Akbar Hydari (Hyderabad), Mirza Ismail (Mysore), Col. Kailas Narain Haksar (Jammu and Kashmir). The **Muslim League** sent Aga Khan III (leader of British-Indian delegation), Maulana Mohammad Ali Jauhar, Muhammad Shafi, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, Muhammad Zafarullah Khan, A.K. Fazlul Huq, Hafiz Ghulam Hussain Hidayat Ullah, Dr. Shafa'at Ahmad Khan, Raja Sher Muhammad Khan of Domeli and A.H. Ghuznavi. The **Hindu Mahasabha and its sympathisers** were represented by B.S. Moonje, M.R. Jayakar and Diwan Bahadur Raja Narendra Nath. The **Sikhs** were represented by Sardar Ujjal Singh and Sardar Sampuran Singh. For the **Parsis**, Phiroze Sethna, Cowasji Jehangir and Homi Mody attended. Begum Jahanara Shahnawaz and Radhabai Subbarayan represented **Women**. The **Liberals** were represented by J.N. Basu, Tej Bahadur Sapru, C.Y. Chintamani, V.S. Srinivasa Sastri and Chimanlal Harilal Setalvad. The **Depressed Classes** were represented by B.R. Ambedkar and Rettamalai Srinivasan. The **Justice Party** sent Arcot Ramasamy Mudaliar, Bhaskarrao Vithojirao Jadhav and Sir A.P. Patro. **Labour** was represented by N.M. Joshi and B. Shiva Rao. K.T. Paul represented the **Indian Christians**, while Henry Gidney represented the **Anglo-Indians**, and the **Europeans** were represented by Sir Hubert Carr, Sir Oscar de Glanville (Burma), T.F. Gavin Jones, C.E. Wood (Madras). There were also representatives of the **landlords** (from Bihar, the United Provinces, and Orissa), the **universities**, Burma, the Sindh and some other provinces.

The **Government of India** was represented by Narendra Nath Law, Bhupendra Nath Mitra, C.P. Ramaswami Iyer and M. Ramachandra Rao.

**Outcome** Nothing much was achieved at the conference. It was generally agreed that India was to develop into a federation, there were to be safeguards regarding defence and finance, while other departments were to be transferred. But

little was done to implement these recommendations and civil disobedience continued in India.

The British government realised that the participation of the Indian National Congress was necessary in any discussion on the future of constitutional government in India.

### ■ Second Round Table Conference

Members of the Indian Liberal Party such as Tej Bahadur Sapru, C.Y. Chintamani and Srinivasa Sastri appealed to Gandhi to talk with the Viceroy. Gandhi and Irwin reached a compromise which came to be called the Gandhi-Irwin Pact (the Delhi Pact).

The second Round Table Conference was held in London from September 7, 1931 to December 1, 1931.

The **Indian National Congress** nominated Gandhi as its sole representative. A. Rangaswami Iyengar and Madan Mohan Malaviya were also there.

There were a large number of Indian participants, besides the Congress.

The **princely states** were represented by Maharaja of Alwar, Maharaja of Baroda, Nawab of Bhopal, Maharaja of Bikaner, Maharao of Kutch, Rana of Dholpur, Maharaja of Indore, Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir, Maharaja of Kapurthala, Maharaja of Nawanagar, Maharaja of Patiala, Maharaja of Rewa, Chief Sahib of Sangli, Raja of Sarila, Sir Prabhashankar Pattani (Bhavnagar), Manubhai Mehta (Baroda), Sardar Sahibzada Sultan Ahmed Khan (Gwalior), Sir Muhammad Akbar Hydari (Hyderabad), Mirza Ismail (Mysore), Col. K.N. Haksar (Jammu and Kashmir), T. Raghavaiah (Travancore), Liaquat Hayat Khan (Patiala). The **Muslims** were represented by Aga Khan III, Maulana Shaukat Ali, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, A.K. Fazlul Huq, Muhammad Iqbal, Muhammad Shafi, Muhammad Zafarullah Khan, Syed Ali Imam, Maulvi Muhammad Shafi Daudi, Raja Sher Muhammad Khan of Domeli, A.H. Ghuznavi, Hafiz Hidayat Hussain, Sayed

