

## The Individual Satyagraha Movement of 1940-41 in India

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**Abstract:** The Congress ministries resigned in protest against the government policies. It is worthwhile to mention that the seed of the Individual Satyagraha Movement was sown at the 53<sup>rd</sup> annual session of the Indian National Congress held under the Presidentship of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad on the 19-20<sup>th</sup> March 1940 at Ramgarh. The Individual Satyagraha was to pass through four distinct phases. In the meantime, the war situation became very menacing subsequent to the Nazi's invasion on Russia 22nd June, 1941. Consequently U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt and the British Prime Minister Winston S. Churchill issued the famous 8 points 'Atlantic Charter' which was regarded as the 'Magna Charta' for the emancipation of subjugated subjects. But Churchill announced in the House of Commons on 9th September 1941 that the Atlantic Charter's self-government clause did not apply to India. Japanese bombarding on the Pearl Harbour in the morning on Sunday, the War situation worsened rapidly. Individual Civil Disobedience Movement postponed.

**Keywords:** Nationalism, Landmark, Imprisonment, Inauguration, Disobedience, Resurgence.

The Individual Satyagraha Movement was a landmark in the history of the growth of freedom movement and nationalism in India. It is also known as the Individual Civil Disobedience Movement which was the third great campaign launched by Mahatma Gandhi for ridding the country of foreign domination. The satyagrahis of India had played a highly significant and remarkable part in this movement. With the Individual

Satyagraha Movement our national movement entered quite into a new phase. The movement was only a moral protest against the British War Policy towards India. The prime motive behind this movement was only to create mass awareness instead of any popular upsurge during the Second World War.

The Congress ministries resigned in protest against the government policies. Launching

Satyagraha movement was the only option left for the Congress leadership. During World War II, some crucial developments like the fall of France, the massive invasion on England and Hitler's advance towards the Soviet Russia had created a general impression that Britain's defeat was inevitable. The Congress socialist Party and Forward Bloc saw in Britain's troubles an opportunity to achieve freedom. The whole scenario on the war front underwent a sea-change when Germany attacked Soviet Russia and took the entire world by surprise. The Congress did try to throw slight shades of difference between the twin evils of Fascism and Imperialism in a different way. Jawaharlal Nehru affirmed that the justice was on the side of Britain. France and Poland but he was convinced that both Britain and France were the imperialist countries.<sup>1</sup> The ongoing war was the result of inner contradictions of capitalism ever increasing since the end of the First World War. Keeping the contemporary situation in view, he believed that India should adopt a policy of benign neglect by striking a pace of neutral stance of neither going help to war effort till she achieved freedom not taking advantage

of Britain's difficulties by starting an immediate struggle against her.

Gandhiji slightly differed from Nehru as regarding the contemporary situation. Like Nehru, Gandhiji too agreed that both the sides had colonial interests but firmly held that India should not achieve her freedom out of 'Britain's ruin.'<sup>2</sup> The Congress leadership had to decide keeping in view the international politics, national situation, unity cum dissidence within the Congress and the pressure of the Indian Left. The Congress leadership had either to compromise or to confront with the British Raj. A section of the Congress expected that the British Government which was run over the democratic principles would ultimately make an honourable settlement in due course of time.<sup>3</sup> This section was not in a hurry but **consented to 'wait and watch'**. **The Left denounced this policy and urged to take immediate steps to launch a mass struggle keeping the nationalist fervor of the masses in view.** Subhash Bose also encouraged the Left that if the Congress did not initiate any mass struggle it should be splited. But some leaders of the Congress Socialist Party and the

Communist Party did not favour the active endeavours of Bose.<sup>4</sup>

It is worthwhile to mention that the seed of the Individual Satyagraha Movement was sown at the 53<sup>rd</sup> annual session of the Indian National Congress held under the presidentship of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad on the 19-20<sup>th</sup> March 1940 at Ramgarh.<sup>5</sup> In Ramgarh Congress the only resolution of Satyagraha was moved by Jawaharlal Nehru and seconded by Acharya J.B. Kripalani, the General Secretary of Congress which was duly passed.<sup>6</sup> Our first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru mentioned that “The demand for some action to meet this situation became imperative, and the Congress, at its annual session held at Ramgarh, in Bihar, in March 1940, under the presidentship of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad decided that civil disobedience was the only course left ..... and asked people to prepare for it.”<sup>7</sup>

Subsequent to the successful conclusion of the Ramgarh Congress Mahatma Gandhi wrote on the 25<sup>th</sup> March 1940 in the ‘HARIJAN’, “Every Congress Committee is a Satyagraha Committee and called upon to register true congressmen as Satyagrahi.”<sup>8</sup> He

opposed the existence of untouchability in any sense of rancour or discrimination in Indian society. All the **Congressmen were directed to spin regularly in spare time and use Khaddar compulsorily.**

