CHAPTER - II

PREPARATION AND LAUNCHING OF
THE CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE MOVEMENT.
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One year of grace given by Congress to the government to grant India Dominion Status expired at the midnight on 31 December 1929. At that very hour Congress, at its annual session held at Lahore under the presidency of Jawaharlal Nehru, declared its goal to be the achievement of complete independence for India.\(^1\) It was resolved that the proposed Round Table Conference should be boycotted, that Congressmen should walk out of the central and provincial legislatures, and a Civil Disobedience Movement be launched at a proper time in the near future.\(^2\) Irwin looked upon the Lahore Resolution as the beginning of a 'secession movement',\(^3\) though he hoped to get the full support of 'sober citizens'.\(^4\)

Gandhi's problem was to define the means and methods of Civil Disobedience and make its programmes attractive to all elements of Indian society so that they all could take part in the movement.\(^5\) He took the first step on 26 January 1930. On this day people all over the country were to take a pledge announcing India's determination to attain complete independence. According to Subhas Chandra Bose the Declaration was prepared by Gandhi himself.\(^6\)

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1. Indian Quarterly Register, Vol.11 (1929), p.300.
3. Irwin Papers, Viceroy to Wedgewood Benn, 9 January 1930
The Congress working Committee passed it as a resolution on 26 January 1930. The first half of the resolution awakened the spirit of independence among them against the fourfold oppression of the British rule and the second half declared their modus operandi. The excerpts of the resolution are given below:

"We believe that it is the inalienable right of the Indian people, as of any other people, to have freedom and to enjoy the fruits of their toil and have the necessities of life, so that they may have full opportunities of growth. We believe also that if any government deprives a people of these rights and oppresses them, the people have a further right to alter it or abolish it. The British government in India has not only deprived the Indian people of their freedom but has based itself on the exploitation of the masses, and has ruined India economically, politically, culturally and spiritually. We believe, therefore, that India must sever the British connection and attain Purna Swaraj or complete independence.

India has been ruined economically. The revenue derived from our people is out of all proportion to our income.

Politically, India's status has never been so reduced as under the British régime.

We hold it to be a crime against man and God to submit any longer to a rule that has caused this fourfold disaster to our country. We recognize, however, that the most effective way of gaining our freedom is not through violence. We will, therefore, prepare ourselves by withdrawing, so far as we can, all voluntary association from the British government, and will prepare for Civil Disobedience, including non-payment of taxes. We are convinced that if we can but withdraw our voluntary help and stop payment of taxes without doing violence, even, under provocation, the end of this inhuman rule is assured. We, therefore, hereby solemnly resolve to carry out the Congress instructions issued from time to time for the purpose of establishing Purna Swaraj."

Irwin did not want to interfere with the celebrations of the Independence Day though he was fully prepared for the maintainance of law and order. The Bombay government wished to check demonstrations. Irwin felt that there would be no dramatic departure in the Congress policy. But Gandhiji was satisfied with the popular response to the Independence Day celebrations which Hailey described as a display of stage-fighting and teapot thunder. It was, however, marked by a communal riot in Dacca, non-participation of Muslims in Delhi and the Punjab, and clashes between workers of the Girni Kamgar Union and Congressmen in Bombay. But still Gandhiji was waiting for the psychologically correct moment. His friend Dr. Ansari warned him that it was one thing to join a
procession, it was quite another to face hardship and to withstand repression.¹

The principal part of the Lahore resolution on complete independence related to the starting of a campaign of Civil Disobedience, for which the authority had been vested in the All India Congress Committee. However, it was crystal clear to all concerned that in reality it was the Mahatma who had to decide the future course of action. But Mahatma Gandhi himself depended upon his 'inner voice' for guidance, and his inner voice kept him waiting for more than two months. On 18 January 1930 when Rabindranath Tagore paid a visit to the Sabarmati Ashram and enquired about the nature of the movement, Gandhi replied: "I do not yet see any light coming out of the surrounding darkness."²

But it would be wrong to think that Gandhi was idol. His inner voice might take time to speak to him, but he himself had started speaking to his countrymen as soon as had returned to his Ashram from Lahore. He wrote in Young India that: "granted a perfectly non-violent atmosphere and a fulfilled constructive programme, I would undertake to lead the Mass Civil Disobedience struggle to a successful issue in the space of a few months."³ Replying to the critics of the movement he said; "The Congress cannot stay

¹. Ansari Papers, 10 February, 1930.
its hands after having passed the independence resolution. It was no bluff, no showy nothing. It is then as much up to the critics as to me, to devise way and means of achieving independence." 1