Muhammad Padshah Saheb Bahadur, Dr. Shafa'at Ahmad Khan, Jamal Muhammad and Nawab Sahibzada Sayed Muhammad Mehr Shah. **Hindu groups** were represented by M.R. Jayakar, B.S. Moonje and Diwan Bahadur Raja Narendra Nath. The **Liberals** at the conference were J. N. Basu, C.Y. Chintamani, Tej Bahadur Sapru, V.S. Srinivasa Sastri and Chimanlal Harilal Setalvad. The **Justice Party** sent Raja of Bobbili, Arcot Ramasamy Mudaliar, Sir A.P. Patro and Bhaskarrao Vithojirao Jadhav. The **Depressed Classes** were represented by B.R. Ambedkar and Rettamalai Srinivasan. Sardar Ujjal Singh and Sardar Sampuran Singh represented the **Sikhs**. The **Parsis** were represented by Cowasji Jehangir, Homi Mody and Phiroze Sethna. **Indian Christians** were represented by Surendra Kumar Datta and A.T. Pannirselvam. **Industry** was represented by Ghanshyam Das Birla, Sir Purshottamdas Thakurdas and Maneckji Dadabhoy. **Labour** was represented by N. M. Joshi, B. Shiva Rao and V. V. Giri. The representatives for **Indian women** were Sarojini Naidu, Begum Jahanara Shahnawaz and Radhabai Subbarayan. The **universities** were represented by Syed Sultan Ahmed and Bisheshwar Dayal Seth. Representatives of **Burma** and from the provinces of **Sindh, Assam, Central Provinces** and the NWFP also attended.

The **Government of India** was represented by C.P. Ramaswami Iyer, Narendra Nath Law and M. Ramachandra Rao. Not much was expected from the conference because of the following reasons.

- By this time, Lord Irwin had been replaced by Lord Willingdon as viceroy in India. Just before the conference began, the Labour government in England had been replaced by a National Government which was an uneasy coalition between Labour and Conservatives. The British were also angered by the increased revolutionary activities which had claimed many European lives in India.

- The Right Wing or Conservatives in Britain led by Churchill strongly objected to the British government

negotiating with the Congress on an equal basis. They, instead, demanded a strong government in India. The Prime Minister, Ramsay MacDonald headed the Conservative-dominated cabinet with a weak and reactionary secretary of state for India, Samuel Hoare.

- At the conference, Gandhi (and therefore the Congress) claimed to represent all people of India against imperialism. The other delegates, however, did not share this view. Historians point out that many of the delegates were conservative, government loyalists, and communalists, and these groups were used by the colonial government to neutralise the efforts of Gandhi. Because of the participation of a large number of groups, the British government claimed that the Congress did not represent the interests of all of India.

- Gandhi pointed out that there was a need of a partnership between Britain and India on the basis of equality. He put forward the demand for the immediate establishment of a responsible government at the centre as well as in the provinces. He also reiterated that the Congress alone represented political India. Saying that the untouchables were Hindus, and thus not to be treated as a minority, he discarded the idea of a separate electorate for them. He also said there was no need for separate electorates or special safeguards for Muslims or other minorities. Many of the other delegates disagreed with Gandhi.

- The session soon got deadlocked on the question of the minorities. Separate electorates were being demanded by the Muslims, depressed classes, Christians and Anglo-Indians. All these came together in a 'Minorities' Pact'. Gandhi fought desperately against this concerted move to make all constitutional progress conditional on the solving of this issue.

- The princes were also not too enthusiastic about a federation, especially after the possibility of the formation

of a Congress government at the centre had receded after the suspension of civil disobedience movement.

