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Mahatma Gandhi - The Architect of Indian Freedom Struggle

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ABSTRACT

Mahatma Gandhi is not only a freedom fighter but also a social and economic revolutionary. His idea of Satyagraha by the method of non-violence is praised and followed all over the world. Gandhi is not a name but an idea that incorporate the feeling of Struggle, Nationalism and Sacrifice.

Gandhi played a crucial role in the freedom struggle of India. He is known for his various Satyagraha to oppose unjust laws made by the British. Some of the popular movements led by Mahatma Gandhi are Champaran Satyagraha for indigo planters, Ahmedabad Mill Satyagraha for an increase of wages of mill workers, Kheda Satyagraha for Patidar peasants, Satyagraha against Rowlett Act, Salt Satyagraha against the tax imposed on salt and Quit India movement for freedom of India.

Hence, we can conclude that the movement led by Mahatma Gandhi played a significant role in the freedom of India, and that is why he can be considered as the architect of the Indian struggle for freedom.

I. INTRODUCTION

“You must not lose faith in humanity. Humanity is like an ocean; if a few drops of the ocean are dirty, the ocean does not become dirty.”

— Mahatma Gandhi

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was born on October 2, 1869, in Porbandar, Gujrat, a seacoast town in the Kathiawar Peninsula. He was the fourth child of his father, Karamchand Gandhi, prime minister to raja of three small city-states. Mohandas was an average student whose childhood ambition was to study medicine, but the medical field was considered beneath his caste. That is why his father persuaded him to study law instead of medicine.

After completing graduation in law from London, he returned to India to practice law in Rajkot and Bombay but failed. In 1893 Gandhi went to South Africa for working in a Muslim firm. While travelling to South Africa by train, he was asked to leave by a white man. He got off the

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train and spent the night in a railway station. Due to this incident, he decided to stay in South Africa to end racial discrimination. After the train incident, he called the meeting of Indians in Pretoria and launched a campaign to end racial discrimination.

In 1907 Gandhi asked all Indians in South Africa to disobey a law that requires compulsory registration and fingerprinting of all Indians. Due to this reason, he was imprisoned for two months but released when he agreed to voluntary registration. The two significant achievements of Gandhi in South Africa were – (1) A law was made which declared Indian marriages valid (2) He played an important role in abolishing a tax levied on former indentured Indian labour due to which they were bound to work and unable to leave for a specific period after this Gandhi regarded his work in South Africa as complete and returned to India in 1915.

Rowlatt Acts of 1919 were brought by Britishers which allowed them to put those people behind bars without any trial who were accused of political crimes. Gandhi called for a strike in which workers refused to work to obtain their rights from the employers. He called off the strike when it resulted in violence against Britishers.

Due to the Amritsar Massacre of April 1919, Gandhi started non-cooperation with British courts, schools; due to this government agreed to bring reforms.

Gandhi urged Indians to make their clothing rather than buying from Britishers, creating employment for Indian peasants during the non-working months of the year. He also tried to tell the importance of the idea of economic independence to Indians. He considered industrialisation a way of acquiring wealth by specific individuals that do not allow a man's growth. According to Gandhi, the welfare of an individual should be more critical than economic productivity.

Gandhi used to believe in non-violence protest; due to this, he used to use the fast and march technique. Gandhi believed that it was impossible to fight against Britishers without Hindu-Muslim unity; that is why he undertook a 21-day fast to bring both communities together. In order to oppose the salt tax imposed by Britishers on Indians, Gandhi, along with thousands of people, started his famous twenty-four-day salt march to the sea, covering 241 miles of distance.

Gandhi also worked for the upliftment of lower caste people or Harijans. In 1932, Gandhi began a fast opposing the Britisher's plans for a separate voting body for Harijans. As a result of his fast various Hindu temples were opened for people of lower caste.

After the start of the second world war, Gandhi proposed not to help Britishers in the war as they had made no political compromise, due to which many nationalist leaders along with

Gandhi were imprisoned, which resulted in violence throughout India. Britishers blamed Gandhi for violence, due to which he fasted for three weeks in jail. He was released from jail on May 6, 1944.

