

Salt Satyagraha

The salt satyagraha was a mass civil disobedience movement against the salt tax that the British Government introduced. According to the law, the Indian populace was prohibited from selling or producing salt independently. As a result, the poor could not afford salt, an essential ingredient, and could not make it as it was considered illegal.

On the morning of 12 March, Mahatma Gandhi and his loyal supporters started marching, and more and more supporters joined them on the way. After a long march that lasted for 24 days, the Satyagrahis reached the seashores of Dandi and produced salt from the seawater. This protest would later be known as the salt satyagraha that paved the way for the massive Civil Disobedience Movement.

Objectives of Salt Satyagraha

In response to the salt tax levied by the British, Mahatma Gandhi initiated the salt satyagraha movement on 12 March 1930. The plan was simple. The salt law had to be broken, and British rule would be attacked without violence. Hence, it was decided that there would be a non-violent and peaceful procession starting from the Sabarmati Ashram in Ahmedabad that would end in the village of Dandi.

As the torchbearer of India's independence struggle, Mahatma Gandhi launched the Salt Satyagraha movement to protest against the India Salt Act of 1882. However, Gandhi took this step after he tried to compromise with Lord Irwin for the last time. He sent him a letter stating that if Lord Irwin accepted his administrative reforms, there would be no need for protest or agitation. In the letter, Gandhi put forward eleven demands which included the abolition of the salt tax. Ten days after sending the letter, Gandhi and his fellow satyagrahis began the peaceful procession.

Features of Salt Satyagraha Movement

Being the first successful act that led to the great civil disobedience movement, the salt satyagraha proved to be the spark that was needed to burn the British rule in India. Some of the most critical features of the Salt Satyagraha are mentioned below.

- The salt march began on 12 March 1930, and Mahatma Gandhi, with his 80 followers, left the Sabarmati Ashram on foot to reach the village of Dandi.
- Hundreds of followers joined the core group along the way to protest against British rule.
- Some of the followers were notable names like Sarojini Naidu, who were fighting British oppression in their own way.
- During the salt march, Gandhi motivated his followers by giving impactful speeches against British rule every day after sunset. He also met with different groups of people in the villages and even spoke to reporters who covered the events and published them.
- Indian citizens were encouraged to break the salt law everywhere and burn foreign clothes and goods.
- On 5 April 1930, the entire entourage of satyagrahis reached the town of Dandi after marching for 385 km in a span of 24 days.

- On the morning of 6 April 1930, Mahatma Gandhi broke the Salt Act by picking up a lump of salt along the seashore of Dandi.

Significance of Salt Satyagraha

Mahatma Gandhi chose salt as the symbol of protest and as a starting point for the Satyagraha movement because it was the most common consumption item. Levying a tax on the most basic household item was highly unethical and immoral. And a protest against this unfair act found an echo among people of all classes. Hence, salt symbolised the basic human rights of Indian citizens.

Moreover, the salt tax accounted for 8.2% of the revenue under the British Raj, and Gandhiji knew that the British Government could not ignore this. Since salt was a necessity for all Indians, Gandhi was able to involve people from both the rural and urban spheres in the salt satyagraha movement. Thus, it created a sense of equality among the population and gave the poor and illiterate people a platform to raise their voices. This was a major achievement as there was an extreme social disparity between the upper and lower classes in those times.

Impact of Salt Satyagraha Movement

Furthermore, smaller marches were initiated in many different parts of India in solidarity with the salt satyagraha. Thousands of textile and railway workers put down their tools and went on strike to join the demonstration. The salt satyagraha spread nationwide and became the first prominent call for civil disobedience. Hence, it is still considered one of the most significant chapters in the book of India's struggle for independence. So, let's look at the powerful impact the salt march made on our country and its history.

International Attention

Although the salt satyagraha didn't get major concessions from the government in India, it got massive coverage in international media. It garnered worldwide attention and became a turning point for the anti-imperialist movement around the globe. This is because the campaign proved to the world that non-violence could effectively fight imperialism.

What's more, Mahatma Gandhi was named the 'Man of the Year' by the Times magazine for that year. Thus, we can say that the salt march thrust the Indian freedom movement into the international spotlight and gave it a new life.

Nationwide Civil Disobedience

The salt satyagraha was undoubtedly a landmark move for the Indian freedom struggle. The British Government was shaken to its core, and it was all done through a peaceful protest. Since Gandhi had encouraged the Indian populace to boycott British clothes, the imports from the United Kingdom plummeted considerably in India. This sent a strong message to the British Government.

Indians also started boycotting foreign cloth, liquor, and other goods. In fact, foreign fabric worth 30 crores was sealed by Congress in the city of Bombay. Hence, Mahatma Gandhi was successful in making Indians all across the country stand up against the tyranny of the British.

Women in the Forefront

The salt satyagraha was perhaps the most empowering campaign for Indian women. It allowed them to step out of their restrictive homes and become a part of a social justice movement. Hence, hundreds of women started pouring out on the streets and actively participated in mass protest. The nightingale of India, Sarojini Naidu, became the face of women in the salt satyagraha movement.

Additionally, Kasturba Gandhi and Mrs Nehru also served as examples and inspired many women to come out and support the initiative. Many women even participated in the picketing of shops that sold foreign cloth. As a result, the revenue for foreign textiles started falling.

Consequences of the Salt Satyagraha

After the 24-day-long salt satyagraha and the defiance of the salt law throughout the country, mass arrests took place in many places. More than 50,000 people were arrested by the British, including Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru. But that's not all. Thousands of Satyagrahis were brutally repressed and attacked by the police, and this only added fuel to the fire because more people started joining the protest.

Eventually, Lord Irwin agreed to release the prisoners, and Indians were allowed to make salt for domestic use. Lastly, Mahatma Gandhi was invited to the Second Round Table Conference in London as a guest and was treated as an 'equal'.

