
UNIT 16 MAHATMA GANDHI'S EMERGENCE IN INDIAN POLITICS AND HIS IDEOLOGY

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16.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit you shall be able to:

- learn about the problems faced by immigrant Indians in South Africa,
- know about the efforts made by Mahatma Gandhi in South Africa to improve the condition of Indians residing there,
- understand the peasants movement in Champaran and Kheda and the work of Gandhi amongst the peasants,
- know the role of Gandhi in the Ahmedabad Workers strike and Rowlatt Satyagrah, and
- understand and explain the ideology of Mahatma Gandhi.

16.1 INTRODUCTION

Mahatma Gandhi played a key role in transforming the content, ideology and range of Indian politics during the National Movement. With his entry into politics there opened a new phase of struggle. With the shift to mass mobilisation he remained the dominant personality during the National Movement and played a crucial role in directing the struggle against British Imperialism. This Unit takes into account his struggle in South Africa and political activities in India till 1920. This is a period which could be described as the formative stage of Gandhi—a stage in which he tried to understand Indian economic, social and political reality. It was during this period that he applied new forms of struggle. We also discuss in this Unit his ideology and how he applied that in political actions.

16.2 GANDHI'S STRUGGLE IN SOUTH AFRICA

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi who came to be popularly known as the Mahatma, was born in a well to do Hindu traditional family of Porbandar in Kathiawar Gujarat on October 2, 1869. Gandhi went to England for his studies in 1881, offered the London Matriculation, and qualified for the Bar. This young barrister returned to India in 1891 and began practising in the Bombay High Court. Not being a success as a lawyer, he shifted to Rajkot where petition-writing brought him a monthly income of about Rs. 300. In 1893, Gandhi sailed to Durban in connection with a legal case of Dada Abdulla and Co., an Indian firm, doing trade in South Africa. Gandhi had contracted to work there for a year only but he stayed there upto 1914 with two breaks in between. During his stay in South Africa Gandhi fought against racial discrimination which denied to the Indian community human rights necessary for leading a civilized life.

16.2.1 Condition of Indians

About 2 lacs Indians lived in South Africa at a time when Gandhi had to fight for their cause. Most of the Indian Population there comprised indentured, freed labourers, and a few merchants with their clerks and assistants. The indentured labourers were treated as semi-slaves by the white planters. The rest suffered from various racial disabilities with regard to rights of citizenship, trade, and ownership of property.

They were also subjected to all kinds of indignities in their daily life:

- Every Indian, without any distinction, was contemptuously a 'coolie' which meant a labourer.
- The Indians were not allowed to walk on footpaths or to be out at night without a permit.
- They were prohibited to travel in first and second class railway compartments, and were forced at times to travel on the footboard of trains.
- They were not permitted to enter hotels exclusively reserved for Europeans.
- In Transvaal, Indians were asked to do trade or reside in specific areas which had highly unhygienic surroundings and had no proper arrangements for light, water supply and drainage.
- Moreover, the ex-indentured labourers had to pay £ 3 as poll tax.

16.2.2 Campaign - 1

Gandhi himself experienced this racial discrimination immediately after reaching South Africa. In the court at Durban, Gandhi was ordered by the European magistrate to remove his turban. But Gandhi refused to do so and left the room in protest. While going to Pretoria, Gandhi was not allowed to travel first class and was asked to shift to Van compartment. When Gandhi refused to move away, he was forcibly thrown out. Eventually it was a proposed bill of the Natal Government to disfranchise Indians, which compelled Gandhi to launch his struggle in South Africa.

In a farewell party being given in his honour, Gandhi read a news item that the Natal legislature was going to pass the above bill. This infuriated Gandhi and he declared: 'this is the first nail into our coffin'. When Indian merchants asked Gandhi to help them fight this bill, he decided to postpone his return to India. The farewell party was converted into a committee to plan agitation against the bill.

In order to lend strength to his struggle, Gandhi's first endeavour was to infuse a strong sense of solidarity into the heterogenous element composing the Indian community of Natal. He formed an association in 1893 and named it 'Indian Natal Organisation'. At the same time, Gandhi's effort was to give wide publicity to Indian cause with a view to securing support from the people and governments in India and England. In India, the Indian National Congress passed a resolution against the disfranchising bill. In England too, a section of the press and some publicmen supported the Indian cause in South Africa.

About 400 Indians living in Natal submitted a petition against the bill. However the Natal legislature passed the bill and the Governor gave his assent to it. Gandhi sent a long petition signed by 10,000 Indians to the Colonial Secretary in England with the appeal that the Queen should not approve the bill. In view of strong opposition the Colonial office in London vetoed the bill on the ground that it discriminated against the inhabitants of another part of the British Empire. But this did not dishearten the Europeans of Natal. They obtained their object by passing the bill in an amended form. According to the new bill: 'No native of

countries (not of European origin) which had not hitherto possessed elective institutions founded on parliamentary franchise were to be placed on voters' list unless they obtained exception from Governor-General. The amended bill was finally approved.

Gandhi continued his struggle against the racial discrimination by writing and producing articles and pamphlets in order to mobilise public support. This enraged many Europeans in South Africa. In 1896 when Gandhi returned to Natal with his family, a mob of 4000 Europeans assembled at the port to oppose him. Later on, some Europeans attacked him. Fortunately he was saved by the wife of a senior police official. This, however, did not deter Gandhi from carrying on his campaign. In his next visit to India, he attended the Congress session at Calcutta and succeeded in piloting a resolution on the condition of Indians in South Africa. In 1902 he again returned to South Africa and now stayed there continuously for 12 years fighting against racial discrimination. A weekly **Indian Opinion** was started in 1903 which became a mouth-piece of Gandhi's struggle. In 1904, Gandhi, with a selected band of his associates, shifted to a place near Durban called Phoenix. Here they lived with utmost simplicity and led community life. The importance of Phoenix was that later all its inhabitants became the main participants in Gandhi's Satyagraha.