On 30 January 1930, Gandhiji set down eleven points and requested Irwin to satisfy the 'very simple but vital needs of India'. The eleven points enumerated by Gandhiji were: (1) total prohibition, (2) reduction of the rupee ratio to 1 s 4 d.; (3) reduction of land revenue by at least fifty per cent and making it subject to legislative control, (4) abolition of the salt-tax, (5) reduction of the military expenditure by at least fifty per cent, (6) reduction of the salaries of the highest grade service to one half or less so as to suit the reduced revenue, (7) imposition of protective tariff on foreign cloth, (8) passage of the Coastal Tariff Reservation Bill, (9) discharge of all political prisoners save those condemned for murder, withdrawal of all political prosecutions and abrogation of Section 124-A Regulation III of 1818 and the like, and permission to all Indian exiles to return, (10) abolition of the C.I.D. or its popular control, (11) issue of licenses of firearms for self defence, subject to popular control. 2

Gandhiji assured that if the British government would accept the eleven points he would not press on with Civil Disobedience. From Irwin's point of view, the eleven

1. Ibid, p.6.
points were "unrealistic, high-pitched and fantastic". 1 Mahadev Desai tells us that only salt, cloth boycott, temperance and land revenue were really important for Gandhiji and he was willing to negotiate with the government on the basis of these four points. 2

The Congress Working Committee met in the Sabarmati Ashram from 14 to 16 February 1930. The members were obviously growing impatient. In response to the Working Committee resolution earlier, thirtythree members of the Central Legislature, seven members of the Bombay Provincial Legislative Council, seventeen members of Legislative Council from Madras, forty from Bengal, seventeen from U.P., thirty from Bihar and Orissa, fifteen from C.P. and twelve from Assam resigned. Subhas Chandra Bose and eleven Congress leaders had been sentenced to imprisonment for a year. The under trial prisoners in the Mainpuri Conspiracy Case were committed to the Sessions. The Working Committee wanted Gandhiji to proceed with surer steps. Its resolution on the Civil Disobedience Movement clearly showed the Gandhian transformation of the Congress: "In the opinion of the Working Committee, Civil Disobedience should be initiated and controlled by those who believe in non-violence for the purpose of achieving Purna Swaraj, as an article of faith, and welcomes the proposal of Mahatma Gandhi and authorises him and those working with him who believe in non-violence as an article of faith to start

1. B.N.Pandey, op.cit., p.208
Civil Disobedience. The Working Committee further hopes that in the event of a mass movement taking place, all those who are rendering voluntary cooperation to the government such as lawyers, and those who are receiving so-called benefits from it, such as students, will withdraw their cooperation or renounce benefits as the case may be, and throw themselves into the final struggle for freedom".  

Irwin found it very hard to preserve patience with Gandhiji who wrote in Young India on 6 February 1930 that the British rule was a perfect personification of violence. On 2 March 1930 Gandhiji sent a politely worded ultimatum to Irwin through a young British Quaker, Reginald Reynolds, to the effect that, unless the Viceroy accepted the eleven points, he (Gandhiji) would disobey the salt laws on 11 March 1930. Irwin regretted his inability to comply. S. Gopal remarks that Irwin's policy gave the authority the cloak of courtsey and restraint. In civilized warfare Gandhiji was well-matched by Irwin. On 12 March 1930 Gandhiji wrote to Irwin, "On bended knees I asked for bread and received stone instead. I repudiate this law and regard it as my sacred duty to break the mournful mandatory of compulsory peace that is choking the heart of the Nation for want of free vent." Gandhiji described the decision as the last throw of a gambler, insisting that even the risk


of violence was worth it. Civil Disobedience need not be stopped because of a sporadic act of violence.

Apart from these circumstances which led to the launching of the Civil Disobedience Movement there were other reasons which indirectly favoured it. This was the time when the world faced a severe economic depression and like other countries India too was affected by it. The prices of every day commodities in the market started swelling and working classes faced a terrible financial crisis. The peasantry in India had always been poor and with this crisis they were not in a position to pay the land revenue and their condition was pitiable. It caused naturally peasant unrest.

British government was not in favour of giving even Dominion Status to India and only insisted on calling Round Table Conference to discuss matters. Therefore, in order to achieve complete independence, Congress was bound to start the Civil Disobedience Movement.

**Launching of the Movement**

*Gandhiji selected seventy-eight volunteers known to have implicit faith in non-violence as a creed. Along with them began his historic march from Sabarmati Ashram in Ahmedabad towards the sea-shore of Dandi, 385 Kms. away or 12 March 1930. Every morning the sixty-one year old leader, weighing a little over fifty kilos, clutching a bamboo-pole walked fast with long steps -- too fast for hundreds of people marching behind him like a silent army. A fire of*
rebellion followed his wake. The great march was the symbol of the peaceful revolt of 350 million unarmed Indians against the mighty British raj and its unjust laws. The unique drama amazed the World. It was a soul, stirring spectacle India walking behind a slander frame. $^1$ Dandi march was Gandhiji's pilgrim journey. $^2$ Moving from village to village "it was a veritable triumphal progress". The villagers flocked from all sides, sprinkled the roads, strewed leaves on them and as pilgrims passed soak on their knees.

