

11. Mahatma Gandhi and The Nationalist Movement

1. How did Mahatma Gandhi seek to identify with the common people?

Ans: Mahatma Gandhi sought to identify himself with the common people of India. For this action plan

- (a) He began to live in a very simple lifestyle. He wore simple clothes which a poor Indian would wear.
- (b) He spoke the language of local people.
- (c) Mahatma Gandhi opposed the caste system and attacked untouchability personally lived with the Harijan.
- (d) Mahatma Gandhi attached dignity to labour and physical work. He worked on Charkha and cleaned toilets.
- (e) He attacked the sentiment of the feeling of classifying people into low and high.

2. How was Mahatma Gandhi perceived by the peasants?

Ans: Mahatma Gandhi was very popular among the peasants and his image was as mentioned below:

- The peasants considered him as if he had been sent by the King to redress the grievances of the farmers, and that he had the power to overrule all local officials.
- It was also claimed that Gandhiji's power was superior to that of the English monarch, and that with his arrival the colonial rulers would go away from the district.
- There were also rumours that the villagers, who had criticised him, have found their houses mysteriously falling apart or their crops failing.
- He was called as, "Gandhi baba – Gandhi Maharaj" or "Mahatma".
- Peasants considered him as a saviour, who would rescue them from high taxes and oppressive officials. It was hoped that Gandhi would restore dignity and autonomy to their lives.

- Gandhiji's appeal among the peasants was enhanced by his ascetic lifestyle, and by his use of the dhoti and the charkha.

3. Why did the salt laws become an important issue of struggle?

Ans: Poorest of poor Indian consume food that has salt as one of its prime ingredient. British government brought tax on salt and making salt indigenously was forbidden. It was to become a big burden on the poor people of India. Some important points regarding salt law are as follows.

1. Salt law was to lead to monopoly of salt production and distribution. It was to fuel prices, and added to this was the tax levied by the government.
2. People were denied access to natural salt and tons of the same were destroyed.
3. Salt law was an attack on the local industry in the villages too. Hence salt law was extremely unpopular and it became an important issue of the struggle.

4. Why are newspapers an important source for the study of national movement?

Ans: Contemporary newspapers are an important source of the study of national movement. Following points lay bare their importance as source of history with reference to Indian Freedom Movement.

(a) Many contemporary newspapers were published by those who were involved in the freedom struggle. For example, National Herald was issued by Motilal Nehru, further Mr. Jinnah issued Dawn. These newspapers were mouthpieces and represented important voices of the movement. Hence, they made important source of information regarding the freedom movement.

(b) Newspapers do daily reporting, hence, their reporting is more detailed than perhaps any other source can be. As they report on extremely recent events, the chances of misreporting is less. Reading different newspapers further makes our reading balanced and free from bias.

(c) Many newspapers were in local Indian languages, i.e. in vernacular languages and their circulation was limited. Hence, they published newspaper from local perspective which other sources of history may not have.

(d) They reflect the mood of the people too. These newspapers shaped what was published and the way events were reported. Accounts published in a London newspaper would be different from a report in an Indian nationalist paper.

5. Why was the charkha chosen as a symbol of nationalism?

Ans: The charkha was chosen as a symbol of nationalism due to the following factors:

- Gandhiji considered the charkha as a symbol of a human society that would not glorify machines and technology.
- The spinning wheel or the charkha provided the poor with supplementary income and make them self-reliant.
- It leads to concentration of wealth, not in the hands of few, but in the hands of all.
- The charkha was considered a machinery and was used for the service of the poorest in their own cottages.

Under the above circumstances, Gandhiji spent a part of each day working on charkha and encouraged other nationalists to do likewise. In this way, he broke the boundaries that prevailed within the traditional caste system, between mental labour and manual labour.

6. How was non-cooperation a form of protest?

Ans: Gandhiji believed that British empire in India could survive as long as the local people were cooperating with the foreign rule. Non-cooperating with the British government was to weaken it and also to protest against the same.

Following points explain how it was a protest:

1. Non-cooperation movement came along with the Khilaphat movement, The British has not seen Hindu Muslem unity of this level ever in history. The protest of the people was unified cutting across communities and at great scale.

2. People boycotted the pillars and symbols of British rule, courts, colleges and government offices. Lawyers stopped going to courts and students stayed away from colleges. At many places alternate arrangements were done to solve litigations out of court. Further many education institutions were established by the leaders of freedom struggle where students can study. One of them is Jamia Millia University in Delhi which exists today as one of the most reputed seats of higher education in India.

3. People boycotted tax collection also and they refused to pay taxes. Thus, non-cooperation was a kind of protest too.

7. Why were the dialogues at the Round Table Conference inconclusive?

Ans: The British Government has had the policy to review the progress of self-rule in India and bring reforms after the gap of ten years. This began in 1910 with Morley Minto Reform and was followed in 1920 with Montague Chelmsford Report. Ten years later British government invited Round Table Conference in London for the way forward. The First Round Table Conference took place in November, 1930. The Conference failed as the most important stake holder of Indian Freedom Movement the Indian National Congress was absent in the conference. The leaders of the Congress were behind bars due to civil disobedience movement.