**Outcome** The lack of agreement among the many delegate groups meant that no substantial results regarding India's constitutional future would come out of the conference. The session ended with MacDonald's announcement of:

- (i) two Muslim majority provinces—North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) and Sindh;
- (ii) the setting up of an Indian Consultative Committee;
- (iii) setting up of three expert committees—finance, franchise and states; and
- (iv) the prospect of a unilateral British Communal Award if Indians failed to agree.

The government refused to concede the basic Indian demand of freedom. Gandhi returned to India on December 28, 1931.

### ■ Third Round Table Conference

The third Round Table Conference, held between November 17, 1932 and December 24, 1932, was not attended by the Indian National Congress and Gandhi. It was ignored by most other Indian leaders.

The Indian States were represented by Akbar Hydari (Dewan of Hyderabad), Mirza Ismail (Dewan of Mysore), V.T. Krishnamachari (Dewan of Baroda), Wajahat Hussain (Jammu and Kashmir), Sir Sukhdeo Prasad (Udaipur, Jaipur, Jodhpur), J.A. Surve (Kolhapur), Raja Oudh Narain Bisarya (Bhopal), Manubhai Mehta (Bikaner), Nawab Liaquat Hayat Khan (Patiala), Fateh Naseeb Khan (Alwar State), L.F. Rushbrook Williams (Nawanagar), and Raja of Sarila (small states). Other Indian representatives were Aga Khan III, B.R. Ambedkar, Ramakrishna Ranga Rao of Bobbili, Sir Hubert Carr, Nanak Chand Pandit, A.H. Ghuznavi, Henry Gidney, Hafiz Hidayat Hussain, Muhammad Iqbal, M.R. Jayakar, Cowasji Jehangir, N.M. Joshi, Narasimha Chintaman Kelkar, Arcot Ramasamy Mudaliar, Begum Jahanara Shahnawaz,

A.P. Patro, Tej Bahadur Sapru, Dr. Shafa'at Ahmad Khan, Sir Shadi Lal, Tara Singh Malhotra, Sir Nripendra Nath Sircar, Sir Purshottamdas Thakurdas, Muhammad Zafarullah Khan.

Again, like in the two previous conferences, little was achieved. The recommendations were published in a White Paper in March 1933 and debated in the British Parliament afterwards. A Joint Select Committee was formed to analyse the recommendations and formulate a new Act for India, and that committee produced a draft Bill in February 1935 which was enforced as the Government of India Act of 1935 in July 1935.

### **Civil Disobedience Resumed**

On the failure of the second Round Table Conference, the Congress Working Committee decided on December 29, 1931 to resume the civil disobedience movement.

#### **■ During Truce Period (March-December 1931)**

Some activity during the period March to December 1931 kept alive the spirit of defiance. In the United Provinces, the Congress had been leading a movement for rent reduction and against summary evictions. In the NWFP, severe repression had been unleashed against the Khudai Khidmatgars and the peasants led by them who were agitating against the brutal methods of tax-collection by the government. In Bengal, draconian ordinances and mass detentions had been used in the name of fighting terrorism. In September 1931, there was a firing incident on political prisoners in Hijli Jail.

#### **■ Changed Government Attitude After Second RTC**

The higher British officials had drawn their own lessons from the Delhi Pact which they thought had raised the political prestige of the Congress and the political morale of the people and had undermined British prestige. After the second

Round Table Conference, the British were determined to reverse this trend. There were three main considerations in British policy:

1. Gandhi would not be permitted to build up the tempo for a mass movement again.
2. Goodwill of the Congress was not required, but the confidence of those who supported the British against the Congress—government functionaries, loyalists, etc.—was very essential.
3. The national movement would not be allowed to consolidate itself in rural areas.

After the CWC decided to resume the civil disobedience movement, Viceroy Willingdon refused a meeting with Gandhi on December 31. On January 4, 1932, Gandhi was arrested.

### ■ Government Action

A series of repressive ordinances were issued which ushered in a virtual martial law, though under civilian control, or a 'Civil Martial Law'. Congress organisations at all levels were banned; arrests were made of activists, leaders, sympathisers; properties were confiscated; Gandhi ashrams were occupied. Repression was particularly harsh on women. Press was gagged and nationalist literature, banned.