After coming out of prison, Gandhi tried to stop the creation of a separate Muslim state called Pakistan, which was demanded by Muhammad Ali Jinnah. Jinnah declared August 16, 1946, as "Direct Action Day," due to which communal violence took place and resulted in the death of thousands of people alone in Calcutta. Gandhi was extremely upset by this violence, due to which he went to Bengal and started his fast to stop the violence.

In 1947, Congress had no choice due to which they agreed to separation as it was the only alternative to end the British Rule in India. Due to this, Gandhi refused to participate in the independence celebration on 15th August 1947.

On 30th January 1948, Gandhi was shot dead by Nathuram Godse, an extremist of Hindu Mahasabha.

(A) Research Objectives

1. To study the important life events of Mahatma Gandhi.
2. To study the impact of Champaran Satyagraha, led by Mahatma Gandhi and reasons for considering it as the foundation of India's Freedom.
3. To study the role of Ahmedabad Mill Workers Satyagraha which was Gandhi's first Satyagraha by means of hunger strike in propagating the idea of Satyagraha and Non-Violence.
4. To study the role of kheda Satyagraha in making Mahatma Gandhi an undisputed leader in the Indian National Congress.
5. To study the provisions of the Rowlett Act and the steps taken by Mahatma Gandhi to mark his protest against such draconian law.
6. To study the repressive and cowardly act done by General Dyer, which was known as the Jallianwala Bagh Massacre in Amritsar, Punjab and the response of Mahatma Gandhi against such repression.
7. To study the role of Salt Satyagraha led by Mahatma Gandhi in uniting people of different caste, religion and social status.
8. To study about Quit India Movement and the role of Mahatma Gandhi in India's Freedom.

(B) Research Questions

1. What were the important life events of Mahatma Gandhi?

2. What was the impact of Champaran Satyagraha, led by Mahatma Gandhi and what are the reasons for considering it as the foundation of India's Freedom?
3. What were the role of Ahmedabad Mill Workers Satyagraha which was Gandhi's first Satyagraha by means of hunger strike, in propagating the idea of Satyagraha and Non-Violence?
4. How did kheda Satyagraha play an important role in making Mahatma Gandhi an undisputed leader in Indian National Congress?
5. What were the provisions of the Rowlett Act, and which steps were taken by Mahatma Gandhi to mark his protest against such draconian law?
6. What was the impact of the Jallianwala Bagh Massacre, and how Mahatma Gandhi responded to it?
7. What was the role of Salt Satyagraha, led by Mahatma Gandhi, in uniting people of different caste, religion and social status?
8. What was the role of Gandhi in the Quit India Movement?

(C) Research Methodology

This research project is based on doctrinal research. The researcher has referred to various historical texts, books, articles, blogs and websites in order to increase the existing knowledge of this topic. Deep and Critical analysis of such sources helped to understand the role of Gandhi in the independence of India.

(D) Scope of the Research

This research is based on the role of Gandhi in various movement such as Champaran Satyagraha, Ahmedabad Mill Workers Satyagraha, Salt Satyagraha, Quit India Movement, as well as in the protest against Rowlett Act and Jallianwala Bagh Massacre.

(E) Limitation of the Study

This research is limited to the role of Gandhi in the movement which took place in India. This research does not focus much on the events which took place during Gandhi visit to South Africa and England.

II. CHAMPARAN SATYAGRAHA

Champaran Satyagraha is marked as India's First Civil Disobedience Movement launched by Mahatma Gandhi to protest against the injustice done to tenant farmers in the Champaran district of Bihar. Champaran district consisted of large and influential landlords who used to lease out villages to European Indigo Planters. Planters used to extract rent from the peasants

as well as they used to exercise civil and criminal jurisdiction in their area.

The farmers of Champaran used to follow the system of ‘‘ Panchkathiya, ‘‘ in which 5/20 of the total area had to be planted with indigo. After a lot of agitation by local leaders against this system, they were able to get some concession and a new system called ‘‘ Tinkathiya ‘‘ was introduced, which means 3/20 of the total area had to be planted with indigo.

