

## Gandhi's Satyagraha with Special Reference to Punjab

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This paper is an attempt to reveal Gandhi's contribution to the Punjab. It focuses on what was the impact of Gandhi's idea of Satyagraha in Punjab? How far Gandhi succeeded to influence the people and leadership of Punjab? How successful was Satyagraha movement in Punjab? To what extent the people of Punjab embraced the ideas of Gandhi? What was the affect of partition of India in general and partition of Punjab in particular on the mind of Gandhi? To furnish the information regarding above mentioned queries secondary sources have been used. Historical- analytical method has been adopted.

Circumstances had been actively working for the great Indian political upheaval of April 1919. The outbreak of the war in 1914 had given rise to the spirit of nationalism all over the world, and India was no exception.

Most of the Indians believed that by rendering help to the British in their difficult hour, they were strengthening their claim for self government since it would put the latter in deep obligation to accede to the just demand of the former.

The Congress got divided between moderates and extremists. The ideologies of both the groups influenced Gandhi in shaping of his political outlook and programme.

The political atmosphere of the country also favoured well for the unity between the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League. The arrest and detention of several Muslim leaders for their pro-Turkish activities acted as an incentive to the Muslim League to come at an understanding with the Congress.

In 1916-17, new forces appeared on the political horizon of India, in the form of Home Rule movements started by Lokmanya Tilak and Mrs. Annie Besant. The Home rule idea spread like wild fire and Home Rule Leagues were established all over the country. The Government began to have a feeling of nervousness. The Government of Madras interned Mrs. Besant, G.S. Arundale and D.P. Wadia in June 1917. Similarly restrictions were imposed on Tilak. Mr. Jinnah joined the Home Rule League immediately after the internment of Mrs. Annie Besant.

When the Home Rule agitation was at full swing Gandhi was experimenting with his new new weapon of Non-violent resistance in various parts of the country. The movement seemed to bear fruit when Government was forced to make the famous August Declaration of 1917 making promises for political concessions etc.

In the April 1918 War Conference convened by the Viceroy, Besant and Tilak were excluded. Though Gandhi did not like it but however, supported the resolution for the recruitment to the army. Then Montague-Chelmsford Reforms were passed. These reforms, as is well known, failed to meet the expectations of a large section of the Indian nationalist opinion. Gandhi, though not entirely satisfied with them, was not in favour of their rejection, for he had full faith in the

honest intentions and efforts of the Secretary of the State and the viceroy.

The post war conditions in India strengthened the anti-British and nationalist forces. After the war, the circumstances changed, the bureaucrats were now not prepared to continue the policy of appeasement.

Gandhi's understanding of the attitude to the British rule in India got a rude jolt by the events in Punjab in April 1919 and entirely changed not only his understanding of the character of the British rule, but also his political personality.

By passing the Black Act by the might of sheer official majority despite of the united opposition, the bureaucracy had thrown out a gauntlet to the people. The Indians clearly saw that they would have to wage a struggle against the British might and insolence. But the problem before them was to decide as to what shape and direction they should give to their struggle. The answer to the question was by no means easy.

The Punjab has been the gateway as well as the sword arm of India since ancient times, Under the British as an administrative unit, like other administrative units in the country, the Punjab underwent territorial changes from time to time.

The repressive policy of the Government that followed the agitation in the Punjab gave rise to the revolutionary activities in the Province. A number of secret organizations sprang up in the province. A number of persons were prosecuted and sentenced to punishments for their revolutionary activities. All this led to multiplication of terrorist happenings. The influence of Ghadr Party which had its origin in the United States as a result of the efforts of Lala Hardayal was an important factor in the spurting of such activities. In 1913 he set up an organization in San Francisco called The Hindustan Workers of the Pacific coast. This organization started a weekly news paper 'Ghadr' after which the organization came to be known as the Ghadr Party.

The failures of the method of the Ghadrites and the revolutionaries in the Punjab prepared ground for the favourable reception of Gandhi's non-violent technique for attaining Swaraj.

Fortunately for the Indian people. Gandhi appeared on the Indian political scene at this stage. People found in him a leader of high ideas and complete selfishness. He had very closely watched the Indian political situation since the introduction of the Rowlatt Bills and how now come to believe that this method of non-violent civil resistance answered the needs of the time. He decided to lead the mass movement which he named Satyagraha to persuade government to withdraw Rowlatt Bills.