Gandhi had once told the British High Commissioner in South Africa: 'What we (Indians) want is not political power; but we do wish to live side by side with other British subjects in peace and amity, and with dignity and self respect'. The Transvaal government, however, came out with a bill in 1906 to further humiliate the Indians. According to this legislation every Indian - man, woman or child above eight—was required to register and to give finger and thumb impressions on the registration form. Whoever failed to register before a certain date would be guilty of an offence for which he could be punished or deported.

At any time, an Indian could be asked to produce his registration certificate, and police officers were permitted to enter into an Indian's house to check his papers.



21. Gandhi as a Satyagrahi in South Africa.

To raise a voice against this bill Gandhi organised a meeting at the Empire Theatre in Johannesburg. The passions of the people were greatly aroused and they were determined to fight to the last to keep their honour and dignity. Gandhi said:

There is only one course open to those like me to die but not to submit to the law. It is unlikely, but even if everyone flinched, leaving me alone to face the music, I am confident that I would not violate the pledge.

Finally, all the participants of the meeting took an oath with God as witness not to submit to this bill if it became law.

Despite vehement opposition by the Indians, the Transvaal legislature passed the Asiatic Registration Bill. Gandhi led a delegation to England with a view to appealing to the British government to veto the bill; but the effort failed and it was announced that the new law would take effect from July 1, 1907. Gandhi evolved a new technique known as Satyagraha (Truth force or insistence on Truth) to launch a struggle against the Act. An organisation called **Passive Resistance Association** was formed which asked the Indian people to boycott the permit offices. Despite all efforts of the Transvaal government to exhort Indians to get themselves registered, only 519 had taken registration forms by November 30, 1907. Gandhi was sentenced to an imprisonment of two months for violating the registration law.

Gandhi agreed to meet General Smuts when a meeting was arranged by his friend Albert Cartright. At the meeting, General Smuts, Secretary for Colonies, assured Gandhi that the registration law would be repealed if Indians registered voluntarily. Gandhi accepted the proposal and convened a meeting of Indians to discuss this informal agreement. Gandhi was criticised by many Indians for accepting this agreement, for they did not expect any justice from General Smuts. Several Indians even accused Gandhi of accepting a monetary gain from General Smuts. The next day, when Gandhi was going to registration office for voluntary registration, a Pathan attacked him for his alleged betrayal.

Smuts backed out from his words as he did not repeal the Asiatic registration law. The government declined to return the Indian's original applications for voluntary registration. Gandhi restarted his Satyagraha movement. He declared that Indians would burn their registration certificates and 'humbly take the consequences'. A large number of Indians consigned their registration certificates to flames. In the meantime Transvaal government enacted the Immigration law which aimed at excluding new immigrants from India. Gandhi announced that Satyagraha movement would also be directed against this law.

A number of prominent Indians living in Natal took part in Gandhi's Satyagraha movement and they were arrested. This time many of the Satyagrahis in the jail were forced to undergo hard labour. Gandhi was also treated badly in the Transvaal prison. But the oppressive policy of the Transvaal state failed to weaken Gandhi's resolve and his movement.



A small band of Satyagrahis continued to court imprisonment. Their families were given financial support by the Satyagraha association which was funded by the Indian National Congress, and many rich people in India like Ratan Tata, Nizam of Hyderabad, etc. Later on, the satyagrahis shifted to a place named as 'Tolstoy Farm'. Here people led a simple community life and were trained to cultivate all those things which were essential for a true satyagrahi.

Check Your Progress 1

1 Write in about ten lines the problems faced by Indians in South Africa.

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2 Which of the following statements are right or wrong? Mark ✓ or × .

- i) Gandhi did not personally experience racial discrimination in South Africa.
- ii) The Indian Natal Organisation was formed to bring about a sense of solidarity among the Indians.
- iii) About 4,000 Europeans supported Gandhi in Natal.
- iv) Asiatic Registration Bill was introduced at the instance of Gandhi.

16.2.3 Campaign - 2

In 1913 another bombshell fell on the Indians when a Supreme Court judgement invalidated at a stroke all marriages which had not been performed according to Christian rites and registered by the Registrar of Marriages. In other words, all Hindu, Muslim and Parsi marriages became illegal and their children illegitimate. Gandhi made a strong representation against these implications of the judgement and asked for amendment of the law. Gandhi's strong and persistent protest in this case did not yield any immediate positive result. He intensified his struggle and Indian women whose honour was at stake, actively participated in the programme of action devised by Gandhi. On November 6, 1913, Gandhi began a march across Transvaal border with a big contingent of Satyagrahis numbering 2037 men, 127 women and 57 children. This resulted in Gandhi's arrest. Despite the oppressive policy of the South African government, the Indians' struggle did not lacken. In India Gopal Krishna Gokhale toured throughout India to mobilise support for Gandhi's movement. Lord Harding, the Viceroy of India, demanded an impartial enquiry into the charges of atrocities levelled against the South African government. For this sympathetic attitude, Lord Harding was criticised in London and Pretoria.

Finally Sumts offered to make some compromise. Negotiations began and a package deal was signed which resolved the major problems of the Indians for which the Satyagraha was launched. The poll tax of £ 3 on freed labourers was abolished, marriages performed according to the Indian rites were declared legal, and domicile certificate bearing the holder's thumb imprint was now required only to enter the Union of South Africa. In this way the Satyagraha struggle which continued for about eight years was finally called off.