"Walking for twentyfour days, with the pitiless April sun beating down on their heads, Gandhiji and his volunteers reached the sea shore of Dandi on 5 April 1930. The half naked 'Seditious Fakir' thus violated the sanctity of British law at 8.30 a.m. on 6 April, by picking up a pinch of salt, nature's bounty lying on the beach. The volunteers and hundreds of other onlookers followed suit. The simple act of picking up a pinch of salt seemed to have switched on the button of an India-wide machine and the entire nation was set in motion. The whole country caught the contagion of the event and almost on all the sea coasts people began making salt. Everywhere in the country people joined hartals, demonstrations and the campaign to boycott foreign goods and to refuse to pay taxes started. Lakhs of Indians offered passive resistance. In many parts of the country, the peasants withheld payment of land revenue and

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rent. A notable feature of the movement was the wide participation of women. Thousands of them left the seclusion of their homes and offered satyagraha. They took active part in picketing shops, selling foreign cloth and liquor. They marched shoulder to shoulder with men in procession. Once again after the non-cooperation movement the nation was filled with hope, exhilaration and excitement.

The Civil Disobedience Movement was in many ways different from that of Non-cooperation Movement. Non-cooperation was actively revolutionary while the Civil Disobedience was passively so, the former aimed at bringing the government to a standstill by withdrawing from the administration, the latter sought to paralyse the government by the mass performances of specific illegal.... in choosing of these acts Gandhiji showed his usual insight into the popular mind for he began with the illicit manufacture of salt in defiance of the unpopular salt tax.

Preparations on Provincial Basis

The people of Central Provinces and Berar fully agreed with the Lahore resolution of the Congress, yet there was a feeling in them that the decision to boycott the Legislative Council and to resign from it was not a wise step at that moment. The Congress members of the Legislative Council in Central Provinces and Berar

tendered their resignations from it.

In Central Provinces and Berar the programmes regarding Civil Disobedience were arranged in two stages—Provincial and District levels. On Provincial level the batches of satyagrahis were to act under the guidance and leadership of Seth Govinddas to break the Salt Law throughout the provinces. The programme to be conducted on District level was to be carried on by local leaders as per directives from time to time.

In the province political upheaval was seen both in Chhattisgarh and Berar areas. Seth Govinddas who was the ex-member of the Council of State, toured Chhattisgarh. In Berar K.B. Sahastrabudhe of Akola arranged various meetings in which programmes were chalked out to carry the Civil Disobedience Movement by way of preparation of Salt boycotting of liquor shops and defiance of the Forest laws.

On 3 February 1930 at the residence of Pt. Ravishankar Shukla in Budhapara, Raipur, a meeting was held in connection with the Civil Disobedience Movement. Pt. Ravishankar Shukla presided over it and it was attended by Wamanrao Lakhe, Thakur Pyarelal Singh, Yatiyatanlal Jain, Maulana Abdul Rauf Khan, Mahani

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1. The Hitvada, 13 April and 17 April, 1930.
2. Home Political Department, File No. 18/3/30, Fortnightly Report 1, 1930, March.
The important decisions of the meeting were as follows:-

(1) To enlarge the activities of the Youth League by Congress for proper follow up and guidance of Mahatma Gandhi.

(2) To send a delegation to Mahatma Gandhi for seeking his guidance.

(3) To have effective control and observe non-violence during the Civil Disobedience Movement as per directive of the Congress.

(4) A warning was issued about the repressive and cruel move of the government and also to save themselves from repression.

Mahatma Gandhi's decision to break the Salt Laws was the first step towards the beginning of the movement and soon after this Pt. Ravishankar Shukla, D.P. Mishra and Seth Govinddas left for Sabarmati to participate in Dandi March.

Hindi Provincial Congress Committee met at Jabalpur on 30 March 1930 to form a War Council in order to formulate the programme of the Civil Disobedience Movement and devise ways and means to carry it effectively on a massive scale. The War Council consisted of Seth Govinddas, D.P. Mishra, Pt. Ravishankar Shukla, Makhanlal Chaturvedi, K.R. Khandekar, Ghanshyam Singh


2. Raipur District Gazetteer, 1973, p.80
Similarly War Councils came into existence in the month of April in the Marathi speaking areas of Nagpur and Berar.

