Dandi March-1930 led by Mahatma Gandhi
A Compilation by Gandhi National Museum, New Delhi

_Dandi March, led by Mahatma Gandhi, to break the atrocious salt tax marked a turning point in the freedom struggle. This article gives an account of Dandi March led by Gandhiji. The account is compiled by National Gandhi Museum, Delhi. It is reproduced from journal SANSTHAKUL._

In all the stirring annals of our Freedom Movement, few events are as dramatic, inspiring and significant as the historic Dandi March led by the Father of our Nation, Mahatma Gandhi.

On one level, the March was intended to protest against the nefarious provisions of the salt tax imposed by the British. But there was another level that had deeper, more profound implications and gave the events a unique significance. The March, in effect, was the spark that ignited the flames of the Freedom Movement and caused the idea of mass civil disobedience to spread like wildfire across the nation.

**Background**

In December, 1929, the Indian National Congress declared that total independence for India was its avowed objective and to that effect January 26, 1930 was celebrated as Independence Day throughout the country. People everywhere enthusiastically pledged themselves to fight for “purna swaraj”. Against this background, Gandhiji, under the authority of the Congress, took the first step and launched the civil disobedience movement known as Salt Satyagraha.
The Beginning

Serving notice on the Viceroy: Before commencing the March, Gandhiji, on March 2, 1930, addressed a historic letter to the Viceroy. In it, he described the ruination of the country under British Rule and gave notice of his intention to launch a civil disobedience movement by symbolically breaking the Salt Tax law, which in his opinion was “the most iniquitous of all from the poor man’s standpoint.” He also added: “As the independence movement is essentially for the poorest in the land, the beginning will be made with this evil.” The Viceroy’s unfeeling reply to this moving letter provoked Gandhiji to exclaim: “On bended knees I asked for bread and I have received stone instead.”

Fixing the time and the place: The place Gandhiji selected as the site for his symbolic breaking of the provisions of the hated Salt Tax was Dandi, a seaside village in Gujarat. He decided to march the full distance of 241 miles, from his Ashram at Ahmedabad with a select band of co-workers. The appointed date: March 12, 1930.
Adding fuel to fire: The days before the March commenced were very tense. Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, who had gone to Borsad to prepare the villagers so as to accord Gandhiji and the satyagrahis a fitting welcome when they passed through the district, was arrested at Ras on March 7. This only added fuel to the already considerable fire. On March 9, a huge crowd of 75,000 people attended a mammoth meeting on the sands of the Sabarmati. Here they passed a resolution in the form of a vow, in Gandhiji’s presence, to tread the same path Sardar Vallabhbhai had trod and not to rest in peace until freedom for the nation was achieved, adding: “nor will the Government get peace.” Echoes of the same resolve resounded all over India.

Growing support at home and abroad: Day after day Gandhiji explained his programme, answered questions, and expounded his message at prayer meetings. There was no limit to the number of visitors at the ashram and press reporters often broke the sanctity of prayer grounds to get through to him. During these days, messages of support poured in. There was a cryptic letter from a Revolutionary Party to “Comrade Gandhi”, giving him three years’ time to try his non-violence. A German doctor sent a drawing executed by himself along with a note that in far-off Germany, “a humble fellow pilgrim is praying for him and his work every morning and evening.” “God guard you”, said a New York message from Rev. Holmes. Simultaneously, serving as a bizarre counterpoint to these encouraging messages, were persistent rumours of Gandhiji’s impending arrest and deportation.
Speaking on the eve of the March: On March 11, the day before the March was to begin, the crowd swelled to 10,000 when the evening prayers were held. At the end, Gandhiji delivered a memorable speech; “In all probability,” he said, “this will be my last speech to you. Even if the Government allows me to march tomorrow morning, this will be my last speech on the sacred banks of the Sabarmati. Possibly, these may be the last words of my life here.”

The March Begins

March 12. The Great March, which can be likened to Lord Buddha’s Mahabhinishkraman, commenced from the Ashram premises on the banks of the river Sabarmati, Ahmedabad, at 6.30 a.m. on March 12, 1930. Gandhiji, staff in hand, frail, but of energy even at the age of 61, led the 78 satyagrahis. These represented a cross-section of the people from all over the country; Andhra, Bengal, Bihar, Bombay, Gujarat, Karnataka, Kerala, Cutch, Maharashtra, Punjab, Rajputana, Sind, Tamilnadu, U.P., Utkal and even Nepal. Besides Hindus, there were among them two Muslims, one Christian and two Harijans. A huge crowd followed the satyagrahis, the roads for miles and miles having been watered and decorated with arches, flags and torans.

