

ROWLATT ACT (1919)

During the viceraoyalty of Lord Chelmsford, a sedition committee was appointed by the government in 1918, headed by Justice Rowlatt, which made certain recommendations to curb seditious activities in India. The Rowlatt Act, 1919, gave unbridled powers to the government to arrest and imprison suspects without trial. The Rowlatt Act was passed by the Government in spite of being opposed by all the Indian members of the Legislative Council. The act created anger among all sections of the society. Even before the act was passed popular agitations had begun against it. Gandhi decided to fight against this act and he gave a call for Satyagraha on 6 April 1919. He was arrested on 8 April 1919. This led to further intensification of the agitation in Delhi, Ahmedabad and Punjab.

Kheda Satyagraha

The Kheda Satyagraha which is also known as the no-tax peasant struggle was launched in March 1919 under the able leadership of Gandhiji along with Sardar Patel, N. M. Joshi and others. This movement provided an opportunity to the educated public workers to establish contact with the real life of the peasantry. The Kheda peasantry mainly consisted of the Patidar peasants. The Patidars have always been known for their skills in agriculture. The land of Kheda, a part of central Gujarat, is quite fertile for the cultivation of tobacco and cotton crops. The struggle of peasants was organized because the peasants had suffered a famine and this had resulted in a large scale failure of crops, but the government did not accept the failure of crops and insisted on the full realization of tax.

The Satyagraha of 1919

The Satyagraha was to be a non-violent affair to the point of riot offering any real resistance. The plan for an all-India hartal was fixed on a Sunday. Two of the factors which contributed to the unexpected nationwide upsurge in answer to the Satyagraha call were the spontaneously growing labour movement (fueled by the fact that an 80-100 per cent increase in the price of food grains had been hardly offset by the

wage rises of say 15 per cent) and the remarkable Hindu-Muslim unity. The former phenomenon included the formation of the first regularly functioning trade unions, and the great largely spontaneous, Mumbai textile strike of January 1919. Hindu-Muslim unity had been facilitated partly by the 1916 Lucknow Pact between the Congress and the leaders of the Muslim League, whereby the Congress accepted separate electorates and a bargain was struck over the distribution of seats. Muslim politicians were agitated over the Khilafat issues. The Sultan of Turkey, who was accepted as the major Muslim power, was being subjected to humiliating terms by the British after World War I and Muslim leaders worldwide sympathized. The anxieties of Muslim politicians coincided in 1919, with the agitational plans of the Congress. And so, for the first time, the major politicians of both communities jointly gave a call for struggle.

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