### ■ Popular Response

People responded with anger. Though unprepared, the response was massive. In the first four months alone, about 80,000 satyagrahis, mostly urban and rural poor, were jailed. Other forms of protest included picketing of shops selling liquor and foreign cloth, illegal gatherings, non-violent demonstrations, celebrations of national days, symbolic hoistings of national flag, non-payment of chowkidara tax, salt satyagraha, forest law violations and installation of a secret radio transmitter near Bombay. This phase of the civil disobedience movement coincided with upsurges in two princely states—Kashmir and Alwar. But this phase of the movement could not be sustained for long because

(i) Gandhi and other leaders had no time to build up the tempo; and

(ii) the masses were not prepared.

Finally in April 1934, Gandhi decided to withdraw the civil disobedience movement. Though people had been cowed down by superior force, they had not lost political faith in the Congress—they had won freedom in their hearts.

### **Communal Award and Poona Pact**

The Communal Award was announced by the British prime minister, Ramsay MacDonald, on August 16, 1932. The Communal Award, based on the findings of the Indian Franchise Committee (also called the Lothian Committee), established separate electorates and reserved seats for minorities, including the depressed classes which were granted seventy-eight reserved seats. Thus, this award accorded separate electorates for Muslims, Europeans, Sikhs, Indian Christians, Anglo-Indians, depressed classes, and even to the Marathas for some seats in Bombay. The award was perceived by the national leaders led by the Congress as another manifestation of the British policy of divide and rule.

It should be noted here that Dr B.R. Ambedkar in the past, in his testimony to the Simon Commission, had stressed that the depressed classes should be treated as a distinct, independent minority separate from the caste Hindus. Even, the Bengal Depressed Classes Association had lobbied for separate electorates with seats reserved according to the proportion of depressed class members to the total population as well as for adult franchise. But the Simon Commission rejected the proposal of separate electorate for the depressed classes; however, it retained the concept of reserving seats.

In the second Round Table Conference held in London, Ambedkar again raised the issue of separate electorate for the depressed classes. Earlier in the conference, Ambedkar

had attempted to compromise with Gandhi on reserved seats in a common electorate, but Gandhi, who had declared himself the sole representative of India's oppressed masses, rejected Ambedkar's proposal, and denounced the other delegates as unrepresentative. Further, Gandhi attempted to strike a deal with Muslims, promising to support their demands as long as the Muslims voted against separate electorates for the depressed classes. It is argued that political considerations might have motivated Gandhi to adopt such a stand. But despite such efforts, a consensus on the minority representation could not be worked out among the Indian delegates. In the wake of such a situation, Ramsay MacDonald, who had chaired the committee on minorities, offered to mediate on the condition that the other members of the committee supported his decision. And, the outcome of this mediation was the Communal Award.

#### ■ Main Provisions of the Communal Award

- Muslims, Europeans, Sikhs, Indian Christians, Anglo-Indians, depressed classes, women, and even the Marathas were to get separate electorates. Such an arrangement for the depressed classes was to be made for a period of 20 years.
- In the provincial legislatures, the seats were to be distributed on communal basis.
- The existing seats of the provincial legislatures were to be doubled.
- The Muslims, wherever they were in minority, were to be granted a weightage.
- Except in the North West Frontier Province, 3 per cent seats were to be reserved for women in all provinces.
- The depressed classes to be declared/accorded the status of minority.
- The depressed classes were to get 'double vote', one to be used through separate electorates and the other to be used in the general electorates.

- Allocation of seats were to be made for labourers, landlords, traders and industrialists.
- In the province of Bombay, 7 seats were to be allocated for the Marathas.

### ■ Congress Stand

Though opposed to separate electorates, the Congress was not in favour of changing the Communal Award without the consent of the minorities. Thus, while strongly disagreeing with the Communal Award, the Congress decided neither to accept it nor to reject it.

The effort to separate the depressed classes from the rest of the Hindus by treating them as separate political entities was vehemently opposed by all the nationalists.