Reactions across India: Writing under the caption ‘Departure’ in the NAVAJIVAN of March 16, 1930, Gandhiji stated. “Thousands of Ahmedabad citizens, both men and women, kept vigil on the night of the 11th. Thousands flocked to the ashram... We walked on between rows of people who had come to see us set out, the rows extending to as far as the Chandola Lake. I can never forget the scene.”

Later, speaking about the Dandi March, Gandhiji said: “My feeling is like that of the pilgrim to Amarnath or Badri-Kedar. For me this is nothing less than a holy pilgrimage.” Shri Motilal Nehru drawing a historical parallel said: “Like the historic march of Ramachandra to Lanka the march of Gandhi will be memorable,” while Shri P.C. Ray compared it with “the exodus of the Israelites under Moses.”

The sight of the satyagrahis moved Jawaharlal Nehru to heights of eloquence, prompting him to exclaim: “Today the pilgrim marches onward on his long trek. Staff in hand he goes along the dusty roads of Gujarat, clear-eyed and firm of step, with his faithful band trudging along behind him. Many a journey he has undertaken in the past, many a weary road traversed. But longer than any that have gone before is this last journey of his, and many are the obstacles in his way. But the fire of a great resolve is in him and surpassing love of his miserable countrymen. And love of truth that scorches and love of freedom that inspires. And none that passes him can escape the spell, and men of common clay feel the spark of life. It is a long journey, for the goal is the independence of India and the ending of the exploitation of her millions.”

After the first day’s march, which ended at Aslali, 13 miles from Ahmedabad, Gandhiji said to the assembled people: “The soldiers of the first batch had burnt their boats the moment the March began.” He also vowed not to return to the ashram until the Salt Act was repealed, and “Swaraj” won.
The March Goes On

Gandhiji’s energy at the age of 61 was amazing. Daily he walked 10 miles or more and addressed public meetings. The ashram routine of prayer, spinning and writing up the daily diary were incumbent on every marcher. “Ours is a sacred pilgrimage”. He said, “and we should be able to account for every minute of our time.” He retired at 9 p.m. still talking to people and giving interviews until he fell asleep. Long before his comrades were up, he rose and began his correspondence. At 4 a.m., he was seen writing letters by the moonlight, as his little lamp had gone out for want of oil and he did not wish to disturb anybody. At 6 a.m. there was the call to morning prayers. After the prayers, he delivered a sermon to the pilgrims on the March and answered questions. Everyday, the March commenced punctually at 5.30 a.m.

Unprecedented scenes of increasing enthusiasm were witnessed throughout the march from Ahmedabad to Dandi. During his numerous speeches on the way, he exhorted people to join in large numbers, boycott foreign cloth, adopt Khadi and desist from the evil of drinking. He advised women who wanted to join the struggle, to take up the picketing of liquor shops and foreign cloth shops.

The “Duty of Disloyalty”: In the issue of YOUNG INDIA of March 27, Gandhiji gave a call to the people in an article titled the ‘Duty of Disloyalty.’

In it, he bluntly declared that there was no halfway house between active loyalty and active disloyalty. He added: “Indeed, loyalty to a state so corrupt is a sin, disloyalty a virtue.” This was in keeping with the sentiments of a speech he had made in Borsad on March 18, where he said: “I regard this as a religious movement since sedition is our dharma.”

In response to this call, several village officials resigned their posts. People everywhere were overcome by a fresh wave of enthusiasm. Addressing the youth, Shri Jawaharlal Nehru said, “The field of battle lies before you, the flag of India beckons to you, and freedom herself awaits your coming.” He also added: “Who lives if India dies? Who dies if India lives?”

Shri Motilal Nehru and Shri Jawaharlal Nehru met Gandhiji at Jambusar and also marched a little distance with him. Later, after consulting him, Shri Motilal Nehru made a gift to the nation of Anand Bhavan, their ancestral house at Allahabad.