Gandhi was a 'lover of the British Empire' and had a deep sense of faith in 'British love of Justice and fair play' till 1906. Gandhi had helped the British government in Boar war (1899) by organising an Indian Ambulance Corps. But soon Gandhi's disenchantment with the British began. He found that the British audience was growing deaf to his pleas. For him Satyagraha became the last alternative to redress the grievances of his compatriots. But this did not mean a total end of his loyalty to the Empire; his notion of loyalty was based on the hope that one day Britain might enact the principles which she subscribed to in theory.

**Radical Trends, Nationalism
and Mahatma Gandhi**

The struggle in South Africa deeply influenced the life of Gandhi and our national movement in many ways. The technique of non-violent Satyagraha (an important aspect of Gandhian thought which we will discuss below) became later on the main weapon with which Gandhi and the Congress carried on the struggle against the British rule. J.M. Brown (in **Gandhi Rise to Power, Indian Politics, 1915-22, Cambridge, 1972**), believes that the Satyagraha was merely a clever strategy designed by Gandhi in South Africa. But an overview of Gandhi's struggle in South Africa shows that Gandhi had developed an abiding faith in this method, which was not applied merely as a convenient tool in the given situation. Another important result of Gandhi's experiences in South Africa was the realisation on his part of the necessity and possibility of Hindu-Muslim unity. Later on it became his deep conviction that the Hindu-Muslim unity was indispensable for launching a powerful struggle against the British rule. Above all, the struggle in South Africa created a new image of Gandhi that he was the leader of Indian people and not of any region or religious community. This worked as a decisive factor in Gandhi's entry into Indian politics.



23. Gandhi in South Africa.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1 Which of the following statements are right or wrong? Mark ✓ or ×.
 - i) The 1913 Supreme Court Judgement legalised marriages.
 - ii) Gopal Krishan Gokhale mobilised support in India for Gandhi's Movement in South Africa.
 - iii) Gandhi had no faith in British Justice.
 - iv) Gandhi offered no Satyagraha in South Africa.
- 2 How did the struggle in South Africa influence our National Movement? Answer in about five lines.

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16.3 GANDHI'S ARRIVAL IN INDIA

Before returning to India Gandhi went to England. In the meantime, the First World War broke out. In this situation Gandhi considered it his duty to help the British government. He decided to organise an Ambulance Corps of the Indians. However, after some time due to differences with the British officials, Gandhi dissociated himself from it. He received a **Kaiser-i-Hind Gold Medal** in the New Year Honours list of 1915.

Gandhi reached India on January 9, 1915 and was given a warm welcome for his partial victory in South Africa. In India, the moderate leader Gokhale was his political **Guru**. He wanted Gandhi to join the Servants of India Society. But Gandhi could not become its member because some members of the society strongly opposed his entry. Gokhale had extracted a promise from Gandhi that he would not express any opinion on political matters for a year. Keeping his vow, Gandhi spent 1915, and most of 1916 touring India and visiting places as far as Sindh and Rangoon, Banaras and Madras. He also visited Rabindranath Tagore's Shantiniketan and the **kumbh** fair at Hardwar. All this helped Gandhi in the better understanding of his countrymen and the conditions in India. In 1915 Gandhi had set up an **Ashram** at Ahmedabad on the bank of the Sabarmati. Here Gandhi lived with his close associates who were being trained in the rigorous of moral and emotional life essential for a satyagrahi.

At this time Gandhi took very little interest in political matters, and mostly at meetings he spoke on his experiences in South Africa and the ideas he had formulated there. When Annie Besant approached Gandhi to join her in founding a Home Rule League he refused on the ground that he did not wish to embarrass the British government during the war. In 1915, he attended the Congress session, but avoided speaking on important issues like self government. Gandhi welcomed the unity move of bringing back Tilak and others who were earlier excluded from the Congress. But at the same time Gandhi made it clear that he did not belong to any group. He attended the reunited session of the Congress but refused to speak on issues which would have meant aligning himself with a particular group. He spoke strongly on the indentured labourers recruitment and a resolution was passed for the abolition of this practice.

16.4 ENTRY INTO INDIAN POLITICS

Gandhi's entry into Indian politics occurred in the 1917-1918 period when he became involved in three local issues concerning with Champaran indigo farmers, the Ahmedabad textile workers and the Kheda peasants. In these disputes Gandhi deployed his technique of Satyagraha and his victories in all these cases ultimately paved the way for his emergence as an all India leader.

16.4.1 Champaran

Champaran in the Tirhut division of North Bihar had been seething with agrarian discontent for some time. European planters had established indigo farms and factories in Champaran at the beginning of the 19th century. By 1916-17, a large part of Champaran was held by three proprietors, the Bettiah, Ram Nagar and Madhuban estates. Bettiah was the largest estate consisting of over one and half thousand villages. Most of these villages were not managed by landlords but were leased to **thikadars** or temporary tenure holders, of whom the most influential group were European indigo planters. The basic issue of the trouble was the system of indirect cultivation whereby peasants leased land from planters, binding themselves to grow indigo each year on specified land in return for an advance at the beginning of the cultivation season.

Indigo was cultivated under the system called **Tinkathia** by which a tenant had to cultivate indigo at three-twentieths of his holdings, which generally constituted the best portion of the land. Although some slight modifications were made in **Tinkathia** system in 1908, it did not

EMERGENCE OF GANDHI

World War I ended at last and the peace, instead of bringing us relief and progress, brought us repressive legislation and Martial Law in the Punjab. A bitter sense of humiliation and a passionate anger filled our people. All the unending talk of constitutional reform and indianization of the services was a mockery and an insult when the manhood of our country was being crushed and the inexorable and continuous process of exploitation was deepening our poverty and sapping our vitality. We had become a derelict nation.

