

Non-cooperation movement

The non-cooperation movement was a political campaign launched in 1920, by Mahatma Gandhi to have Indians revoke their cooperation from the British government, with the aim of inducing the British to grant self-governance.

Non-cooperation movement

- This came as result of the Indian National Congress (INC) withdrawing its support for British reforms following the *Rowlatt Act* of 18 March 1919— which suspended the rights of political prisoners in sedition trials, and was seen as a "*political awakening*" by Indians and as a "threat" by the British and the Jallianwala Bagh massacre of 13 April 1919.
- The movement was one of Gandhi's first organized acts of large-scale *satyagraha* (civil disobedience). Gandhi's planning of the non-cooperation movement included persuading all Indians to withdraw their labour from any activity that "sustained the British government and also economy in India," including British industries and educational institutions. Through non-violent means, or *Ahinsa*, protesters would refuse to buy British goods, adopt the use of local handicrafts, and picket liquor shops.

In addition to promoting "self-reliance" by spinning khadi, buying Indian-made goods only, and boycotting British goods, Gandhi's non-cooperation movement called for the restoration of the Khilafat (Khilafat movement) in Turkey and the end to untouchability. This resulted in publicly-held meetings and strikes (*hartals*), which led to the first arrests of both Nehru and his father, Motilal Nehru, on 6 December 1921.

The non-cooperation movement was among the broader movement for Indian independence from British rule and ended, as Nehru described in his autobiography, "suddenly" on 4 February 1922 after the Chauri Chaura incident. Subsequent independence movements were the Civil Disobedience Movement and the Quit India Movement.

Though intended to be non-violent, the movement was eventually called off by Gandhi in February 1922 following the Chauri Chaura incident, in which numerous policemen were murdered by a mob at Chauri Chaura, United Provinces. Nonetheless, the movement marked the transition of Indian nationalism from a middle-class basis to the masses.

**Gandhi during the
Salt March, March
1930.**



a notable example of satyagraha.



Factors leading to the non-cooperation movement

- The non-cooperation movement was a reaction towards the oppressive policies of the British Indian government such as the *Rowlatt Act* of 18 March 1919, as well as towards the Jallianwala massacre of 13 April 1919.
- The *Rowlatt Act* of 1919, which suspended the rights of political prisoners in seditious trials, was seen as a "political awakening" by Indians and as a "threat" by the British. Although it was never invoked and declared void just a few years later, the Act motivated Gandhi to conceive the idea of *satyagraha* (truth), which he saw as synonymous with independence.

➤ Motivation for Gandhi's movement was further solidified following the events of 13 April 1919, when a large crowd had gathered at Jallianwala Bagh near the Golden Temple in Amritsar to protest against the arrest of Saifuddin Kitchlew and Dr. Satyapal, while others had come to attend the annual Baisakhi festival. The civilians were fired upon by soldiers under the command of Brigadier-General Reginald Dyer, resulting in killing and injuring thousands of protesters. The outcry generated by the massacre led to thousands of unrests and more deaths by the hands of the police. The massacre became the most infamous event of British rule in India.

➤ Gandhi, who was a preacher of nonviolence, was horrified. He lost all faith in the goodness of the British government and declared that it would be a "sin" to cooperate with the "satanic" government. Likewise, the idea of *satyagraha* was subsequently authorised by Jawaharlal Nehru, for who the massacre also endorsed "the conviction that nothing short of independence was acceptable."

➤ Gandhi derived his ideologies and inspiration from ongoing non-cooperation movements, particularly that by Satguru Ram Singh, who is credited as being the first Indian to use non-cooperation and boycott of British merchandise and services as a political weapon.

➤ In response to the Jallianwala Bagh massacre and other violence in Punjab, the movement sought to secure *Swaraj*, independence for India. Gandhi promised *Swaraj* within one year if his non-cooperation programme was fully implemented. The other reason to start the non-cooperation movement was that Gandhi lost faith in constitutional methods and turned from cooperator of British rule to non-cooperator campaigning for Indian independence from colonialism.

➤ Other causes include economic hardships to the common Indian citizen, which the nationalists attributed to the economic exploitation of India under colonial rule, the hardships faced Indian artisans due to British factory-made goods replacing handmade goods, and conscription being employed by the British Indian Army to gather enough recruits during the First World War.

