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The role of Mahatma Gandhi in freedom struggle

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Abstract

India, with its rapid economic modernization and urbanization, has rejected Gandhi's economics but accepted much of his politics and continues to revere his memory. Reporter Jim Yardley notes that, "modern India is hardly a Gandhian nation, if it ever was one. His vision of a village-dominated economy was shunted aside during his lifetime as rural romanticism, and his call for a national ethos of personal austerity and nonviolence has proved antithetical to the goals of an aspiring economic and military power." By contrast Gandhi is "given full credit for India's political identity as a tolerant, secular democracy." Gandhi's birthday, 2 October, is a national holiday in India, Gandhi Jayanti. Gandhi's image also appears on paper currency of all denominations issued by Reserve Bank of India, except for the one rupee note. Gandhi's date of death, 30 January, is commemorated as a Martyrs' Day in India.

Keywords: gandhi, modern India, nonviolence

Introduction

Mahatma Gandhi was known for his non-violence protest and was a leading figure of freedom movements whether in India or South Africa. With his efforts finally India got freedom from the colonial rule. He always gave importance to human rights. No doubt, Mahatma Gandhi is a true inspiration not only for the past generation but also for the generations to come with his ideology of non-violence, truth, tolerance and social welfare. On Gandhi Jayanti occasion let us have a look about some major nationalist movements that played a crucial role in the freedom struggle.

▪ Civil Disobedience Movement

Gandhi again took off with another non-violent movement known as the civil disobedience movement. This movement was more active than the non-cooperation movement and brought about a revolution of sorts. This movement aimed at bringing the British administration to a stop by withdrawing support from everything. There was agitation against land revenue, abolition of salt tax, cutting down military expenditure, levying duty on foreign cloth, etc. A very important movement was that of Salt Satyagraha where Gandhi undertook the Dandi march as a protest against the Salt tax.

▪ Quit India Movement

The Quit India Movement was launched under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi in August 1942. The main aim for launching this movement was to bring the British to negotiate with the Indian leaders. It was a call for immediate independence of India and the slogan of "Do or Die" was adopted for the same. However the leaders were arrested soon after Gandhi's speech and were put in jail by British officials. Gandhi went on a fast for 21 days demanding the release of the leaders despite his failing health. The British had to secure

the release of the leaders.

▪ India Independence

After the Quit India Movement the freedom struggle got even more intense and passionate. Entire India was united together in the movement for freedom. Everyone contributed what they could in the freedom struggle. The cry of Purna Swaraj or complete independence was raised. After much sacrifices and efforts, India gained its independence on the 15th August, 1947.

Major movements of Mahatma Gandhi are as follows

1. **Champaran Satyagraha (1917):** In Champaran district of Bihar the condition of Indigo cultivators became miserable under Tinkathiya system. Under this system the cultivators were forced to cultivate Indigo on the best 3/20th part of their land and were forced to sell them at a cheaper price. The situation for the farmers became worse due to harsh weather conditions and levy of heavy taxes. Then, Rajkumar Shukla met Mahatma Gandhi at Lucknow and invited him. At Champaran, Mahatma Gandhi adopted the approach of civil disobedience movement and launched demonstrations and strikes against the landlords. As a result, the government set up a Champaran agrarian committee of which Gandhi ji was also one of the members. All the demands of the cultivators were accepted and the Satyagraha was successful.
2. **Kheda Satyagraha (1917 -1918):** A no-tax campaign was started by Mohan Lal Pandey in 1917 who demanded the remission of taxes due to poor harvest or crop failure in Kheda village, Gujarat. Mahatma Gandhi was invited and he joined the movement on 22 March, 1918. There, he started Satyagraha. The movement was also joined by

Vallabhbhai Patel and Indulal Yagnik. Finally, the demands were fulfilled by the British government and it was successful.

3. **Khilafat Movement (1919):** Khilafat movement was started by the Ali brothers to show the protest against unjust done with the Turkey after the First World War. Under the guidance of Mahatma Gandhi the movement was launched against the British government to restore the collapsing status of the Caliph in Turkey. All India Conference was held in Delhi where Mahatma Gandhi was elected as a president. He also returned the medals received from the British Empire in South Africa. The success of the Khilafat movement made him the national leader.
4. **Non-Cooperation Movement (1920):** Non-Cooperation movement was launched in 1920 by Mahatma Gandhi due to the Jallianwala Bagh Massacre. Mahatma Gandhi thought that this will continue and Britishers will enjoy their control over Indians. With the help of Congress, Gandhi ji convinced people for starting non-cooperation movement in a peaceful way which is key factor to attain independence. He framed the concept of Swaraj and it became a crucial element in the Indian freedom struggle. The movement gained momentum and people started boycotting the products and establishments of British government like schools, colleges, government offices. But due to Chauri Chaura incident, Mahatma Gandhi ended the movement because in this incident 23 police officials were killed.
5. **Civil-Disobedience Movement (1930):** Mahatma Gandhi in March 1930 addressed the nation in a newspaper, Young India and expressed his willingness to suspend the movement if his eleven demands get accepted by the government. But the government at that time was of Lord Irwin and he did not respond back to him. As a result, Mahatma Gandhi initiated the movement with full vigour. He started the movement with Dandi March from 12 March to 6 April, 1930. Mahatma Gandhi along with his followers marched from Sabarmati Ashram to Dandi in Nausari District, Ahmedabad on the sea coast and broke the salt law by making salt on 6 April, 1930. Under this movement student left college and government servant resigned from the office. Boycott foreign clothes, communal burning of foreign clothes, non-payment of government taxes, women stage Dharna at the government liquor shop etc. In 1930, the Lord Irwin's Government called for a Round Table Conference in London and Indian National Conference refused to take part in it. So, to make sure that Congress participates in conference he signed a pact with Mahatma Gandhi in 1931. It was known as Gandhi-Irwin Pact. It focuses on the release of all the political prisoners and cancellation of the oppressive laws.
6. **Quit India Movement (1942):** Mahatma Gandhi launches Quit India movement on 8 August, 1942 during Second World War to drive British rule out of India. In the movement Mahatma Gandhi delivered 'Do or Die' speech. As a result the entire members of Indian National Congress were arrested by the British officials and

imprisoned them without trial. But the protest continued across the nation. By the end of World War II, British government cleared that they will hand over the powers to India. Mahatma Gandhi called off the movement which results in the release of thousands of prisoners. Therefore, these are the major movements that led by Mahatma Gandhi and helped India in attaining freedom from the British rule or colonial rule.

Conclusion

One of the first series of nonviolent protests nationwide was the non-cooperation movement started by Mahatma Gandhi. This movement officially started the Gandhian era in India. In this freedom struggle, the non-cooperation movement was basically aimed at making the Indians aware of the fact that the British government can be opposed and if done actively, it will keep a check on them. Thus, educational institutions were boycotted, foreign goods were boycotted, and people let go off their nominated seats in government institutions. Though the movement failed, Indians awakened to the concept of going against the British.

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