Yet what could we do, how change this vicious process? We seemed to be helpless in the grip of some all-powerful monster; our limbs were paralyzed, our minds deadened. . . .

And then Gandhi came. He was like a powerful current of fresh air that made us stretch ourselves and take deep breaths, like a beam of light that pierced the darkness and removed the scales from our eyes, like a whirlwind that upset many things but most of all the working of people's minds. He did not descend from the top; he seemed to emerge from the millions of India, speaking their language and incessantly drawing attention to them and their appalling condition. Get off the backs of these peasants and workers, he told us, all you who live by their exploitation; get rid of the system that produces this poverty and misery. Political freedom took new shape then and acquired a new content. Much that he said we only partially accepted or sometimes did not accept at all. But all this was secondary. The essence of his teaching was fearlessness and truth and action allied to these, always keeping the welfare of the masses in view. The greatest gift for an individual or a nation, so we had been told in our ancient books, was *abhaya*, fearlessness, not merely bodily courage but the absence of fear from the mind. . . . But the dominant impulse in India under British rule was that of fear, pervasive, oppressing, strangling fear; fear of the army, the police, the widespread secret service; fear of the official class; fear of laws meant to suppress and of prison; fear of the landlord's agent; fear of the money-lender; fear of unemployment and starvation, which were always on the threshold. It was against this all-pervading fear that Gandhi's quiet and determined voice was raised. Be not afraid.

So, suddenly as it were, the black pall of fear was lifted from the people's shoulders, not wholly of course, but to an amazing degree. As fear is close companion to falsehood, so truth follows fearlessness. The Indian people did not become much more truthful than they were, nor did they change their essential nature overnight; nevertheless a sea-change was visible as the need for falsehood and furtive behaviour lessened. It was a psychological change, almost as if some expert in psycho-analytical method had probed deep into the patient's past, found out the origins of his complexes, exposed them to his view, and thus rid him of that burden.

Jawaharlal Nehru

24. Jawahar Lal Nehru's views on Gandhi

bring any material change in the degrading conditions of the tenants. Planters always forced them to sell their crop for a fixed and usually uneconomic price. At this time the demand of Indian indigo in the world market was declining due to the increasing production of synthetic indigo in Germany. Most planters at Champaran realised that indigo cultivation was no longer a paying proposition. The planters tried to save their own position by forcing the tenants to bear the burden of their losses. They offered to release the tenants from growing indigo (which was a basic condition in their agreement with planters) if the latter paid compensation or damages. Apart from this, the planters heavily inflated the rents and imposed many illegal levies on the tenants.

Gandhi took no interest in the case of indigo cultivators of Champaran when this question was discussed at the Lucknow session of the Congress in 1916 on the ground that he knew nothing about the matter. But Raj Kumar Shukul a peasant from Champaran, after strenuous efforts prevailed upon Gandhi to visit Champaran. Gandhi arrived in Bihar and started making investigations in person. When he reached Motihari, the headquarters of the district of Champaran, he was served with an order to quit Champaran as he was regarded a danger to the public peace. Gandhi decided to disobey the order 'out of a sense of public responsibility.' He was immediately arrested and tried in the district court. But the Bihar government ordered the Commissioner and District Magistrate to abandon proceedings and grant to Gandhi the facilities for investigation. Gandhi was warned not to stir up trouble, but he was free to continue his investigations into the cultivators grievances.

The Government appointed Champaran Agrarian Committee with Gandhi as one of its members. The committee unanimously recommended the abolition of **Tinkathia** system and many illegal exactions under which the tenants groaned. The enhanced rents were reduced, and as for the illegal recoveries, the committee recommended 25% refund. The major recommendations of the Committee were included in the Champaran Agrarian Act of 1917.

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In this agitation, the chief supporters of Gandhi came from the educated middle class. For instance, Rajendra Prasad, Gorakh Prasad, Kirpalani and some other educated persons from the cities worked as his close associates. Local **Mahajans** traders and village **Mukhtars** (attorneys) also helped him. But it was the peasantry which gave him the real massive support. Gandhi approached them in a most simple and unassuming manner. In the countryside, he often walked on foot or travelled in a bullock cart. He came where ordinary people lived and talked about their fight in the language they understood.

16.4.2 Kheda

Gandhi's second intervention was for the peasants of Kheda in Gujarat where his method of Satyagraha came under a severe test. Most of Kheda was a fertile tract and the crop of food grains, tobacco and cotton produced here had a convenient and sizeable market in Ahmedabad. There were many rich peasant proprietors called Patidars or from the Kunbi caste. Besides, a large number of small peasants and landless labourers also lived in this region.

In 1917 excessive rain considerably damaged the **Kharif** crop in Kheda. This coincided with an increase in the price of kerosine, iron, cloth and salt because of which the cost of living for the peasantry went up. In view of the poor harvest, the peasants demanded the remission of land revenue. The 'revenue code' provided for a total remission if the crops were less than twenty five per cent of the normal production. Two Bombay barristers, V.J. Patel and G.K. Parakh made the enquiries and reached the conclusion that a major portion of the crop was damaged. But the government did not agree with their findings. After enquiry into the state of the crop in Kheda the Collector decided that there was no justification for the remission of land revenue. The official contention was that the agitation was not a spontaneous expression of the peasant discontent but was started by 'outsiders' or members of the Home Rule League and Gujarat Sabha of which Gandhi was the president at that time. The truth was that initiative for the agitation against payment of revenue came neither from Gandhi nor from the other Ahmedabad politicians; it was raised by local village leaders like Mohanlal Pandya of Kapadvanj **taluka** in Kheda.