In fact, it was a serious crisis in India’s movement for national freedom. At this hour of trial the Congress again placed itself under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi for the inevitable struggle. In view of the emergency the All-India Congress Committee met at Bombay on the 15<sup>th</sup> September, 1940.<sup>9</sup> The President, Maulana Azad said, “these events made us decide to again request Mahatma Gandhi to assume the active lead of the Congress”. At the request of Congress President, Mahatma Gandhi assumed the responsibility perhaps the greatest in his life as he expressed in his Hindustani speech.<sup>10</sup> Gandhiji advised individual civil disobedience of chosen individuals, and to prevent any embarrassment to Government during the War period. Care was taken not to have any mass upheavals at that time.<sup>11</sup> Jawaharlal Nehru wrote, “this individual civil disobedience movement started in a very small way, each person having to pass some kind

of a test and get permission before he or she could take part in it.<sup>12</sup> Rajendra Prasad mentioned, “Gandhiji suggested a satyagraha of a new kind. It was not to be collective but individual and only such contribution in any sphere of constructive programme.<sup>13</sup> On the 15th October 1940, Mahatma Gandhi chose Acharya Vinoba Bhave to start the fight.<sup>14</sup> As per the instructions of Gandhiji, Acharya Vinoba Bhave commenced the historic Satyagraha on 17th October 1940 at Paunar as the first satyagrahi of the country.<sup>15</sup> The leaders and other national workers of Manbhum congratulated Vinoba Bhave on his arresting. It is worthy to note that the second satyagrahi Jawaharlal Nehru was indiscriminately arrested at Chheoki Junction in Allahabad in the evening on the 31<sup>st</sup> October 1940 before the offering his Satyagraha fixed on the 7th November 1940.<sup>16</sup> The incarceration of Pt. Nehru was followed by a complete hartal observed on the 2<sup>nd</sup> November 1940, throughout the length and breadth of the Province.

The Individual Satyagraha was to pass through four distinct phases. In the first phase, only the national leaders were to offer Satyagraha. In the second phase, members of **Provincial**

**Congress Working committees, All India Congress Committee and the Central and Provincial Legislatures** were to decide about the Satyagrahis. In the third phase, only those Congressmen whose names would be suggested by the local Congress Committees were to offer Satyagraha. In the last phase, all the workers were allowed to go for the Satyagraha. All the Satyagrahis wherever they went, they shouted some such slogans as, “Don’t Get your Sons Butchered for a few Paise by this Dishonest Government”. Better die for Independence of the Motherland than to die for the Satanic Government.” “Long Live the Revolution.” The government tried hard to suppress movement by large scale arrests of Satyagrahis in quick succession.<sup>17</sup>

It is worthwhile to mention that the prisoner satyagrahis were let out from prison bars subsequent to the expiry of the terms of their imprisonment. However, Dr. Rajendra Prasad our first President of India mentioned that the satyagrahis of the one year’s imprisonment were released after nine months because of remissions usually granted to prisoners.<sup>18</sup>

In the meantime, the war situation became very menacing subsequent to the Nazi's invasion on Russia 22nd June, 1941. Consequently U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt and the British Prime Minister Winston S. Churchill issued the famous 8 points 'Atlantic Charter' which was regarded as the 'Magna Charta' for the emancipation of subjugated subjects. But Churchill announced in the House of Commons on 9th September 1941 that the Atlantic Charter's self-government clause did not apply to India.<sup>19</sup> It caused the distrust and discontent throughout the length and breadth of the country which flared up into a gigantic conflagration in 1942.<sup>20</sup>

It is worthy of fact, the 17th October 1941 was the anniversary of the inauguration of the Individual Civil Disobedience Movement. Colonial Government released on 3rd December, 1941 satyagrahi prisoners together with Congress President Maulana A.K. Azad as well as Jawaharlal Nehru as a gesture of goodwill.<sup>21</sup> After the Japanese bombarding on the Pearl Harbour in the morning on Sunday, 7th December 1941, the scenery of the War situation worsened rapidly. Consequently, the

Congress working Committee held its meeting at Bardoli on 23rd December, 1941 and relieved Mahatma Gandhi of the responsibility of leading the Individual Satyagraha campaign as per his wishes.<sup>22</sup> The retirement of Gandhiji from the leadership eventually led to the postponement of the Individual Civil Disobedience Movement.<sup>23</sup>

**Conclusion:** The Individual Civil Disobedience Movement was a campaign on non-violence conducted under the sole and supreme leadership of Mahatma Gandhi to accelerate the pace for the attainment of independence. After the successful campaign of over fourteen months, the Individual Satyagraha was suspended with a view to the approaching Japanese menace to India. The movement was launched as a mark of moral protest against the imperialist policy of the British Government as India was dragged into war without making due consideration to her legitimate aspirations. From this point of view the Individual Satyagraha Movement was a fairly successful national experiment. The movement spread also the feeling of anti-imperialism and paved the way for the

forthcoming gigantic revolution of 1942.

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