A farmer named Rajkumar Shukla was not satisfied with the concession as they were still not able to cultivate food according to their own requirement as well as they were not used to get appropriate payment for growing indigo. One of the major problems with indigo plantation was that it was responsible for the infertility of land. The situation worsened after the arrival of German synthetic dyes; the planters started to charge high rents and illegal dues to maximise their profit and to recover the loss suffered by them due to the arrival of German synthetic dyes in the market.

Rajkumar Shukla had heard about the notable work of Gandhi in South Africa from Ganesh Vidyardhi as well as well known lawyers of Patna like Brajkishore Prasad, and Rajendra Prasad advised him to meet Gandhi, who was attending the 31st Session of the Congress in Lucknow between 26-30 December 1916.

Rajkumar Shukla, along with Sant Raut, went to Lucknow to meet Gandhi and to request him to visit Champaran for the cause of peasants. Gandhi was busy attending Congress meeting at Lucknow and promised him to visit Champaran after returning from Calcutta. When Gandhi went to Calcutta, Rajkumar also went along with him for bringing him to Bihar after while returning from Calcutta.

Gandhi arrived in Champaran on 10th April 1917 along with eminent lawyers like Brajkishore Prasad, Rajendra Prasad and J.B. Kripalani and stayed in the house of Sant Raut in Amolwa village. When District Magistrate came to know about the arrival of Gandhi, he issued a notice saying that Gandhi must leave Champaran by first available train.

Gandhi disobeyed this order, and due to which he was summoned to appear before the court. The magistrate asked Gandhi to leave Champaran, and after that case against him will be withdrawn.

Gandhi replied that he came to Champaran for the shake of Humanity and to render national service, and he wants to work for the suffering of the people.

There was a lot of crowd outside the court, and police were unable to manage it. Gandhi went there and requested them to remain quiet and show faith in him and due to the appeal of Gandhi

crowd dispersed peacefully within a moment. The police were surprised after looking at the Charismatic attributes of Gandhi.

The government withdrew the case against Gandhi and allowed him to stay in Champaran. Gandhi stayed there and tried to study and research the grievances of the peasants. He visited several villages and recorded the statements of several indigo cultivators to understand their issues.

After conducting a lot of research, Gandhi concluded that ignorance of the cultivators was the main reason behind their suppression by the European planters. Therefore he opened various organisations for the economic and educational upliftment of the peasants.

The government set upon a committee to study the grievances of the peasants as well, as they invited Gandhi to serve in that committee, to which he agreed. As a result, The Champaran Agrarian Bill was passed by the government to address the problem faced by peasants who used to cultivate indigo.

This was not only a constitutional victory but was a moral victory of Gandhi against the exploitation of peasants by European settlers.

III. AHMEDABAD MILL-WORKERS SATYAGRAHA

The Ahmedabad satyagraha started in the winter of 1917. The dispute between mill workers and mill owners led to satyagraha. The workers wanted an increase in their wages because of the increase in the cost of living, but mill owners refused to do so.

This issue came to Gandhi, and due to his sympathy with the workers, he decided to support their cause. He launched a peaceful protest against mill owners along with workers. All workers followed Gandhi and protested along with banners on the street and decided not to go back to work unless their demands are fulfilled.

After several days of the strike, even a single effort was not made by mill-owners to settle the dispute. The workers were getting impatient due to starvation, and due to this, Gandhi feared that some workers might return to their work which will result in their moral defeat. That's why for the shake of unity among workers, Gandhi decided to go on a hunger strike.

After three days of hunger strike, the mill- owners came to an agreement with the workers and decided to increase their wages by 35 percent to settle the dispute.

Ahmedabad Satyagraha was the first Satyagraha in which Gandhi protested by hunger strike.

IV. KHEDA SATYAGRAHA

Kheda Satyagraha was launched by Gandhi, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel and several others leaders in the Kheda district of Gujrat in March 1919.

The land of Kheda is the part of central is fertile for the cultivation of tobacco and cotton crops, and most of the peasants in this area are Patidars.