Gandhi maintained that the officials had over-valued the crops and the cultivators were entitled to a suspension of revenue as a legal right and not as a concession by grace. After a lot of hesitation he decided to launch a Satyagraha movement on 22 March 1918. He inaugurated the Satyagraha at a meeting in Nadiad, and urged the peasants not to pay their land revenue. He toured villages and gave moral support to the peasants in refusing to pay revenue, and to expel their fear of the government authority.

Gandhi was also assisted in this struggle by Indulal Yajnik, Vallabhbai Patel and Anasuya Sarabhai. The Satyagraha reached at its peak by 21 April when 2,337 peasants pledged not to pay revenue. Most of the Patidars took part in this Satyagraha. Some poorer peasants were coerced by the government into paying the revenue. Moreover, a good **Rabi** crop had weakened the case for remission. Gandhi began to realise that peasantry was on the verge of exhaustion. He decided to call off the agitation when the government issued instructions that land revenue should be recovered from only those who had the capacity to pay and no pressure should be exerted on the genuinely poor peasants. This agitation did not have a uniform effect on the area. Only 70 villages out of 559 in Kheda were actually involved in it and it was called off after a token concession. But this agitation certainly helped Gandhi in broadening his social base in the rural Gujarat.

16.4.3 Ahmedabad

Gandhi organised the third campaign in Ahmedabad where he intervened in a dispute between the mill owners and workers. Ahmedabad was becoming the leading industrial town in Gujarat. But the millowners often faced scarcity of labour and they had to pay high wages to attract enough millhands. In 1917 plague outbreak made labour shortage more acute because it drove many workers away from Ahmedabad to the countryside. To dissuade the workers from leaving the town, the millowners decided to pay 'Plague Bonus' which was sometimes as high as 75% of the normal wages of the workers. After the epidemic was over, the millowners decided to discontinue the Plague Bonus. But the workers opposed the employers move and argued that it was helping them to offset the war time rise in the cost of living. The millowners were prepared to give 20% increase but the workers were demanding a 50% raise in the wages in view of the price hike.

**During
1917-18
there were
22,996
Plague
deaths in
Ahmedabad**

Gandhi was kept informed about the working conditions in Ahmedabad mills by one of the secretaries of the Giga Sakshya Gandhi movement, Ambalal Sarabhai, a millowner, as the latter had financially helped Gandhi's Ashram. Moreover, Ambalal's sister, Anasuya Sarabhai had reverence for Gandhi. Gandhi discussed the workers' problems with Ambalal Sarabhai and decided to intervene in the dispute. Both workers and millowners agreed to refer the issue to a board of arbitration consisting of three representatives of the employers and three of the workers with the British Collector as Chairman. Gandhi was included in the board as representing the workers. But, suddenly the millowners decided to withdraw from the board on the ground that Gandhi had no real authority or mandate from the workers, and that there was no guarantee that workers would accept the arbitration award. They declared the lockout of the Mills from 22 February 1918.

In such a situation, Gandhi decided to study the whole situation in detail. He went through a mass of data concerning the financial state of the mills and compared their wage rates with those of Bombay. Finally he came to the conclusion that the workers should demand 35% instead of 50% increase in their wages. Gandhi began the Satyagraha movement against the millowners. The workers were asked to take a pledge stating that they would not resume work without 35% increase and that they would remain law-abiding during the lockout. Gandhi, assisted by Anasuya Sarabhai, organised daily mass meetings of workers, in which he delivered lectures and issued a series of leaflets on the situation.

The millowners ended the lockout on 12 March and announced that they would take back the workers who were willing to accept 20% increase. On the other hand, Gandhi announced on 15 March that he would undertake a fast until a settlement was reached. Gandhi's object was to rally the workers who were thinking of joining the mills despite their pledge. The fast created tremendous excitement in Ahmedabad and the millowners were compelled to negotiate. A settlement was reached on 18 March. According to this agreement, the workers on their first day would receive 35% raise, in keeping with their pledge. On the second day, they would get 20% increase, offered by the millowners. From the third day until the date of an award by an arbitrator, they would split the difference and receive 27 1/2% increase. Finally the arbitrator's award went in favour of the workers and 35% raise was given to them.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1 Discuss in about ten lines Gandhi's attitude towards the Peasants' Movement in Champaran.

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- 2 Discuss in about five lines the problems faced by workers in Ahmedabad.

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- 3 Which of the following statements are right (✓) or wrong (×).

- i) Gandhi joined the Home Rule League.
- ii) Gandhi did not take sides with any group in the Congress.
- iii) Rajkumar Shukul brought Gandhi to Champaran.
- iv) The peasants of Kheda had no grievances against the Government.

During the years 1917 and 1918 Gandhi took little interest in all India issues. He protested against internment of Annie Besant, and also demanded the release of Ali brothers (Mahomed Ali and Shaikat Ali) who were actively associated with the Khilafat issue. Unlike other political leaders of the time, he did not take active interest in the Reform proposals. But it was the British decision to pass 'Rowlatt Act' which forced him to plunge into national politics in a forceful manner.

16.5.1 Rowlatt Act

In 1917 the Government of India had appointed a committee under the chairmanship of Justice Sydney Rowlatt to investigate "revolutionary crime" in the country and to recommend legislation for its suppression. After a review of the situation, the Rowlatt committee proposed a series of change in the machinery of law to enable the British government to deal effectively with the revolutionary activities. In the light of these recommendations the Government of India drafted two bills and presented them to the Imperial Legislative Council on 6 February 1919. The government maintained that the bills were 'temporary measures' which aimed at preventing 'seditious crimes'.