During the war the Punjab made tremendous efforts to save the Empire. On the termination of war, Government's apathy towards the well-being and aspirations of the people generated greater resentment in the Punjab since it had

suffered more during the years of wars. O' Dwyer's administration had abused the powers.

Gandhi made a whirlwind tour of many parts of the country. He exhorted the people in every sentence that non-violence was the heart and soul of the movement. Government was in no mood to listen or negotiate with him. Hence Gandhi was forced to inaugurate formally the Satyagraha movement.

The situation at about the end of March 1919 was one of great stress and strain for the Britishers in India. There was general war weariness, which was more marked in the northern regions of India, and especially in the Punjab, than elsewhere. The Satyagraha movement was an All-India movement in every sense of the word, but it found its vortex in the soil of Punjab because it was the most affected province in the country due to many causes.

March 30 was proclaimed as the day of general closing of shops, suspension of business activity, fasting, prayers and meetings all over the country. For some reasons the day was subsequently advanced to April 6. The Punjab found itself in full agreement with Gandhi in his opposition to the Bills.

This attitude of Punjabis gave a tremendous shock to O' Dwyer, the Lt. Governor of the province who had reassured himself and his superiors that his province would always remain thoroughly loyal to British government. He felt as if Punjabis had betrayed and disgraced him. He was, therefore, swayed by only one passion, namely to take revenge upon Punjabis. There was great political awakening in the city of Amritsar and it was acquiring prominence throughout India as a centre of political activities. It was therefore, only natural for O' Dwyer to select this city for wrath and nefarious plan. Dr. Kitchlu, who had obtained education in Germany and had been practicing as a barrister in the city. He was a great friend, a political associate of a Hindu practitioner Dr. Satyapal. They had attended the Delhi session of Congress held in December 1918 and had requested to hold its next session at Amritsar. Their invitation was gladly accepted by the All India Congress Committee.

They actively participated in all the social and political activities of the city in the first month of 1919. Under the impact of these two dynamic leaders the city was seething with anti-British feelings on the eve of Gandhi's call for Satyagraha.

The information about the postponement of Hartal, however, reached Punjab, too late. On 29<sup>th</sup> March, at 4:30 pm, a crowded meeting of the citizens of Amritsar was held on Jallianwala Bagh to organize Hartal on the following day. Michael O' Dwyer learnt of what had happened in the meeting the same evening and at once took a decision as how to checkmate the brewing danger.

Similar meetings were held in Multan, Gujranwala, Shikhpura, Batala Pathankot, Ferozpur, Abohar, Hafizabad, Sialkot, Rawalpindi, Jullundur, Hoshiarpur, Gurdaspur, Ludhiana, Ropar, Ambala, Faridabad, Palwal, Bhivani, Bahadurgarh, Panipat and at many other smaller towns.

The Delhi Congress Committee had also not received instructions to postpone hartal to 6<sup>th</sup> April. Consequently, Delhi also observed a big hartal on 30<sup>th</sup> March. But it was not as peaceful as that of Punjab. The news about these Delhi incidents spread like wildfire in the Punjab and determined the course of events between 2<sup>nd</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> of April. Though people

of Punjab were angry but they maintained order and peace. Fearing another hartal on 6<sup>th</sup> April, O'Dwyer made full arrangements with the police and military authorities on the 4<sup>th</sup> to cope with it. The success of Gandhi's programme in the Punjab made the Punjab Government nervous. Gandhi, who had been invited by Dr. Satyapal to explain to the people the doctrine of Satyagraha, was arrested at Palwal and was sent back to Bombay Presidency where he was interned. News of arrest of Gandhi at Palwal set the whole province ablaze. The authorities dealt with them strongly and did numerous activities as it could. All these hardships failed to break the will of the young men in the Punjab. The nominees of British Government made efforts to prevent hartal and held meeting with the citizens and members of Congress Reception Committee and published there would be no hartal on 6<sup>th</sup> April. One remarkable achievement of this programme in Punjab was the fraternization between the Hindus and the Muslims. Nothing could be more pleasing to Gandhi than this phenomenon in Indian political life, for he viewed Hindu-Muslim unity as manifestation of the spirit of Ahimsa operating in the Indian society. Promotion of Hindu Muslim Unity was, therefore, part of his programme of Satyagraha. Hindu and Muslim of Amritsar had given proof of this unity on March 30, April 6, and were eager to demonstrate their solidarity on every occasion. It was a national solidarity day on Ram Naumi which fell on April 9 that year. This appeared to him as a serious challenge to British authority. He made up his mind to punish the people of Amritsar for all such acts of disloyalty. This was the state of mind of General O' Dwyer when the state of emergency was proclaimed and all meetings were declared illegal. But in the meantime, the leaders of the city had announced a meeting, the leaders of the city had announced a meeting to be held in the Jallianwala Bagh on the Baisakhi day.