The peasants of Kheda suffered a famine which resulted in large scale failure of crops. They demanded exemption on land tax, but the government refused to consider their request and rather than giving exemption, they reassessed the land and crops and increased the revenue, which was unjust and unacceptable to the peasants.

The Gujrat Sabha consisting of the peasants, submitted petitions and telegram to higher government authority for requesting them for exemption on land revenue for the year 1919, but officials rejected their demand, and due to this, Gandhi advised them to show their protest by Satyagraha.

The peasants refused to pay the taxes imposed on them, due to which their castles were auctioned, houses were confiscated, and their movable property was taken away as well as a lot of penalties were imposed on them.

At last, the government accepted the main demands of the peasants, due to which Kheda Satyagraha was terminated.

The government waived off the land revenue of poor and small peasants, and only well to do peasants had to pay the revenue. The success of Kheda Satyagraha is considered a major victory among the peasants across the country.

V. ROWLETT ACT AND JALLIANWALA BAGH MASSACRE

The Rowlett Act is the famous name of the Crime Act of 1919 passed by the Imperial Legislative Council on 18th March 1919. This act extended the emergency provision imposed by the Defence of India Act, 1915, passed during the First World War.

The act gave the government power to imprison any person suspected of terrorist activities for a maximum period of two years without trial. It also provides for preventive indefinite as well as arrest without any warrant. Convicted people had to deposit securities and was not allowed to take part in any political, religious or educational activities.

In spite of protest by Indian leaders in the Imperial Legislative Council, the government passed the Rowlett Act.

Gandhi received an invitation to go to Madras for attending a small conference of leaders. Despite his poor health condition, Gandhi went to Madras for discussing the implications of the Rowlett Act, and it was decided to start Satyagraha Movement by means of all – India hartal. The date of 6th April 1919 was decided for the hartal.

Gandhi left Madras went to Bombay to join the hartal on April 6. Gandhi had asked people to be peaceful and not to be provoked by violence due to the government's action. Despite this, violence broke out in many places, such as Ahmedabad and Punjab. He decided to go to Punjab to propagate non-violence but was arrested at a wayside station and sent back to Bombay.

After seeing a lot of violence throughout the country, Gandhi went to Ahmedabad and met the commissioner to express his regret for the violence and promised complete cooperation in restoring peace.

Gandhi asked for permission to hold a public meeting in Sabarmati Ashram, and he was granted permission to do so. At a meeting, he announced the suspension of civil disobedience and decided to fast for three days to condemn violence as well as appealed to all people to fast for one day. He also asked those people to confess their guilt which was involved in violence.

Even after the announcement of a suspension of civil disobedience by Gandhi, the situation of Punjab was very critical, but the steps taken by the government were too severe. The leaders were trying to restore peace, but the steps taken by the administration was totally unjust and repressive and were never seen in the history of India. People were not allowed to move freely, and a proclamation was made to prohibit public gathering or meeting. Many people were not able to know about the proclamation as it was not announced widely, as well as it was made only in English.

As people were not aware of the proclamation, they decided to hold a meeting to celebrate Baisakhi as well as to mark a protest in Jallianwala Bagh. General Dyer came to know about the meeting but did not take any steps to prevent it. He reached the place soon after the meeting started along with his armed troops, and without giving any warning, he ordered open fire on the people.

The garden was surrounded by walls, and there was only one exit point which was already blocked by the troops. There were six to ten thousand people in the garden, and the troops open fired over sixteen hundred rounds into the unarmed and innocent people, including children and women. According to the official figure, about 379 people were killed, and 200 were wounded. Instead of bringing the wounded people for treatment, the troops along with General Dyer left the garden. The condition was very shameful all over the Punjab, and people were

forced to salute the soldiers, as well as the water and electricity supply of Indian people were stopped. General Dyer became the second name of terror in Punjab.

Gandhi asked for repeated permission to visit Punjab, but it was turned down by the government. Finally, he was granted permission by the viceroy to visit Punjab. The Congress appointed a committee to enquire into the atrocities committed in the Punjab, and Gandhi was also requested to join the committee. Gandhi conducted the enquiry and concluded that the government is trying to save those people who were responsible for the massacre.

