

Chapter Title & Core Theme

- **NCERT Chapter Name:** Theme Eleven, *Mahatma Gandhi and the Nationalist Movement: Civil Disobedience and Beyond* (Themes in Indian History, Part III)
- **Central Theme:** The chapter analyses Gandhiji's activities in India during **1915-1948**. It studies his interactions with different sections of Indian society and the popular struggles he inspired and led. It also shows that "individuals, even great ones, are **made by history even as they make history**". Finally, it introduces the different **kinds of sources** historians use to reconstruct a leader's career and social movements.

A Leader Announces Himself (1915-1916)

Key Concepts & Flow

- January 1915: Gandhiji returned after **two decades** abroad, mostly in **South Africa**, where he went as a lawyer and became a leader of the Indian community. Historian **Chandran Devanesan** called South Africa "**the making of the Mahatma**".
- In South Africa he first forged **satyagraha**, promoted **harmony between religions**, and alerted **upper-caste Indians** to their discriminatory treatment of **low castes and women**.
- The India of 1915 was politically more active than in 1893. The **Indian National Congress** had branches in most major towns, and the **Swadeshi movement (1905-07)** had broadened its middle-class appeal.
- Swadeshi leaders were **Lal, Bal, Pal** (Lala Lajpat Rai of Punjab, Bal Gangadhar Tilak of Maharashtra, Bipin Chandra Pal of Bengal). The alliteration conveyed the **all-India character** of the struggle.
- **Moderates** preferred a gradual and persuasive approach. They included **Gopal Krishna Gokhale** (Gandhiji's acknowledged **political mentor**) and **Mohammad Ali Jinnah**.
- On Gokhale's advice, Gandhiji spent a year travelling around British India.
- **February 1916, Banaras Hindu University (BHU) opening:**
 - o He was relatively unknown and was invited for his South Africa work.
 - o He called the event "a most **gorgeous show**" and contrasted the "**richly bedecked noblemen**" with the "**millions of the poor**" who were absent.
 - o He said "Our salvation can only come through the **farmer**."
- **Significance:** At one level, a statement of fact that nationalism was an **elite phenomenon**. At another level, a **statement of intent** to make nationalism more **representative of the Indian people**.
- December 1916, Lucknow Congress: a peasant from **Champaran (Bihar)** told him about the harsh treatment of peasants by **British indigo planters**.

Source/Box Notes: The BHU speech quotations are the chapter's evidence for Gandhiji's early view of nationalism as elite-dominated.

The Making and Unmaking of Non-cooperation (1917-1922)

Key Concepts & Flow

- **Local struggles:**
 - o **1917, Champaran:** security of tenure and freedom to cultivate crops of choice.
 - o **1918, Ahmedabad:** a labour dispute, with textile mill workers demanding better working conditions.
 - o **1918, Kheda:** peasants asked the state for **remission of taxes** after harvest failure.
 - o These marked him as a nationalist with **deep sympathy for the poor**, but they were **localised**.

- **1919, Rowlatt Act:**
 - Wartime **press censorship** and **detention without trial** were continued on the recommendation of a committee chaired by **Sir Sidney Rowlatt**.
 - Gandhiji called a countrywide campaign (**Rowlatt Satyagraha**), with a **bandh** in North and West India.
 - Protests were especially intense in **Punjab**, where men had served the British in the War.
 - April 1919: a British Brigadier ordered troops to fire on a nationalist meeting in Amritsar. The **Jallianwala Bagh massacre** killed **more than 400** people.
- The Rowlatt Satyagraha made him “a **truly national leader**”. He then called for **non-cooperation**, meaning a “renunciation of (all) voluntary association with the (British) Government”. Indians were to stop attending **schools, colleges and law courts** and to **not pay taxes**. If carried out effectively, **swaraj within a year**.
- He joined hands with the **Khilafat Movement** (restoration of the **Caliphate**, a symbol of **Pan-Islamism**, abolished by **Kemal Attaturk**).

Knitting a Popular Movement

- Hindus and Muslims were to jointly end colonial rule.
- Students left government institutions and lawyers boycotted courts.
- **396 strikes in 1921**, involving **600,000 workers**, with **seven million workdays** lost.
- Countryside: **hill tribes in northern Andhra** violated forest laws, **farmers in Awadh** did not pay taxes, and **peasants in Kumaun** refused to carry loads for officials.
- Many protests occurred **in defiance of local nationalist leadership**. People interpreted “non-cooperate” in ways that suited **their own interests**.
- Louis Fischer: non-cooperation was “**negative enough to be peaceful but positive enough to be effective... It was training for self-rule.**” It **shook the British Raj to its foundations** for the first time since the **Revolt of 1857**.
- **February 1922, Chauri Chaura (United Provinces):** peasants torched a **police station**, and several constables died. Gandhiji **called off the movement**: “No provocation can possibly justify (the) brutal murder of men who had been rendered defenceless”.
- **March 1922:** Gandhiji was arrested and charged with **sedition**. **Justice C.N. Broomfield** acknowledged that Gandhiji was “a great patriot and a leader” in the eyes of millions. The sentence was **six years’ imprisonment**.

