

Forms Of Mass Movement During Non-Cooperation Movement

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Abstract:

The Non-Cooperation Movement was the first mass movement of pan-India and also Gandhi's first step into the Indian freedom struggle. With this movement, he demonstrated the strength of the masses when they are united, guided, and follow a policy of non-violence. A new leaf turned with this movement, as the struggle for India's freedom from British rule was no longer confined to a smaller section; rather, it witnessed broad popular participation.

Keywords: *Non-cooperation, Gandhi, Mass Movement, Khilafat, Swaraj*

Date of Submission: 16-12-2025

Date of Acceptance: 26-12-2025

The Gandhian phase of the national movement saw mass mobilization on a wide scale. It was under the leadership of Gandhi that Indian National Movement became a mass movement. The main contribution of Gandhi to India and the Indian masses had been through the powerful movements which he launched through the Indian National Congress. Before Gandhi's arrival, the agitations involved the few elites fighting for their motherland. But it was Gandhi who brought forth the idea that a freedom struggle on a larger scale is possible only through involvement of the larger stakeholders like peasants, workers and other general public. The true scope of mass movement was felt in the Non-Cooperation Movement of 1920 - 1922 when every section of the Indian society equally came forward. The movement gave all sections of Indian society an opportunity to fight for their grievances.

The two most severe problem which arose after the First World War and were responsible for the existence of the Non-Cooperation were - the Khilafat issue and, the Punjab wrongs. The Caliph of Turkey was regarded as the spiritual head of Muslims. However, after the defeat of Turkey in the First World War, the Ottoman Empire was to be dissolved. This naturally upset the Muslims. The Khilafat leaders were told quite clearly that they should not expect anything more and the Treaty of Sevres signed in Turkey in May 1920 which made it amply clear that the dismemberment of the Turkish Empire was complete.

Meanwhile the Congress was becoming skeptical of any possibility of political advance through constitutional means. It did not agree with the Hunter Committee Report. Gandhi issued a 'manifesto' in which he categorically stated that there was no way but to resist their injustice through non-violent non-cooperation. During this time the issue of Khilafat also became a major catalyst for mass upsurge. Congress leaders belonging to the Hindu community, including Gandhi, and the Muslim leaders, including the Ali Brothers, jointly condemned the breach of trust committed by the British rulers. All of them appealed to the people that Hindu-Muslim differences should not hinder the united fight against the rulers to win Home Rule for India and to restore the Caliph's powers.

The movement was launched formally on 1 August 1920, after the expiry of the notice that Gandhiji had given to the Viceroy in his letter of 22 June, in which he had asserted the right recognized "from time immemorial of the subject to refuse to assist a ruler who misrules". The Congress met in September at Calcutta and accepted non-cooperation as its own. But it was opposed by C.R. Das because of the boycotts of Legislative Councils, as elections were to be held very soon. By December, when the Congress met for its annual session at Nagpur, the opposition had melted away. Thus, the advocates of non-cooperation who were a minority just a year earlier became a majority at the Nagpur session.

The programme of non-cooperation included:

- Surrender of titles and honours
- Boycott of government affiliated schools and colleges, law courts, foreign cloth
- Resignation from government services and mass civil disobedience including non-payment of taxes
- Establishment of National Schools and Colleges
- Establishment of Panchayats for settling disputes

- Hand-spinning and weaving was to be encouraged
- Maintenance of Hindu-Muslim unity
- Give up untouchability and,
- Observe non-violence

The Congress committed itself to a programme of extra-Constitutional mass action in the Nagpur session. This was a programme as distinct from the moderate-radical politics of the old generation, as well as from the bomb politics in which the entire Indian people could easily participate. There could not be a single individual in India, who could not implement least one item in this programme. Even if the entire programme were implemented, no section of the Indian vested interests would have lost anything. On the contrary, the boycott of foreign goods, the last item of the program, was in the interest of the developing Indian Capitalists. It was thus a program which attracted the Indian people as a whole to active politics.

Whenever it has become necessary to fight the British rule, rallying the masses on a big scale as in the 1930-1932 and in 1942 periods, the entire bourgeois political leadership had accepted Gandhi as their unquestioned leader, as they did in 1920 - 1921. And whenever it had become impossible to continue such a struggle, they had allowed him to withdraw it and switch over to forms other than that of mass struggle. That is, the bourgeois political leaders accepted Gandhi as their "commander-in-chief" during periods of struggle, while at other times they ignored him as an "impractical idealist".

Gandhi elevated the national movement by drawing the entire Indian people into action by linking up one's daily tasks and duties to the demand of national independence. This is the most striking feature of this period which helped in the growth of the movement. Thus, the social base of the movement was expanded as every section of society joined the movement.

The policies which were to be followed by the Congress organization and their workers were-

- Bringing Tilak Swaraj Fund to 1,00,00,000 of rupees before 30 June.
- Registering 1,00,00,000 of Congress workers before 30 June.
- Introducing 20 lakh of spinning wheels before 30 June.

Collection of Tilak Swaraj Fund was essential to put into effect the Congress policies. The requirement of fund was important for propagation of work, promotion of Swadeshi, establishment of national schools and colleges and for those lawyers who resigned from their jobs.

The country-wide tour Gandhi undertook to propagate his programme inspired millions. The collections to Tilak Swaraj Fund surpassed all expectations. Thousands of students and hundreds of lawyers implemented the boycott programme. Boycotting foreign textiles was an important item in the boycott programme. Unlike the boycott of educational institutions or courts, the entire people could take part in it. People made bonfires of foreign cloth. This further gave impetus to spinning of Charkha and Khadi. The value of imports of foreign cloth fell from rupees 102 crore in 1920-1921 to rupees 57 crore in 1921-1922.

When the Prince of Wales visited India on 17 November 1921, *hartal* was observed all over the country. Unfortunately, clashes occurred between those who attended the welcome function and the crowd returning from Gandhiji's meeting. The riot led to police firing and the three-day turmoil resulted in fifty-nine dead.

The civil disobedience movement scheduled to be launched in the Bardoli *taluka* of Gujarat on 23rd November was put off. This constitutes one of the peculiarities of Gandhi's non-cooperation - civil disobedience programmes. Whenever small incidents take place somewhere, as people, responding to his call, start organized struggles against imperialism and its henchman, Gandhi would immediately put off the struggle in the name of such incidents. Whenever he stopped struggles in this manner, he always left opportunities to launch it again when favorable conditions arose. The calling off of the Non-cooperation Movement on 12 February 1922 was one such case.

Gandhi's slogan of "Swaraj in one year" was part of his tactic. Gandhi, the pragmatist, understood that political conditions never remained the same over time. He knew that political conditions would change within a year, which would necessitate changes in the programmes and what was essential was to make people realize about things to be done in the next one year. It was on this perspective that Gandhi formulated the programme, incorporating certain practical items like raising the Tilak Swaraj Fund.

Gandhi's movement revealed to Indians that the salvation of their country lay in their own hands. They need not beg for favours, nor need they resort to violence in their fight for national freedom. What was necessary was to bid goodbye both to terrorism and to active cooperation.

Last of all, it may be concluded that all through the struggle for independence from the yoke of the colonial rule, Mahatma Gandhi played a crucial role throughout at various places and gave Indians a real meaning to their life. This was all due to the mobilization of the masses throughout length and breadth of country respective of their caste, creed, sex or religion.

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