### ■ Gandhi's Response

Gandhi saw the Communal Award as an attack on Indian unity and nationalism. He thought it was harmful to both Hinduism and to the depressed classes since it provided no answer to the socially degraded position of the depressed classes. Once the depressed classes were treated as a separate political entity, he argued, the question of abolishing untouchability would get undermined, while separate electorates would ensure that the untouchables remained untouchables in perpetuity. He said that what was required was not protection of the so-called interests of the depressed classes but root and branch eradication of untouchability.

Gandhi demanded that the depressed classes be elected through joint and if possible a wider electorate through universal franchise, while expressing no objection to the demand for a larger number of reserved seats. And to press his demands, he went on an indefinite fast on September 20, 1932. Now leaders of various persuasions, including B.R. Ambedkar, M.C. Rajah and Madan Mohan Malaviya got together to hammer out a compromise contained in the Poona Pact.

### ■ Poona Pact

Signed by B.R. Ambedkar on behalf of the depressed classes on September 24, 1932, the Poona Pact abandoned the idea of separate electorates for the depressed classes. But the seats reserved for the depressed classes were increased from 71 to 147 in provincial legislatures and to 18 per cent of the total in the Central Legislature.

The Poona Pact was accepted by the government as an amendment to the Communal Award.

### ■ Impact of Poona Pact on Dalits

The Poona Pact, despite giving certain political rights to the depressed classes, could not achieve the desired goal of emancipation of the depressed class. It enabled the same old Hindu social order to continue and gave birth to many problems.

- The Pact made the depressed classes political tools which could be used by the majoritarian caste Hindu organisations.

- It made the depressed classes leaderless as the true representatives of the classes were unable to win against the stooges who were chosen and supported by the caste Hindu organisations.

- This led to the depressed classes to submit to the status quo in political, ideological and cultural fields and not being able to develop independent and genuine leadership to fight the Brahminical order.

- It subordinated the depressed classes into being part of the Hindu social order by denying them a separate and distinct existence.

- The Poona Pact perhaps put obstructions in the way of an ideal society based on equality, liberty, fraternity and justice.

- By denying to recognise the Dalits as a separate and distinct element in the national life, it pre-empted the rights

and safeguards for the Dalits in the Constitution of independent India.

### **Joint Electorates and Its Impact on Depressed Classes**

The Working Committee of the All India Scheduled Caste Federation alleged that in the last elections held under the Government of India Act, 1935, the system of joint electorates deprived the scheduled castes of the right to send true and effective representatives to the legislatures. The committee, further, said that the provisions of the joint electorate gave the Hindu majority the virtual right to nominate members of the scheduled castes who were prepared to be the tools of the Hindu majority. The working committee of the federation, thus, demanded for the restoration of the system of separate electorates, and nullification of the system of joint electorates and reserved seats. Even after signing the Poona Pact, Dr B.R. Ambedkar continued to denounce the Poona Pact till 1947.

### **Gandhi's Harijan Campaign and thoughts on Caste**

Determined to undo the divisive intentions of the government's divide and rule policy, Gandhi gave up all his other preoccupations and launched a whirlwind campaign against untouchability—first from jail and then, after his release in August 1933, from outside jail.

While in jail, he set up the All India Anti-Untouchability League in September 1932 and started the weekly *Harijan* in January 1933. After his release, he shifted to the Satyagraha Ashram in Wardha as he had vowed in 1930 not to return to Sabarmati Ashram unless swaraj was won.

Starting from Wardha, he conducted a Harijan tour of the country in the period from November 1933 to July 1934,

covering 20,000 km, collecting money for his newly set up Harijan Sevak Sangh, and propagating removal of untouchability in all its forms. He urged political workers to go to villages and work for social, economic, political and cultural upliftment of the Harijans. He undertook two fasts—on May 8 and August 16, 1934—to convince his followers of the seriousness of his effort and the importance of the issue. These fasts created consternation in nationalist ranks throwing many into an emotional crisis.