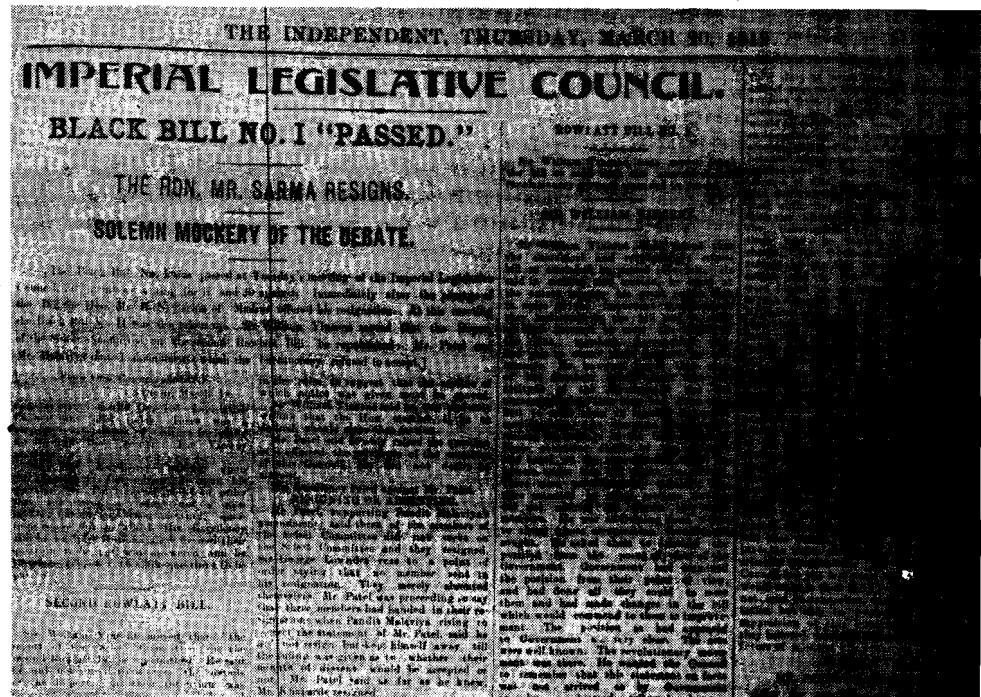
The new bills attempted to make war-time restrictions permanent. They provided trial of offences by a special court consisting of three high court judges. There was no provision of appeal against the decision of this court which could meet **in camera** and take into consideration evidence not admissible under the Indian Evidence Act. The bill also proposed to give authority to the government to **search a place and arrest a person without a warrant. Detention without a trial for maximum period of two years was also provided in the bills.** The bills were regarded by nationalist leaders as an effort to conciliate a section of official and non-official white opinion which had resented Montagu's Reform proposals.

16.5.2 Movement

There was widespread condemnation of the bills in the whole country. Gandhi also launched his campaign against the bills. He said that the proposed powers were out of all proportion to the danger, particularly when the Viceroy possessed emergency powers of legislation by ordinance. He also stated that they were instruments of distrust and repression, nullifying the proposed reforms. Moreover, he opposed not just the content of the bills, but also the manner in which they were foisted in the country without regard to public opinion. He formed a Satyagraha Sabha on 24th February 1919 in Bombay to protest against the Rowlatt Bills. Its members signed a pledge proclaiming their determination "to refuse civilly to obey these laws (i.e., the Rowlatt Bills) and such other laws as a committee hitherto appointed may think fit and we (members) further affirm that in this struggle we will faithfully follow truth and refrain from violence to life, person or property." While launching the Satyagraha agitation against the Rowlatt bills Gandhi said: "It is my firm belief that we shall obtain salvation only through suffering and not by reforms dropping on us from the English — they use brute force, we soul force."

Despite strong opposition in the whole country the government remained firm. The Council passed one of the bills, though all the non-official members voted against it. The Viceroy gave assent to the bill on March 21, 1919. A group of liberals like Sir D.E. Wacha, Surendranath Banerjee, T.B. Sapru and Srinivas Sastri opposed Gandhi's move of starting Satyagraha. Their reason for opposing the Satyagraha was that it would hamper the Reforms. Some of them also felt that the ordinary citizen would find it difficult to civilly disobey the Act. Annie Besant also condemned the Satyagraha on the grounds that there was nothing in the Act to resist civilly, and that to break laws at the dictate of others was exceedingly dangerous. But the younger and radical elements of Annie Besant's Home Rule League supported Gandhi. They formed the main cadre of Satyagraha movement in different parts of the country. In organising this Satyagraha, Gandhi was also assisted by certain Pan-Islamic Leaders, particularly **Abdul Bari** of Firangi Mahal Ulema group at Lucknow, and some radical members of the Muslim League. M.A. Jinnah also opposed the Rowlatt Bill vehemently and warned the Government of the dangerous consequences if the government persisted in clamping on the people of India the "lawless law".

Gandhi inaugurated his Satyagraha by calling upon the countrymen to observe a day of '**hartal**' when business should be suspended and people should fast and pray as a protest against the Rowlatt Act. The date for the '**hartal**' was fixed for 30th March but it was



25. News paper report on Rowlatt Act.

changed to April 6th. The success of **hartal** varied considerably between regions and between towns and the countryside. In Delhi a **hartal** was observed on 30th March and ten people were killed in police firing. Almost in all major towns of the country, the **hartal** was observed on the 6th April and the people responded enthusiastically. Gandhi described the **hartal** a 'magnificent success. Gandhi intensified the agitation on 7th April by advising the satyagrahis to disobey the laws dealing with prohibited literature and the registration of newspapers. These particular laws were selected because disobedience was possible for an individual without leading to violence. Four books including **Hind Swaraj** of Gandhi, which were prohibited by Bombay Government in 1910 were chosen for sale as an action of defiance against the government.