Source/Box Notes

- **Khilafat box:** Movement of Indian Muslims (1919-1920) led by **Muhammad Ali and Shaukat Ali**. Demands: the Turkish Sultan/**Khalifa** to retain control over Muslim **sacred places** in the erstwhile **Ottoman empire**; **jazirat-ul-Arab** (Arabia, Syria, Iraq, Palestine) to remain under **Muslim sovereignty**; the Khalifa to have **sufficient territory** to defend the Islamic faith. The Congress supported it.
- **Fig. 11.4:** Foreign cloth collected for **bonfires** (July 1922), showing the **boycott of foreign cloth**.

A People’s Leader

Key Concepts & Flow

- By 1922 he had transformed nationalism from a movement of **professionals and intellectuals** into one including **peasants, workers and artisans**. This **redeemed the promise of his BHU speech**.
- People called him “**Mahatma**” because he **dressed like them, lived like them and spoke their language**.
- Other leaders wore **Western suits or Indian bandgala**. Gandhiji wore a **dhoti/loincloth** and spun on the **charkha** daily. Spinning broke the **caste boundary between mental and manual labour**.
- 1921: during a South India tour he **shaved his head** and adopted the loincloth. This symbolised **asceticism and abstinence**, opposed to the **consumerist culture** of the modern world.

- **Shahid Amin's study** traced his image among the peasants of **eastern Uttar Pradesh** through local press reports and **rumours**. He was known as "**Gandhi baba**", "**Gandhi Maharaj**" or simply "**Mahatma**", a **saviour** from high taxes and oppressive officials.
- Rumours: that the **King had sent him** to redress farmers' grievances, that his power was **superior to the English monarch's**, and that his opponents met misfortune.
- **Careful organisation:**
 - o New **Congress branches** were set up.
 - o **Praja Mandals** were established in the **princely states**.
 - o The nationalist message was spread in the **mother tongue**, not English.
 - o **Provincial committees** were based on **linguistic regions**, not the artificial boundaries of British India.
- **Supporters:** Businessmen and industrialists such as **G.D. Birla** supported the movement because the favours enjoyed by British competitors would end in free India. Peasants and industrialists followed him for different, even opposed, reasons.
- **Followers (1917-1922):** Mahadev Desai, Vallabhbhai Patel, J.B. Kripalani, Subhas Chandra Bose, Abul Kalam Azad, Jawaharlal Nehru, Sarojini Naidu, Govind Ballabh Pant, C. Rajagopalachari. They came from **different regions and religious traditions**.
- **After release (February 1924):** he promoted **khadi** and the **abolition of untouchability**. He was "as much a **social reformer** as a politician". He wanted Indians to get rid of **child marriage and untouchability**, cultivate **Hindu-Muslim harmony**, and become **self-reliant**.

Source/Box Notes

- **Source 1 (Charkha):** From *Young India* (13 Nov 1924; 17 March 1927). Gandhiji was critical of the **craze for labour-saving machinery** that leaves thousands jobless. He wanted wealth in "the hands of **all**" and not of the few. The charkha could give the poor **supplementary income** and **self-reliance**, and khaddar "regulates" machinery without destroying it.
- **Source 2 (Gorakhpur newspaper and rumours):** Crowds of **15,000-20,000** at stations on his 1921 tour, with **bhent (donations)** and **darshan**. The rumours reflect the **peasants' belief in him as a saviour with miraculous powers**, the structure of belief of the time.