Throughout his campaign, Gandhi was attacked by orthodox and reactionary elements. These elements disrupted his meetings, held black flag demonstrations against him and accused him of attacking Hinduism. They also offered support to the government against the Congress and the Civil Disobedience Movement. The government obliged them by defeating the Temple Entry Bill in August 1934. Orthodox Hindu opinion in Bengal was against the acceptance of permanent caste Hindu minority status by the Poona Pact.

Throughout his Harijan tour, social work and fasts, Gandhi stressed on certain themes:

- He put forward a damning indictment of Hindu society for the kind of oppression practised on Harijans.
- He called for total eradication of untouchability symbolised by his plea to throw open temples to the untouchables.
- He stressed the need for caste Hindus to do ‘penance’ for untold miseries inflicted on Harijans. For this reason he was not hostile to his critics such as Ambedkar. He said, “Hinduism dies if untouchability lives, untouchability has to die if Hinduism is to live.”
- His entire campaign was based on principles of humanism and reason. He said that the *Shastras* do not sanction untouchability, and if they did, they should be ignored as it was against human dignity.

Gandhi was not in favour of mixing up the issue of removal of untouchability with that of inter-caste marriages and inter-dining because he felt that such restrictions existed among caste Hindus and among Harijans themselves, and because the all-India campaign at the time was directed against disabilities specific to Harijans.

Similarly, he distinguished between abolition of untouchability and abolition of caste system as such. On this point he differed from Ambedkar who advocated annihilation of the caste system to remove untouchability. Gandhi felt that whatever the limitations and defects of the *varnashram* system, there was nothing sinful about it, as there was about untouchability. Untouchability, Gandhi felt, was a product of distinctions of high and low and not of the caste system itself. If it could be purged of this distinction, the *varnashram* could function in a such manner that each caste would be complementary to the other rather than being higher or lower. Anyway, he hoped that believers and critics of the caste system would come together in the fight against untouchability.

He believed that the removal of untouchability would have a positive impact on communal and other questions since opposition to untouchability meant opposing the notion of highness and lowness. He was opposed to using compulsion against the orthodox Hindus whom he called 'sanatanis'. They were to be won over by persuasion, by appealing to "their reason and their hearts". His fasts were aimed at inspiring friends and followers to redouble their work to abolish untouchability.

Gandhi's Harijan campaign included a programme of internal reform by Harijans covering education, cleanliness, hygiene, giving up eating of beef and carrion and consumption of liquor, and removing untouchability among themselves.

**Impact of the Campaign** Gandhi repeatedly described the campaign as not a political movement but as being

primarily meant to purify Hinduism and Hindu society. Gradually, the campaign carried the message of nationalism to Harijans who also happened to be the agricultural labourers in most parts of the country, leading to their increasing participation in the national and peasant movements.

### **Ideological Differences and Similarities between Gandhi and Ambedkar**

Gandhi, the principal architect of the Indian freedom struggle, and B.R. Ambedkar, the principal architect of the Constitution of independent India shared many ideas, though in many ways they held different beliefs. There is a striking similarity in the symbolism involved in some of the actions of both individuals. The burning of foreign cloth by Gandhi and the burning of *Manusmriti* by Ambedkar are not to be seen as mere acts of sentiment. Rather, foreign cloth and *Manusmriti* represented the bondage and slavery for India. So too, a pinch of salt from the ocean, and a drop of water from the Mahad tank were acts of political catharsis and social philosophy.

Gandhi believed that freedom was never to be bestowed but to be wrested from the authority by the people who desire it, whereas Ambedkar expected bestowing of freedom by the imperial rulers.

The two leaders differed over the nature and scope of democracy as a method of government. Ambedkar advocated parliamentary system of government for independent India, but Gandhi had very little respect for the parliamentary system of governance. Gandhi believed that democracy tends to get converted into mass democracy with a propensity for domination by leaders. Ambedkar was inclined towards mass democracy as it could act as a pressure on the government with the advancement of the oppressed people.