Gandhi left Bombay on the 8th to promote the Satyagraha agitation in Delhi and Punjab. But, as his entry in Punjab was considered dangerous by the government, so Gandhi was removed from the train in which he was travelling at Palwal near Delhi and was taken back to Bombay. The news of Gandhi's arrest precipitated the crisis. The situation became tense in Bombay and violence broke out in Ahmedabad and Virangam. In Ahmedabad the government enforced martial law.

The Punjab region as a whole and Amritsar, in particular, witnessed the worst scenes of violence. In Amritsar, the news of Gandhi's arrest coincided with the arrest of two local leaders Dr. Kitchlew and Dr. Satyapal on 10th April. This led to mob violence and government buildings were set on fire, five Englishmen were murdered, and a woman assaulted. The civil authority lost its control of the city. On 13th April, General Dyer ordered his troops to fire on a peaceful unarmed crowd assembled at Jallianwala Bagh. Most of the people were not aware of the ban on meetings, and they were shot without the slightest warning by General Dyer who later on said that it was no longer a question of merely dispersing the crowd, but one of 'producing a moral effect.' According to official figures, 379 persons were killed but the unofficial accounts gave much higher figures,

almost three times of the official figures. The martial law was immediately enforced in Punjab also on the 13 April (night).

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26. Pictures showing bullet marks on the walls in Jallianwalla Bagh.

16.5.3 Importance

The whole agitation against the Rowlatt Act shows that it was not properly organised. The Satyagraha Sabha concentrated mainly on publishing propaganda literature and collecting signatures on the Satyagraha pledge. The Congress as an organisation was hardly in the picture at all. In most of the areas people participated because of their own social and economic grievances against the British rule.

Gandhi's Rowlatt Act Satyagraha provided a rallying point to the people belonging to different sections and communities. This aspect of the movement is quite evident from the massive participation of the people in Punjab, which Gandhi had not even visited before the movement. Broadly speaking, the movement was intense in cities than in rural areas.

On 18th April Gandhi decided to call off the Satyagraha because of the widespread violence particularly in his home state in Ahmedabad city. He confessed publically that he committed a 'Himalyan blunder' by offering civil disobedience to people who were insufficiently prepared for the discipline of Satyagraha. **The most significant result of this agitation was the emergence of Gandhi as an all India leader.** His position became almost supreme in the Indian national movement and he began to exercise decisive influence on the deliberation of the Congress. At Amritsar session of the Congress in 1919, Gandhi proposed that the Indians should cooperate in the working of Reforms despite some inadequacies. But in September 1920 Gandhi reversed his policy of cooperation and decided to launch the Non-Cooperation Movement.



27. Amritsar Congress

Check Your Progress 4

1 Discuss in about five lines the provisions of Rowlatt Act.

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2 Discuss in about ten lines the response of Indians to Rowlatt Act.

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3 Write five lines on Jallianwala Bagh incident.

16.6 THE GANDHIAN IDEOLOGY

In this part we will study the main aspects of Gandhian ideology. Before we discuss Gandhi's ideology it is necessary to mention that there were a number of influences which worked on Gandhi and helped him in evolving his philosophy. His autobiography makes it clear that the outlook of his parents and the socio-religious milieu of his native place left a profound influence on him. In particular, the values of **Vaishnavism** and the tradition of **Jainism** shaped his early thoughts. Moreover, some Hindu texts like the **Bhagavata Gita** also influenced him. The Gospels (especially the Sermon on the Mount) and the writings of Tolstoy, Thoreau and Ruskin also greatly influenced his thinking. Gandhi was primarily a man of action and his own experiences in life helped him more than his readings in evolving and shaping his ideology.

16.6.1 Satyagraha

The chief aspect of Gandhi's ideology was Satyagraha i.e. 'true force'. As mentioned earlier, it was evolved by Gandhi in South Africa but after it had been fully developed it became a dominant element in India's struggle for freedom from 1919 onwards. For Gandhi, the Satyagraha was to be used so that by self suffering and not by violence the enemy could be converted to one's own view. P. Sitaramayya aptly explains Satyagraha as follows:

It involves self-chosen suffering and humiliation for the resisters. If it is effective, it is so by working on the conscience of those against whom it is being used, sapping their confidence in the exclusive rightness of their cause making their physical strength important, and weakening their resolution by insinuating a sense of guilt for the suffering they have part in causing.

Gandhi made a distinction between the Satyagraha and passive resistance, when he wrote:

The latter (passive resistance) has been conceived as a weapon of the weak and does not exclude the use of physical force or violence for the purpose of gaining one's end; whereas the former (Satyagraha) has been conceived as a weapon of the strongest, and excludes the use of violence in any shape.

In fact, for Gandhi, Satyagraha was not merely a political tactic but part of a total philosophy of life and ideology of action. Gandhi believed that the search for truth was the goal of human life. Since no one could know the ultimate Truth one should never attack another's integrity or prevent another's search for truth.

16.6.2 Non-Violence

Non-Violence formed the basis of **Satyagraha**. Gandhi wrote:

When a person claims to be non-violent, he is expected not to be angry with one who has injured him. He will not wish him harm; he will wish him well; he will not swear at him; he will not cause him any physical hurt. He will put up with all the injury to which he is subjected by the wrong doer. Thus non-violence is complete innocence. Complete Non-Violence is complete absence of ill will against all that lives.

Gandhi emphasised that non-violent Satyagraha could be practised by common people for achieving political ends. But some time Gandhi took a position which fell short of complete non-violence. His repeated insistence that even violence was preferable to a cowardly surrender to injustice sometimes created a delicate problem of interpretation.

In 1918 Gandhi campaigned for military recruitment in the hope of winning concessions from the British government after the war which can not be easily recruited with the doctrine of non-violence.