Movement

The non-cooperation movement

- The non-cooperation movement aimed to challenge the colonial economic and power structure, and British authorities would be forced to take notice of the demands of the independence movement.
- Gandhi's call was for a nationwide protest against the *Rowlatt Act*. In promoting "self-reliance," his planning of the non-cooperation movement included persuading all Indians to withdraw their labour from any activity that "sustained the British government and also economy in India," including British industries and educational institutions.

•Through non-violent means, or *Ahinsa*, protesters would refuse to buy British goods, adopt the use of local handicrafts (by spinning khadi, etc.), and picket liquor shops. Moreover:

- ❖all offices and factories would be closed;
- ❖Indians would be encouraged to withdraw from Raj-sponsored schools, police services, the military, and the civil service, and lawyers were asked to leave the Raj's courts;
- ❖public transportation and English-manufactured goods, especially clothing, was boycotted; and
- ❖Indians returned honours and titles given by the government and resigned from various posts like teachers, lawyers, civil and military services.

Gandhi's non-cooperation movement also called for the end to untouchability.

Untouchability is the practice of ostracising a group of people regarded as 'untouchables', as ascribed in the Vedic Hindu literature to persons of "high caste" or to persons excluded from the caste system resulting in the segregation and persecutions from the people regarded as "higher" caste.



➤ Publicly-held meetings and strikes (*hartals*) during the movement ultimately led to the first arrests of both Jawaharlal Nehru and his father, Motilal Nehru, on 6 December 1921. The calls of early political leaders like Bal Gangadhar Tilak (Congress Extremists) were called major public meetings. They resulted in disorder or obstruction of government services. The British took them very seriously and imprisoned him in Mandalay in Burma and V. O. Chidambaram Pillai received 40 years of imprisonment.

➤ Veterans such as Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Bipin Chandra Pal, Mohammad Ali Jinnah, and Annie Besant opposed the idea outright. The All India Muslim League also criticized the idea. However, the younger generation of Indian nationalists was thrilled and backed Gandhi, whose plans were adopted by the Congress Party in September 1920 and launched that December.

➤ Gandhi strengthened the movement by supporting the contemporaneous Khilafat Movement, the Muslim campaign to restore the status of the Khalifa and protest the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire after World War I. As such, Gandhi received extensive support from Indian-Muslim leaders like Maulana Azad, Mukhtar Ahmed Ansari, Hakim Ajmal Khan, Maghfoor Ahmad Ajazi, Abbas Tyabji, Maulana Muhammad Ali Jauhar and Maulana Shaukat Ali.

Impact and suspension

➤ The impact of the revolt was a total shock to British authorities and a massive support to millions of Indian nationalists. Unity in the country was strengthened and many Indian schools and colleges were made. Indian goods were encouraged. On 5 February 1922 a massacre took place at Chauri Chaura, a small town in the district of Gorakhpur, Uttar Pradesh. A police officer had attacked some volunteers picketing a liquor shop. A whole crowd of peasants that had gathered there went to the police *chowki* (station). The mob set fire to the police *chowki* with some 22 policemen inside it.

➤ Mahatma Gandhi felt that the revolt was veering off-course, and was disappointed with the rise of violent nature of the movement. He did not want the movement to degenerate into a contest of violence, with police and angry mobs attacking each other back and forth, victimizing civilians in between. Gandhi appealed to the Indian public for all resistance to end, went on a fast and on 12 February 1922 called off the non-cooperation movement. Gandhi was also a firm believer of STS (struggle truce struggle). He believed that after a duration of struggle, there should be a resting phase by which they could recover the power and rise again more strong and powerful. Though this point is not mentioned but every movement lead by Gandhi was withdrawn by him after a year or two.

END OF NON-COOPERATION

❖ The Non-cooperation movement was withdrawn after the Chauri Chaura incident. Although he had stopped the national revolt single-handedly, on 12 Feb 1922, Mahatma Gandhi was arrested. On 18 March 1922, he was imprisoned for six years for publishing seditious materials. This led to the suppression of the movement and was followed by the arrest of other leaders.

❖ Although most Congress leaders remained firmly behind Gandhi, the determined leaders broke away, including the Ali brothers (Muhammad Ali Jinnah and Shaukat Ali). Motilal Nehru and Chittaranjan Das formed the Swaraj Party, rejecting Gandhi's leadership. Many nationalists had felt that the non-cooperation movement should not have been stopped due to isolated incidents of violence, and most nationalists while retaining confidence in Gandhi, were discouraged.