Gandhi was moved by the suffering of Punjab as he knew very well about the atrocities which had been committed on innocent people. Gandhi asked people to non-cooperate with the government in every possible way. He advised people not to accept any honour from the government and requested those people who had already received to return the honour. He advised people to boycott goods, not to serve the government in any capacity. He also asked students to boycott government educational institutions.

Due to the growing influence of Gandhi on the people of India, he became the undisputed leader of Congress. Under the leadership of Gandhi, Congress was fighting against the government by the method of non-violence and non-cooperation.

The political situation of India was very critical. There was a lot of tension everywhere, and the government had a fear that violence may break out any time due to the suppression of innocent and unarmed people.

On August 1, 1920, in a letter to the viceroy, Gandhi gave a signal for a non-cooperation campaign. He also returned the Kaiser-i-Hind gold medal awarded to him in 1915. Gandhi travelled throughout the country and held various meetings to propagate the idea of non-violence and non-cooperation.

A special session of Congress was held in Calcutta on Sep 4-9, 1920, which adopted the non-cooperation plan as a means of attaining Swaraj.

At the end of 1920, Gandhi asked for an absolute boycott of the Government as well as all government institutions such as schools, colleges and courts.

The government, after looking at the condition, issued a warning that whoever crosses the boundary of law would be arrested and imprisoned. Gandhi considered the warning as a victory for the campaign and issued instructions that people need to follow if they get arrested.

On December 26, 1920, a resolution was passed in Congress session held at Nagpur for the complete boycott of all government organisations, which would give a chance to Congress to

set up a parallel organisation and lead India to Swaraj.

As a result of the appeal of Gandhi, several students left their institutions, and several people resigned from the government jobs.

VI. THE ARRIVAL OF PRINCE OF WALES IN INDIA

It was announced that the Prince of Wales was to visit India. When Gandhi came to know about the visit of the Prince of Wales, he advised people to boycott all the parades, receptions and celebrations in honour of the Prince to show their non-cooperation. Many people also burned British clothes to mark their protest against their suppression.

Prince visited various cities and was welcomed by empty streets, and not a single shop was opened. The people remained inside them, and due to this, Britishers get angry and ordered the government to take action against such mischief. After this act, the government arrested and imprisoned several leaders, including Motilal Nehru and Jawaharlal Nehru.

Many people demanded Gandhi start a mass movement for the attainment of Swaraj, due to which he decided to start Satyagraha in Bardoli but had to stop the campaign due to the Chauri Chaura incident in Gorakhpur in which police were burnt alive by an angry mob.

Gandhi was very upset due to the violence which took place in Chauri Chaura and decided to stop the intended Satyagraha in Bardoli. Even after stopping the mass movement, Gandhi was arrested and imprisoned for six years. He was released in 1924 as he was suffering from appendicitis.

VII. SALT SATYAGRAHA

Salt Satyagraha was a mass civil disobedience movement led by Gandhi against the salt tax imposed by the British government in India. He started the march from Sabarmati Ahram on 12th March 1930 and went to Dandi, a coastal village in Gujrat, to break the salt law by producing salt from seawater.

Gandhi broke the salt on 6th April 1930. As a result, he, along with 60000 people were arrested by the Government. Even after the arrest, civil disobedience carried on by the people and several unpopular laws were broken by the people to mark their protest for Swaraj.

This movement not only brought the Indian freedom struggle in the limelight of western media, but it also brought all sections of the society, including women and lower caste people, as salt was the essential ingredient of food for everyone.

Gandhi was released from jail in 1931, and Gandhi-Irwin Pact took place, due to which the

civil disobedience movement was ended, and the arrested people were released, as well as Indians were allowed to make salt for domestic use.

VIII. QUIT INDIA MOVEMENT

During World War II, the Japanese army was moving towards India; that's why it becomes necessary for the British to end the political deadlock in India.

On March 11, 1942, the British Prime Minister Churchill appointed Sir Stafford Cripps to go to India and talk to all the parties.