As a political and social activist, Ambedkar had certain

principles which were very rigid, while Gandhi had no rigidities of ideology or principles except the uncompromising notion of non-violence. Gandhi tried to put forward simple practical alternatives to the political streams of the twentieth century like liberalism, communism and fascism. Ambedkar, on the other hand, had a natural inclination for liberal ideology and desired institutional framework and structures. Ambedkar's politics tended to highlight the aspect of Indian disunity whereas the Gandhian politics tried to show the aspect of Indian unity. In '*Hind Swaraj*', Gandhi tries to prove that India has always been a nation prior to the beginning of the imperial rule and it was the British rule who broke this cultural unity. Ambedkar, on the other hand, believed in the notion that Indian unity was the by-product of the legal system introduced by the imperial state.

For Gandhi, '*Gramraj*' was '*Ramraj*' and real independence for Indians. But for Ambedkar, the status-quoist nature of the Indian villages denied equality and fraternity and also liberty. As the scourge of casteism and untouchability was most dominant in the rural areas of India, Ambedkar believed that '*Gramraj*' would continue the social hierarchy based on discrimination and inequality. So he vehemently propagated that there was nothing to be proud of the Indian village system.

The idea of the use of compulsion or force for social integration as well as social reforms was negated by Ambedkar. But the idea of proper education to make the individual desire for change, reform and integration was the stance where the views of two leaders were the same.

The two leaders also differed in their views and approaches in respect of the context of development for deprived classes. For instance, when Gandhi named the depressed classes and the untouchables as '*Harijan*', Ambedkar denounced it as a clever scheme. Thus, when the Depressed

Classes League was renamed as Harijan Sevak Sangh (by Gandhi), Ambedkar left the organisation by claiming that for Gandhi removal of untouchability was only a platform, not a sincere programme.

Ambedkar held that the centre of religion must be between man and man, and not between man and God alone, as preached by Gandhi. In the beginning, Ambedkar too wanted to cast away the evil practices prevalent in Hinduism in an attempt to reform and reconstruct, rather than destroy it fully. But in the later phase of his life, he left Hinduism, denouncing it as an entity which couldn't be reformed.

Ambedkar denounced the *Vedas* and other Hindu scriptures. He believed that the Hindu scriptures do not lend themselves to a unified and coherent understanding, and reflect strong contradictions within and across sects. And the caste system and untouchability were the manifestations of the Hindu religious scriptures. On the contrary, Gandhi held that caste system in Hinduism has nothing to do with religious precepts and spirituality. For Gandhi, caste and varna are different, and caste is perversive degeneration.

In political percepts, Ambedkar believed in freedom of religion, free citizenship and separation of State and religion. Gandhi also endorsed the idea of freedom of religion, but never approved a separation of politics and religion. But religion as an agent of social change was well accepted by both leaders. Both denounced in theory and thinking anything that either decried or diminished the role of religion in the life of an individual or in the life of society.

Ambedkar envisaged limited sovereign power of the State and, following from that, limited authority for the government. According to him, legal sovereign power should be limited and people should be the ultimate sovereign. Gandhi too believed in limited sovereign power of the State. According to him, absolute sovereign power of the State

would annihilate the spirit and personality of an individual. Gandhi, in fact, believed in least governance being the best governance.

The notions of violence and non-violence got differing explanations from Gandhi and Ambedkar. Ambedkar held absolute non-violence as an end and relative violence as a means, whereas Gandhi never made such a distinction and was an avowed opponent of violence of any kind.

Ambedkar believed in purity of ends and justified means as just when the ends were just. Whereas in Gandhian perception it was purity of means that determined the end.

Gandhi and Ambedkar differed greatly in their views concerning mechanisation of production and utilisation of heavy machinery. Gandhi was apprehensive about the de-humanising impact of mechanisation and held it responsible for the creation as well as sustaining of exploitative socio-economic orders in the world. Ambedkar, on the other hand, attributed the evil effect of machinery to wrong social organisations that gave sanctity to private property and the pursuit of personal gains. Ambedkar was of the firm belief that machinery and modern civilisation were of benefit to all, and held that the slogan of a democratic society must be machinery and more machinery, civilisation and more civilisation.