General Dwyer sent orders to Deputy Commissioner, Amritsar, to arrest Dr. Kitchlew and Dr. Satyapal, and send them under escort to Dharamshala. He took step in the hope that it would provoke the people of Amritsar to do something violent. He ordered General Beynon, GOC, Lahore, to dispatch a large number of troops to Amritsar before the 13<sup>th</sup> of April, on which date he intended to do something horrible in the city. On April 10 the two doctors were deported to Dharamshala. This report made the people gather and move towards D.C.'s residence. The situation became tense. On April 12, at 4:00 pm meeting was held to discuss about the proceedings of April 13. On the Baisakhi day i.e April 13 people gathered in Jallianwala Bagh. A proclamation was being continuously made that every assembly of the people could be dispersed by force of arms. When the people assembled in Bagh, General Dwyer reached there and without warning the people he ordered the troops to open fire. The firing continued for ten to fifteen minutes, at about 5:30 he left the Bagh, along with his force, leaving behind a terrific scene.

What was Gandhi doing when the Punjab was undergoing such hardships? He could hardly do anything else, though his silence appeared irritating to some. The government of Punjab had taken all steps to keep the world dark about the happenings in the province. Gandhi took several steps to mitigate the sufferings of the people of the Punjab. He suspended Civil Disobedience in order to create favorable climate for the Government to withdraw harsh

measures against the people of the province, This suspension of Satyagraha was a bitter pill for him but it had to be swallowed by him for the sake of Punjab, But the withdrawal of Satyagraha made many leaders of the Punjab to get annoyed with Gandhi, Gandhi was deeply impressed by the resolute determination of the people of Punjab to stand against the tyranny of the rulers, So Gandhi thought that Punjab might show the way to India, for the energy generated by suppression here, could illuminate the whole of India if it was used properly. He thought that Punjab was awakened.

Non- Cooperation movement of Mahatma Gandhi was one of his prime fights against the British, The massacre at Jallianwala Bagh of Punjab was what instigated him to focus himself entirely on obtaining complete autonomy for the country as well as the control of all Indian government institutions, Soon this movement turned into Swaraj complete individual, spiritual and political independence, spiritual political independence.

The atrocities in the Punjab weakened his faith in the British Empire but his faith in the British Empire was not completely shaken. That is why he welcomed the appointment of Hunter Commission for inquiring into the cause of the disturbances in Punjab in 1919. For the same reason he accepted the work on the commission appointed by the Punjab sub-committee of INC for investigating the facts leading to the disturbances in the province, The report revealed a wide gap between views of Gandhi and those of the British Government.

The great massacre was an inevitable clash between two diametrically opposed forces, i.e. those of imperialism and

nationalism. Had the people of Punjab not taken a heroic stand against the awful might of the British on that fateful day, India would not have gained freedom with in a generation thereafter,

Though Gandhi withdraws Satyagraha yet he prepared ground to fight against the mighty British Empire. After this tragedy so many events took place in India. Finally British government agreed about the independence of India along with her partition.

Gandhi was vehemently opposed to any plan that partitioned India into two separate countries. But an overwhelming majority of Muslims, living in India, along with Hindus and Sikhs, favoured partition, Gandhi dislike the partition idea but his closest colleagues had accepted partition as the best way out, and Sardar Patel endeavored to convince Gandhi that it was the only way to avoid civil war. A devastated Gandhi gave his consent.

Later Gandhi, outsmarted, disparately sought to undo the spirit of Partition by planning to settle down in Lahore with 50 Punjabi refugee families after obtaining the consent of Jinnah. Dr Sushila Nayar went to Lahore to finalize the arrangements for Gandhi's proposed plan. Gandhi was to depart traveling by foot on February 14, 1948. On January 30 he was assassinated.

No doubt Gandhi's technique of Satyagraha awakened not only the people of Punjab but also helped to ingnite of light of attaining complete independence in whole of the India, unfortunately at the cost of partition of India.

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