Instructions were issued to the District Congress Committees to form Councils on District and Tahsil levels and take the advantage of the District Councils and their school teachers for carrying on the message of Civil Disobedience to the masses. 2

The All India Congress Committee which met under the presidency of Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru at Ahmedabad on 21 March 1930 passed the resolution that, "The Committee trusts that while full preperation will be carried on inspite of any government interference, Civil Disobedience will not be started till Gandhi has reached his destination and has actually committed a breach of the salt laws and given the word. In the event of Gandhi's earlier arrest the provinces shall have full liberty to start Civil Disobedience." 3

Different types of pledge forms were distributed in the country which were being obtained from the volunteers. The members of the War Council discussed the matter about different forms and in order to have

1. The Hitvada. 13 April 1930.
2. The Hitvada, 16 February 1930.
uniformity they formulated a pledge form with the approval of Gandhiji which contained the following points:-

(1) I desire to join the Civil Resistance Campaign for the independence of India undertaken by the National Congress.

(2) I accept the creed of the National Congress, that is, "the attainment of Purna Swaraj (complete independence) by the people of India by all peaceful means."

(3) I am ready and willing to go to jail and undergo all other sufferings and penalties that may be inflicted on me in this campaign.

(4) In case I am sent to jail I shall not seek any monetary help for my family from the Congress funds.

(5) I shall implicitly obey the orders of those who are in charge of the campaign.

**Gandhi's Call for Satyagraha**

A number of reasons have been suggested why the Indian people responded to Gandhiji's call for satyagraha. Besides mass awakening and the urge for freedom in the 1920s, Gandhiji's influence with the masses was, unquestionably, enormous. It is also to be borne in mind that India's long tradition of non-violence and truth is embedded in her culture.² According to Dharampal, Gandhi who was not a student of history, had a much deeper

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insight into it than any historian.\textsuperscript{1} Gandhiji's satyagraha campaign aimed at welding his countrymen together in a disciplined unity and at gathering the maximum support or benevolent neutrality of non-participants.\textsuperscript{2} Gandhiji's call for \textit{purna swaraj} was also the call for a united front against the colonial regime. Above all, there was Gandhiji's \textit{charisma} -- his most effective weapon in politics.\textsuperscript{3} Gandhiji was determined to carry through the Satyagraha campaign as there was no other honourable way out. As he wrote to Irwin, he had no option but to take a 'mad risk', that no victories of truth had been won without risks and also that he would prefer chaos to perpetual and gilded slavery.\textsuperscript{4} S.Gopal observes in this context: "The nation was anxious to feel its strength, and its desire required to be channelled."\textsuperscript{5}

The Civil Disobedience Movement was 'national in its geographical spread', with the stated objective of complete independence. It was not confined to elite politicians. It marked a definite advance in radicalization over the Non-Cooperation Movement because it was a deliberate violation of law.\textsuperscript{6} According to the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{1} Dharampal, \textit{Civil Disobedience and Indian Tradition}, pp.XVIII-LXIII
\item \textsuperscript{2} Judith Brown, \textit{Gandhi and Civil Disobedience, The Mahatma in Indian Politics, 1928-34}, Cambridge, 1977, p.81.
\item \textsuperscript{3} Ravinder Kumar (ed.), \textit{Essays on Gandhian Politics: The Rowlatt Satyagraha of 1919}, p.5
\item \textsuperscript{4} S.Gopal, \textit{The Viceroyalty of Lord Irwin 1926-31}, Oxford, 1957, p.63.
\item \textsuperscript{5} Ibid
\item \textsuperscript{6} Sumit Sarkar, \textit{Modern India}, New Delhi, 1992, p.289.
\end{itemize}
Indian League Delegation Report, the Civil Disobedience Movement was not an encouragement to violence and crime. It was lawless, because it was a defiance of the existing law which was not based on the consent of the people. Civil Disobedience thus became both a moral protest and weapon of attack on the present system of administration. 1

Judith Brown asserts that the mass support was not truly Gandhiji's political support. 2 He derived his strength from dedicated satyagrahis, and no wonder 'the official type of Gandhian Civil Disobedience Movement' had its natural starting points in Gandhiji's Ashram at Bardoli, Kheda, Bhanura, Arambagh and Bihpur. The Indian National Congress led the Civil Disobedience Movement, and Gandhiji knew that the main problem in a mass upsurge would be control and cohesion. S.Gopal maintains that the Civil Disobedience Movement was in fact a 'War' 3 as there were 'Dictators' and 'War Councils'.

The movement developed in various spheres -- in rural and urban India -- amongst different sections of society. In the following chapters efforts have been made to trace its development in the Central Provinces and Berar.

1. Indian League Delegation Report, p.75.
3. S.Gopal, op.cit.,p.66.