The idea of social transformation through democratic and peaceful means got support from Ambedkar as well as Gandhi. They never sought a violent overthrow of any kind. Ambedkar desisted from pleading a blunt destruction of the social order, however, evil it was. And like Gandhi, he wanted to solve the problem of social disharmony and disintegration through peaceful rehabilitation of the oppressed classes.

The target groups of Ambedkar and Gandhi were different, even though they converged at certain points. The methods and skills of communication and mobilisation of

**View**

It would thus appear that Ambedkar and Gandhi had common allergy for social evil and imperial injustice. But a fundamental difference, more apparent than real, demarcated the two minds.

—Justice Krishna Iyer

both were different. Gandhi spoke in plain local vernacular, whereas Ambedkar spoke in English.

To disobey the law to make the law more just was a Gandhian principle; its outward manifestations were non-cooperation, *hartal*, satyagraha and civil disobedience. Ambedkar was more inclined towards the observance of law and constitutionality in the political process.

Gandhi viewed the *untouchables* as an integral part of the Hindu whole, whereas Ambedkar had an ambivalent stand on the issue. Ambedkar regarded the untouchables as a religious minority and not a part of the Hindu community, and preferred to call them a 'political minority' or 'minority by force'. To Gandhi, untouchability was one of the many problems confronted by Indian society. To Ambedkar, untouchability was the major problem that captured his sole attention. Ambedkar made an exhaustive study of the problem from its the historical angle, while Gandhi was more concerned with the problem in its contemporary situation. Ambedkar wanted to solve the problem of untouchability through laws and constitutional methods, whereas Gandhi treated untouchability as a moral stigma and wanted it to be erased by acts of atonement. Gandhi had little use of legal/constitutional modes; he looked to morality and thus supported conscience to remedy the evil.

### Summary

- **Calcutta Congress Session (December 1928)**

One year ultimatum to government to accept dominion status or else civil disobedience to be launched for complete independence.

- **Lahore Congress Session (December 1929)**

Congress adopted complete independence as its goal.

Congress decided to launch a civil disobedience movement.

January 26, 1930 celebrated as the first Independence Day all over the country.

- **Dandi March (March 12-April 6, 1930)**

Led by Gandhi; resulted in spread of salt satyagraha to Tamil Nadu, Malabar, Andhra, Assam, Bengal.

- **Spread of the movement with additional avenues of protest**

Khudai Khidmatgars active in NWFP.

Textile workers active in Sholapur.

Salt satyagraha in Dharasana.

No-chowkidara tax campaign in Bihar.

Anti-chowkidara and anti-union-board tax in Bengal.

No-tax movement in Gujarat.

Civil disobedience of forest laws in Maharashtra, Karnataka and Central Provinces.

Agitation against 'Cunningham Circular' in Assam.

No rent campaign in UP.

Mass participation of women, students, some sections of Muslims, merchants and petty traders, tribals, workers and peasants.

- **Gandhi-Irwin Pact (March 1931)**

Congress agreed to attend Second RTC and to withdraw CDM.

- **Karachi Congress Session (March 1931)**

Endorsed Delhi Pact between Gandhi and Irwin.

Passed resolutions on economic programme and fundamental rights.

- **The Round Table Conference**

**The Second RTC** Right wing in Britain against concessions to Indians.

Session got deadlocked on question of safeguards to minorities.

- **December 1931 - April 1934:** Second phase of Civil Disobedience Movement
- **Communal Award (1932) and Poona Pact**  
Provided separate electorates to depressed classes.  
Nationalists felt this to be a threat to national unity.  
Gandhi's fast unto death (September 1932) led to Poona Pact which abandoned separate electorates for depressed classes in favour of increased reserved seats for them.
- **Impact of Poona Pact on depressed classes**
- **Joint electorate and its Impact on depressed classes**
- **Differences and similarities between thoughts of Gandhi and Ambedkar**