The Salt Satyagraha: A Case Study (1928-1934)

Key Concepts & Flow

- **1928:** Gandhiji blessed the all-India agitation against the all-White **Simon Commission** and the **Bardoli** peasant satyagraha, but did not participate.
- **December 1929, Lahore Congress:** **Jawaharlal Nehru** elected President (passing of the baton to the **younger generation**), and **Purna Swaraj** (complete independence) proclaimed.
- **26 January 1930: "Independence Day"** observed with flag hoisting and constructive work such as **spinning, service of 'untouchables', Hindu-Muslim reunion, prohibition work**.
- **Why salt?** Salt was **indispensable in every household**, yet the state held a **monopoly** on manufacture and sale. People had to buy it at high prices, so the issue could mobilise **wider discontent**. This showed Gandhiji's **tactical wisdom**.
- **12 March 1930:** he began the march from his **Sabarmati ashram** to **Dandi**, reaching the sea **three weeks later**. By making a **fistful of salt** he became "a criminal in the eyes of the law". He had given **advance notice to Viceroy Lord Irwin**, who failed to grasp its significance. **Parallel salt marches** occurred elsewhere.
- **Other streams of protest:** peasants breached **forest laws**, factory workers struck, lawyers boycotted courts, and students boycotted government institutions. Nearly **60,000 arrested** after the march, including Gandhiji.
- At **Wasna village** he told the upper castes: "you must **serve untouchables...** Hindus, Muslims, Parsis and Sikhs will have to **unite**".

- **Time** magazine first mocked his “spindly frame” and then called him a “**Saint**” and “**Statesman**”.

Significance of the Salt March (three reasons)

1. It first brought Gandhiji to **world attention**, with wide European and American press coverage.
2. It was the first nationalist activity with **large-scale participation of women**. **Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay** persuaded Gandhiji not to restrict it to men.
3. It forced the British to realise that their **Raj would not last forever** and that they would have to **devolve some power to Indians**.

Dialogues: Round Table Conferences

- **First Round Table Conference (November 1930)**: held without the pre-eminent political leader, so “an **exercise in futility**”.
- **January 1931**: Gandhiji was released. **Gandhi-Irwin Pact (March 1931)**: civil disobedience called off, all prisoners released, salt manufacture allowed along the coast. **Radical nationalists criticised it** because no commitment to **political independence** was obtained, only talks towards it.
- **Second Round Table Conference (late 1931), London**: Gandhiji represented the Congress. His claim to represent all India was challenged by the **Muslim League** (Muslim minority), the **Princes** (the Congress had no stake in their territories), and **B.R. Ambedkar** (the Congress did not represent the **lowest castes**).
- It was **inconclusive**. Gandhiji returned and **resumed civil disobedience**. The new Viceroy, **Lord Willingdon**, was deeply unsympathetic.
- **Government of India Act, 1935**: promised some form of **representative government**. **1937 elections** (restricted franchise): Congress won **eight out of 11 provinces**.

Source/Box Notes

- **Source 3 (Why salt?)**: From *CWMG*, Vol. 49. Salt tax was at times **fourteen times its value**, and the government **destroyed salt** it could not sell profitably. Gandhiji called the monopoly a “**fourfold curse**”: it deprives people of an easy village industry, destroys property that nature produces in abundance, adds national expenditure, and levies a tax of more than **1,000 per cent** on a starving people.
- **Source 4 (Dandi speech, 5 April 1930)**: He credited the “**power of peace and non-violence**” for reaching Dandi. The government did not arrest the “**army of peace**” perhaps from fear of **world opinion**. “When a whole nation is roused and on the march **no leader is necessary**.”
- **Sources 5 & 6 (Separate electorates)**:
 - o *Gandhiji (Round Table Conference)*: separate electorates would ensure the Untouchables “**bondage in perpetuity**”, perpetuate the **stigma**, and what is needed is the **destruction of untouchability**. (Fig. 11.9 caption: he feared they would be **segregated** from caste Hindus.)
 - o *Ambedkar (Writings and Speeches, Vol. 9)*: the Depressed Classes are **economically dependent** on high-caste Hindus and socially branded. **Some share of political power** is “a **paramount necessity**” for protection.
- **Fig. 11.8**: Congress leaders at Allahabad after Gandhiji’s January 1931 release.

Quit India and the Road to Independence (1939-1947)

Key Concepts & Flow

- **September 1939**: Second World War began. Gandhiji and Nehru were critical of **Hitler and the Nazis**. The Congress offered support if Britain promised **independence after the war**. The offer was **refused**, and the **Congress ministries resigned (October 1939)**.
- **1940-41**: individual satyagrahas.