Fiery speeches by Gandhiji: Gandhiji’s speeches along the way were charged with emotion and spared neither the Government nor the people. His speech at Bhatgam on March 29 was introspective and as he noted in YOUNG INDIA “moved both the audience and me deeply.” He expressed agony at reported extravagances saying: “Extravagance has no room in this campaign.” He also reiterated his resolve to carry on the struggle. His ringing words were: “It will continue no matter how co-workers or others act. For me there is no turning back whether I am alone or joined by thousands. I would rather die a dog’s death and have my bones licked by dogs than that I should return to the Ashram a broken man.” In a speech at Navsari, he said: “Either I shall return with what I want or my dead body will float in the ocean.” Earlier, addressing the volunteers on
March 28, Gandhiji had said: “We have looked upon Dandi as Hardwar. Let us become worthy of entering a place as holy as Hardwar.”

The March Ends

The long 241-mile trek finally ended on April 5, 1930. Along the way, Gandhiji and his companions had broken journey for the night at 22 places.

On April 6, the atmosphere at Dandi was both tense and solemn. The day began with prayers. Gandhiji then nominated Shri Abbas Tyabji and after him Smt Sarojini Naidu, to lead the Satyagraha if he was arrested.

After prayers, Gandhiji with his followers took a bath in the sea. Then at 8.30 a.m. he defied the Salt Law by picking up a lump of salt. Smt. Sarojini Naidu who was there, hailed him as a 'law breaker.'

The Aftermath

*The Nation defies the Salt Law:* The first salvo of the battle was thus fired. Gandhiji in a statement issued after breaking the Salt Law, declared, “Now that the technical or ceremonial breach of the Salt Law has been committed, it is now open to anyone who would take the risk of prosecution under the Salt Law to manufacture salt, wherever he wishes and wherever it is convenient.”

The entire nation rose as a man against what Gandhiji described as “Goonda Raj.” Millions broke the Salt Law and courted imprisonment. Salt depots were raided everywhere and the manufacture of illicit salt was undertaken. In a single raid at Dharasana, 289 volunteers were wounded because the police now used lathis and batons freely. But even the brutality of the mounted police failed to break the morale of the people. At the same time, the breaking of other oppressive laws was also undertaken.

*Gandhiji moves on:* Gandhiji declared to the nation: “The call of 1920 was a call for preparation, today it is a call for engaging in final conflict.” He said in a message: “At present India’s self-respect, in fact, her all, is symbolized as it were in a handful of salt in the satyagrahi’s hand. Let the first holding it, therefore, be broken, but let there be no voluntary surrender of the salt.”

*British react:* The Government replied by unleashing a reign of terror. By March 31, more than 95,000 were jailed. Shri Jawaharlal Nehru was arrested on April 14 and sentenced to 6 months' imprisonment. Sporadic violence broke out in Karachi, Calcutta, Peshawar and Chittagong. The police opened fire in Calcutta, Madras and Karachi and perpetrated acts of brutality all over the country. Through all this Gandhiji urged the people to “answer this organized hooliganism with great suffering.”

*Gandhiji is arrested:* The battle against the “Black regime” was at its peak when Gandhiji planned to commence the March to Dharasana. But at 12.45 a.m. on May 4, he was arrested at Karadi, 3 miles from Dandi whilst asleep in his cottage. The camp where he rested was raided by the District Magistrate of Surat, with two police officers armed with pistols and about 30 policemen armed with rifles. Flashing a torch on Gandhiji, who was asleep in his bed, the British officer asked him if he was Mohandas Karmchand Gandhi. Then he was arrested under a
written order under Regulation XXV of 1827, and allowed to pack up his few belongings and take time to say his prayers. Gandhiji then asked Pandit Khare, one of the satyagrahis, to recite his favourite hymn- Vaishnavjan, with which he had commenced his march. The members of the party then bade him an affectionate farewell by offering pranams to him. Within an hour, at 1.10 a.m., he was driven away in a lorry, to Yeravda Central Prison.

Miraben, a close associate of Gandhiji, commented thus on his arrest: “At the dead of night, like thieves they came to steal him away for ‘when they sought to lay hand on him, they feared the multitudes, because they took him for a prophet!’

Thus ended a glorious episode in our Freedom Struggle. The spark that the Dandi March ignited, soon kindled the flames of a movement that engulfed the entire nation and finally succeeded in achieving what Gandhiji, in essence, strove to accomplish at Dandi—total independence for the people of his beloved India.

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