

Salt Satyagraha and Dandi March

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Abstract: Salt Satyagraha or Salt march or as one may call it Dandi march was a very significant part of the Indian Independence movement against the British rule led by Mahatma Gandhi. It was a milestone in the way, it influenced the Indian society to resist the wrong donings of the British. It included tax resistance and non-violent protest based on the principle of Satyagraha by Mahatma Gandhi and his followers. This moment has often been quoted as one of the most significant organized challenge to imperial British rule.

Keywords: Salt Satyagraha or Salt march, Dandi march, Indian Independence.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Salt Satyagraha was initiated by Gandhiji in the second week of March (12th March 1930) with the full co operation of devoted followers and people of the country. It was a part of the long Civil-Disobedience movement (1930-31) which continued for about one year. The Salt acts were deliberately chosen by Gandhiji for contravention in a general civil-disobedience movement as those laws basically were not only unjust in themselves, but also alien, and unrepresentative. The immediate objective of Salt Satyagraha was to remove those laws which caused great hardship to poor and downtrodden masses and to break the Government monopoly over an essential commodity.

2. BACKGROUND AND HISTORY

The problem started in 1835 when a Salt commission had recommended that the Salt prepared in India had to be taxed and as a result the Salt became such an commodity which was beyond the reach of poor people. Hence Gandhiji rightly felt the nerve of the people and expressed that the Salt tax oppressed all the Hindus, the Muslims, the Parsees, the Christians and the Jews. That is why he reminded the people to be conscious of their rights so that they could take possession of the rights which certainly belonged to them. In this respect a considerable number of officials both in England and India condemned the Salt laws and held them outrageous and unjust. Gandhi decided to fight against this kind of injustice and planned to violate the Salt laws along with members of his Ashram at Sabarmati.(1)

Meaning of Satyagraha:-

The word Satyagraha is from the Sanskrit words Satya ("Truth") and Agraha (Insistence). For Gandhiji , Satyagraha went far beyond just "passive resistance". His non violence also became his strength. He said that he chose the name because Truth means Love, and Insistence means Force, and the Sanskrit name showed it was a force born from Truth and Love. (2)

3. PREPARING TO MARCH

On 5th February, newspapers reported that Gandhi would begin civil disobedience by defying the Salt laws. The Salt Satyagraha would begin on 12 march and end in Dandi with Gandhiji breaking the Salt act on 6 April. (3) Gandhi prepared the worldwide media for the march by issuing regular statements from Sabarmati, at his regular Prayer meetings and through direct contact with the press. (4)

For the march itself Gandhi wanted the strictest discipline and adherence to Satyagraha and ahimsa. For that reason, he recruited the marchers not from congress party members, but from the residents of his own Ashram who were trained in Gandhi's strict standards of discipline. (5) The 24-day March would pass through 4 districts and 48 villages. The route of

the march, along with each evening's stopping place, was planned based on recruitment potential, past contacts and timing. Gandhi sent scouts to each village ahead of the march so he could plan his talks at each resting place, based on the needs of the local residents. (6)

On 2 march 1930 Gandhi wrote to the viceroy, Lord Irwin, offering to stop the march if Irwin met eleven demands, including reduction of land revenue assessments, cutting military spending imposing a tariff on foreign cloths, and abolishing the Salt tax. (7) His strongest appeal to Irwin regarded the Salt tax. Victory ignored the letter and refused to meet with Gandhiji, the march was set in motion. (8)

March to Delhi:

On 12 march 1930, Gandhi and 80 satyagrahis, many of them were scheduled castes, set out on foot for the coastal village of Dandi, Gujarat, over 390 kilometers from their starting point at Sabarmati Asharam. (9) The first day's march of 21kilometers (13ml) ended in the village of Asali, where Gandhi spoke to a crowd of about 4,000. (10) At Asali, and the other villages that the march passed through, volunteers collected donations, registered new Satyagrahis, and received resignations from village officials who chose to end co- operation on with British rule. (11)

Thousands of Satyagrahis and leaders like Sarojini Naidu joined him. Everyday, more and more people joined the march, until the procession of marchers became at least two miles long . (12) The marchers used to sing the Hindu Bhajan Raghupati Raghav Raja Ram while walking. At surat, they were greeted by 30,000 people. (13) When they reached the railhead at Dandi, more than 50,000 were gathered. Gandhiji gave interviews and wrote articles along the way. (14) Near the end of the march , Gandhi declared, " I want world sympathy in this battle of Right against Might.(15) Upon arriving at the seashore on 5 April, Gandhi was interviewed by an Associated Press Reporter. He stated:

"I cannot withhold my compliments from the government for the policy of complete non interference adopted by them throughout the march. I wish I could believe this non interference was due to any real change of heart or policy," (16)

The following morning, after a prayer, Gandhiji raised a lump of Salty mud and declared, "With this, I am shaking the foundations of the British Empire." (17)

The March Ends:

The long 241 miles trek finally ended on April 5, 1930. Along the way Gandhiji and companions had broken journey for the night at 22 places.

On April 6, the atmosphere at Dandi was both tense and solemn. The day began with prayers. Gandhiji then nominated Shri Abbas Tyabji, and after him, Smt Sarojini Naidu, to lead the Satyagraha if he was arrested,

The entire nation rose as a man against what Gandhiji described as "Goonda Raj." Millions broke the Salt law and courted imprisonment. Salt depots were raided everywhere and the manufacture of illicit Salt was undertaken. In a single raid at Dharasana, 289 volunteers were wounded because the police now used lathis and batons freely.

By March 31, more than 95,000 were jailed. Gandhiji is also arrested. Thus ended a glorious episode in own freedom struggle. (18)

4. LONG TERM EFFECT

Salt Satyagraha succeeded in drawing the attention of the world. Millions saw the newsreels showing the march. Time Magazine declared Gandhiji its "1930 Man of the Year." (19) Salt Satyagraha produced scant progress toward dominion status or independence for India. (20) Gandhiji had asked that only men take part in the Salt March, but eventually women began manufacturing and growing number of women began manufacturing and selling salt throughout India. (21) The growing number of women in the fight for independence was a "new and serious feature" according to Lord Irwin. (22)

The Satyagraha campaign of the 1930s also forced the British to recognised that their control of India depended entirely on the consent of the Indians- Salt Satyagraha was a significant step in the British losing that consent. (23) Nehru considered the Salt Satyagraha the high water mark of his association with Gandhiji (24) and felt that its lasting importance was in changing the attitudes of Indians:

“Of course these movements exercised tremendous pressure on the British Government and shook the government machinery. But the real importance, to my mind, lay in the effect they had on our own people and especially the village masses..... Non co-operation dragged them out of the mire and gave them self respect and self reliance.” (25)

5. CONCLUSION

The Salt Satyagraha during 1930 was indeed a rightful example to the way how Gandhi acted as a mediator in resolving several conflicts between Indians and the British. It explains how Gandhi applied the techniques of management in his own unique way to help unity develop among the Indian and cause a “Change of Heart”

Gandhi did more than anyone else in advancing the development of a non-violent struggle in the 20th century. He and the movement in which he was involved contributed to a worldwide recognition of the existence of the potential of non-violence as a means of solving conflicts. There is no simple or easy way of healing the wounds of society in the aftermath of sustained violence. It is important to examine the painful past, acknowledge it and understand it, in order to move forward. We must create trust and understanding between people. This is the Gandhian method for solving conflicts and building peace.

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