In practice, Satyagraha could assume various forms—fasting, non-violent picketing, different types of non-cooperation and ultimately in politics, civil disobedience in willing anticipation of the legal penalty. Gandhi firmly believed that all these forms of Satyagraha were pure means to achieve pure ends. Gandhi's critics sometime take the view that through the technique of Satyagraha, Gandhi succeeded in controlling the mass movements from above. The dominant section in the peasantry and the business groups also found the Gandhian non-violent model convenient because they feared to lose if political struggle turned into uninhibited and violent social revolution. On the whole, the use of Satyagraha by Gandhi and the Congress in national movement brought different sections and classes of society together against the British rule.

16.6.3 Religion

Another important aspect of Gandhi's ideology was his attitude towards religion. Religion for Gandhi was not a doctrinal formulation of any religious system but a basic truth underlying all formal religions. Gandhi described religion as the struggle for Truth. His conviction was that religion could not be relegated to the realm of private opinion but must influence and permeate all activities of men. He was convinced that religion provided the fundamental basis for political action in India. This makes easy for us to explain that Gandhi took the Khilafat issue of the Muslims with a view to bringing them in the movement against the British government. Gandhi also used the religious idiom through concepts like 'Ram Raj' to mobilise people in the national movement. However, it cannot be denied that this use of religious idiom prevented Gandhi and the national movement under his leadership from giving effective challenge to a major category of division among the Indian people which can cause a fissure in our national unity in periods of crisis and strain, and tended to push into the background their internal differences and conflicts.

16.6.4 Hind Swaraj

The other important feature of Gandhian thought was the body of ideas which he illustrated in his book '**Hind Swaraj**' (1909). In this work, Gandhi pointed out that the real enemy was not the British political domination but the modern western civilization which was luring India into its stranglehold. He believed that the Indians educated in western style, particularly lawyers, doctors, teachers and industrialists, were undermining Indian's ancient heritage by insidiously spreading modern ways. He criticised railways as they had spread plague and produced famines by encouraging the export of food grains. Here he saw **Swaraj** or self rule as a state of life which could only exist where Indians followed their traditional civilization uncorrupted by modern civilization. Gandhi wrote:

Indian's salvation consists in unlearning what she has learnt during the past 50 years or so. The Railways, telegraphs, hospitals, lawyers, doctors and such like have to go and the so-called upper classes have to learn to live consciously and religiously and deliberately the simple life of peasant.

These ideas certainly look utopian and obscurantist in the context of the early twentieth century. But it seems that his ideas reflected adverse effects of 'modernisation' under the colonial rule on the artisans and poor peasantry in the countryside.

Later on, Gandhi tried to give concrete shape to his social and economic ideas by taking up the programme of Khadi, village reconstruction and Harijan welfare (which included the removal of untouchability). It is true that these efforts of Gandhi could not completely solve the problem of the rural people, but it cannot be denied that this programme of Gandhi succeeded in improving their conditions to a certain extent and making the whole country conscious of the new need for its social and economic reconstruction.

16.6.5 Swadeshi

Gandhi advocated swadeshi which meant the use of things belonging to one's own country, particularly stressing the replacement of foreign machine made goods with Indian hand made cloth. This was his solution to the poverty of peasants who could spin at home to supplement their income and his cure for the drain of money to England in payment for imported cloth. It is interesting to find that despite his pronounced opposition to the influences of Western Industrial civilization Gandhi did not take a hostile view towards emerging modern industries in India. As noticed earlier, Gandhi had close relations with industrialists like Ambalal Sarabhai. Another noted industrialist G.D. Birla was his close associate after 1922. Gandhi believed in the interdependence of capital and labour and advocated the concept of capitalists being 'trustees' for the workers. In fact, Gandhi never encouraged politicization of the workers on class lines and openly abhorred militant economic struggles. As a matter of fact, all the major elements of Gandhi's ideology are based on a distrust of conflict in the notion of class interests. Gandhi always emphasised the broad unity that can and must be achieved on the basis of a larger objective among people divided on account of class or any other category.

Check Your Progress 5

- 1 What do you understand by the concept of Satyagraha as propagated by Gandhi?
Answer in about ten lines.

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- 2 Discuss in about five lines the message which Gandhi conveyed through his book **Hind Swaraj**.

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16.7 LET US SUM UP

We have seen in this unit how Gandhi launched a struggle against the racist regime in South Africa. With his entry into Indian politics, there started a new era of mass mobilisation. It was by taking up regional issues that he emerged as a national leader. It is necessary to mention that there have always been strong differences of opinion on the relevance of Gandhi's ideology. But the fact remains that his ideas deeply influenced the course of our struggle against the British rule and determined its major thrust and direction.

15.7 KEY WORDS

Anarchist Movement: A movement with emphasis on individual violence with the aim of removing a political authority. It does not believe in organised politics.

Chauvinist Nationalism: A fierce belief which considers one's own nation above all other nations and international movements.

Fabianism: An understanding according to which that socialism can be brought in only by peaceful means.

Nationalist Critique: The critical analysis of a given situation from the point of view which has only the interest of nation in mind.

15.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1 See Sub-sec. 15.2.1
- 2 See Sub-sec. 15.2.2
- 3 See Sub-sec. 15.2.2

Check Your Progress 2

- 1 See Sub-sec. 15.3.1
- 2 See Sub-sec. 15.3.4
- 3 See Sub-sec. 15.3.3
- 4 See Sub-sec. 15.3.4

Check Your Progress 3

- 1 See Section 15.4
- 2 See Sub-sec. 15.4.1
- 3 See Sub-sec. 15.4.3
- 4 See Sub-sec. 15.4.3

Check Your Progress 4

- 1 See Sub-sec. 15.5.1
- 2 See Sub-secs. 15.5.3 and 15.5.4
- 3 See Sub-secs. 15.5.5 and 15.5.6

SOME USEFUL BOOKS

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