The Second Table Conference took place in February 1931. One month earlier Mahatma Gandhi was released from the jail. Hence, he participated in the conference. Gandhi Irwin pact was signed and the British government agreed to withdraw salt law partly. But the agreement came under criticism as it did not talk about complete independence of India.

Third and the most important Round Table Conference took place in the later part of 1931. The new constitutional developments were not agreed upon. The main reason was that the other participants of the conference described Congress as representative of small group of Indians and not the entire population. The major voice of dissent were, the Moslem League that claimed itself the sole representative of the Moslems in India, Dr B.R. Ambedkar claimed himself the

sole representative of the low castes in India and the native rulers also claimed they would deal with the British independently and Congress could not have any say in that.

To conclude divisive politics of Moslem League, Dr Ambedkar and the attitude of the princely states are the main reasons for the failure of the round table conferences.

8. In what way did Mahatma Gandhi transform the nature of the national movement?

Ans: Gandhiji came to India back from South Africa in 1915. In 1917 he went to Champaran in Bihar to fight for the cause of farmers who were forced to grow indigo by the British government. The farmers movement proved successful as the British government accepted the demands of the farmers. Since that time to 1943 when he was assassinated, he occupied the central place in the politics of India. The fact is Mahatma Gandhi is the chief protagonist of the Indian Freedom Struggle.

Mahatma Gandhi changed the nature of freedom movement and this can be elaborated by the following points:

1. When Gandhiji joined Indian politics, the freedom movement was limited to the middle class. Everybody who participated in the political movements was educated and product of the English education. Gandhiji made it all pervasive, now people from villages, poor people, labours, workers, and students all became part of the freedom struggle. However, there are people who find fault with the act of Gandhiji. They point out that Mahatma Gandhi used religious symbols to popularise the freedom movement that in long term gave fillip to communal politics. It is notable that the Age of Gandhi is also the age of the Rise of Moslem League in Indian politics. Eminent author Nirad C Choudhary has also criticised Mahatma Gandhi for making the freedom movement a mass movement by short cuts.

2. Mahatma Gandhi has to be credited with emancipation of women and their participation in the public life at a scale not known in Indian history. Women were very prominent in picketing activities against shops selling foreign goods. The

freedom movement gave some prominent woman leaders viz. Sarojini Naidu, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, and many more.

3. For Mahatma Gandhi freedom movement was also a platform for social reforms. He spoke in favour of place of dignity and respects for depressed classes. He made end to untouchability a fundamental objective of his political philosophy. Thus Mahatma Gandhi made freedom movement a mass movement and a movement much beyond politics.

9. What do private letters and autobiographies tell us about an individual? How are these sources different from official accounts?

Ans: Private letters and autobiographies are important source of individual's life and views. Many of our freedom struggle leaders wrote autobiographies and letters and today they are our great record about them and history too.

The autobiographies and letters tell us the following things about an individual.

1. Autobiographies and letters throw light on the interests of an individual. Let us take an example, Nehru wrote letters to his daughter Indira describing the events of world history, today it is known as the book, "Glimpses of the World History". These letters show that Nehru had great interest in history. These letters show also the views of the author. For example, Nehru talks highly of the socialist government of USSR in his autobiography.

2. These autobiographies and letters are a good source of information of the social life of those days in India. Dr Rajendra Prasad has given vivid description of the village life that he saw as a child in his village.

3. Above all these autobiographies and letters are great source of history too. Nehru in his autobiography has explained in details about the obstinate approach of Moslem League towards solving the minority problem in India.

These sources were different from the official accounts. This is manifested in the following points:

1. The official accounts are done by individuals but they work under the guidelines of the government. Thus, views that run against the government remain stifled. In

addition, the author would not have the freedom of focused area. He would be required to write only on topics already defined. However, in autobiographies and letters one can choose anything of personal interest. Dr Rajendra Prasad gives a vivid description of his school and college days in his autobiography. This is not possible in any government account.

2. The autographic letters throw light on the personal life of individual leaders and show these events shaped the thought process of these leaders in future life. Mahatma Gandhi described how he was thrown out of the first class compartment of the train in South Africa because he was not a white man. He describes the struggle inside on how to protest and later how he took to non-violent means of protest.

10. Find out about the route of the Dandi March. On a map of Gujarat plot the line of the march and mark the major towns and villages that it passed along the route.

Ans: Dandi March was started from Sabarmati Ashram. This Ashram is in Ahmedabad (Gujarat). The route followed from Ahmedabad to Vadodara and from there to Surat. We have used triangle A, B, and C to mark the Dandi expedition route.