After reaching India, Cripps introduced several constitutional reforms such as:

1. Dominion status would be given to India as like as Canada.
2. A constituent assembly would be set up to draft a new constitution.
3. There would be a federation of British India and Indian states.
4. Provinces would be free to join Indian Union, and if they refused to do so, then they would form their own constitution and get the same dominion status as that of India.
5. An undertaking would be signed between the Government of Britain and the Constituent Assembly to cover all matters related to the transfer of responsibilities.
6. Special provisions would be made for the protection of racial and religious minorities.
7. During War, Viceroy would remain in power and would be responsible for the affairs related to Defence.

Reasons for the failure of Cripps Mission are as follows:

1. It remained silent on the issue of complete independence in the near future.
2. It did not talk about the formation of Pakistan; that's why Muslim League opposed it.
3. Cripps Mission indirectly talked about the partition of the country. That's why Hindu Mahasabha opposed it.
4. Religious minorities such as Sikhs, Buddhist, Jains, Christians and Anglo Indians opposed it as there was no provision about sufficient safeguard regarding their religious, cultural and political interest.
5. The princely state opposed Cripps mission as it denied their right of selecting their representative to the Constituent Assembly.
6. Congress opposed the provision of giving separate dominion status to Provinces because this would lead to the disintegration of India.
7. Congress wanted all the affairs, including Defence, under the National Government.

8. In 1942, the Japanese Army attacked Burma and was moving towards Assam. Gandhi said that the presence of the British in India is an invitation to Japan to invade India; that's why Gandhi decided to launch a movement asking the British to Quit India.
9. All India Congress Committee met at Bombay on August 8th 1942, and passed Quit India Resolution. As a result, Gandhi, along with several leaders, were arrested on 9th April 1942. Congress was banned and declared illegal.
10. There were severe reactions from the people against the arrest of Gandhi and other leaders, but the British adopted repressive measures to stop the movement.
11. Although the British were able to crush the movement, this movement propagated the feeling of Nationalism, Struggle and Sacrifice.
12. It was clear from the Quit India movement that the British can't rule India against the will of the people of India.

IX. CONCLUSION

Mahatma Gandhi is not only a freedom fighter but also a social and economic revolutionary. His idea of Satyagraha by the method of non-violence is praised and followed all over the world. Gandhi is not a name but an idea that incorporate the feeling of Struggle, Nationalism and Sacrifice.

Gandhi played a key role in the freedom struggle of India. He is known for his various Satyagraha to oppose unjust laws made by the British.

Champaran Satyagraha was the first Satyagraha of Mahatma Gandhi, in which he supported the cause of indigo planters (peasants) and also opened several organisations such as schools for the economic and educational development of the peasants of Champaran.

Ahmedabad Mill Satyagraha was the Satyagraha in which Gandhi supported the demand of mill workers for an increase in their wages. This Satyagraha was the first Satyagraha in which Gandhi went on hunger strike.

Kheda Satyagraha is also a well known Satyagraha of Gandhi, in which he supported the demand of Patidar peasants for exemption of land tax due to famine. This Satyagraha is considered as a revolution among peasants against their suppression.

Rowlett Act was passed by Imperial Legislative Council, which provide unjust and unrestrictive power to police and government to arrest an individual and imprison him for two years without trial. Gandhi considered this law against the basic human of an individual and called for– India Hartal to protest against this black law.

Salt Satyagraha was one of the most important Satyagraha with respect to the independence of India. This Satyagraha started from Sabarmati Ashram and ended in Dandi, a coastal area in Gujrat, against the tax imposed by the government on salt. This Satyagraha brought all Indians together as salt is the essential ingredient of food for everyone, whether he is rich or poor.

The Quit India movement was the last movement led by Gandhi, which laid the foundation of India's independence and incorporated the feeling of Unity, Nationalism, Sacrifice and Struggles among Indians.

Hence, it can be concluded that the movement led by Mahatma Gandhi played a very important role in the freedom of India, and that's why he can be considered as ***the architect of the Indian struggle for freedom.***

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