- **March 1940:** the **Muslim League** demanded **autonomy for Muslim-majority areas**. Politics became a **three-way struggle** between the Congress, the Muslim League and the British.
- **Churchill** was a “diehard imperialist”. **1942, Cripps Mission:** talks broke down when the Congress insisted that the Viceroy first appoint an **Indian as Defence Member** of his Executive Council.
- **August 1942, Quit India:**
 - o Gandhiji’s **third major movement**.
 - o He was jailed at once, but **younger activists** organised strikes and **sabotage**. **Jayaprakash Narayan** and other socialist Congressmen were active in the **underground resistance**.
 - o “**Independent**” governments were proclaimed in **Satara (west)** and **Medinipur (east)**.
 - o It took **more than a year** to suppress.
 - o It was “genuinely a **mass movement**”, especially energising the young.
 - o Meanwhile, the **Muslim League** expanded its influence, notably in **Punjab and Sind**.
- **June 1944:** Gandhiji was released and held meetings with **Jinnah**.
- **1945:** a **Labour government** in Britain committed to granting independence. Viceroy **Lord Wavell** convened Congress-League talks.
- **Early 1946:** provincial elections. The Congress swept the **General** category and the League won an overwhelming majority of **reserved Muslim seats**. “The **political polarisation was complete**.”
- **Summer 1946, Cabinet Mission:** failed to get agreement on a **federal system**. Jinnah called for **Direct Action Day (16 August 1946)** to press the demand for **Pakistan**, and riots broke out in **Calcutta** and spread to Bengal, Bihar, the United Provinces and the Punjab.
- **February 1947:** **Mountbatten** replaced Wavell and announced that British India would be **freed but divided**. Formal transfer of power: **15 August**.

Source/Box Notes

- **Satara box (1943):** Rooted in the **non-Brahman movement**, which opposed the caste system and landlordism. Younger leaders set up a **parallel government (prati sarkar)** with **volunteer corps (seba dals)** and **village units (tufan dals)**, ran **people’s courts**, and organised **constructive work**. Dominated by **kunbi peasants** and supported by **dalits**, it functioned until the **1946 elections**, despite repression and later **Congress disapproval**.
- **Fig. 11.13:** Nehru and Patel represented the **socialist** and the **conservative** tendencies within the Congress, and Gandhiji often **mediated** between them.

The Last Heroic Days (1947-1948)

Key Concepts & Flow

- **15 August 1947:** Gandhiji was in **Calcutta** and marked the day with a **24-hour fast**. Freedom had come at an “unacceptable price”.
- Per biographer **D.G. Tendulkar**, he visited **hospitals and refugee camps**, appealing for peace and fellowship.
- A Congress resolution (initiated by Gandhiji and Nehru) on the “**rights of minorities**”: the party never accepted the “**two-nation theory**”. India would be “a **democratic secular State** where all citizens enjoy full rights... irrespective of the religion”.
- Many scholars call the months after Independence his “**finest hour**”. He moved from Bengal to **Delhi**, where refugees disrupted his meetings.
- **20 January 1948:** an attempt on his life. **30 January 1948:** shot dead at his **daily prayer meeting** by **Nathuram Godse**.
- **Tributes:** from **George Orwell** and **Albert Einstein**. *Time* compared his martyrdom to **Abraham Lincoln’s**: a bigoted Hindu killed him for believing that **friendship was possible between Indians of different faiths**.

Source/Box Notes: **Fig. 11.15** is a popular print in which Gandhiji is **deified** as the **unifying force**, blessing Nehru and Patel standing on either side of his pyre.

Knowing Gandhi: Sources for the Historian

Key Concepts & Flow

- **6.1 Public voice and private scripts:**
 - o **Speeches** give the public voice and **private letters** give private thoughts.
 - o The **private-public distinction often breaks down**. Letters may be shaped by awareness of future publication.
 - o Gandhiji published letters in his journal ***Harijan***. Nehru edited ***A Bunch of Old Letters***.
- **6.2 Framing a picture (Autobiographies):**
 - o They are **retrospective accounts written from memory**.
 - o They show how the author wants to be viewed. Historians must see “what the author does not tell us”, including **wilful or unwitting acts of forgetting**.
- **6.3 Through police eyes (Government records):**
 - o **Fortnightly Reports** of the **Home Department**.
 - o They often expressed what higher officials **wanted to believe**.
 - o They dismissed the Salt March as a “**drama**” or “**antic**” but also betrayed **anxiety**.
- **6.4 From newspapers:**
 - o They are **not unprejudiced**, since owners had their own **political opinions and world views**.
 - o A **London newspaper** reported differently from an **Indian nationalist paper**.
 - o Reports reflect the **fears and anxieties of officials**. The more the state watched, “the more it **worried about the basis of its rule**”.

Source/Box Notes

- **Source 7 (A Bunch of Old Letters, 1936):** Context: Nehru’s **socialist** leanings, a rift between **socialists and conservatives** (Rajendra Prasad, Patel), and Gandhiji’s role as **mediator**.
 - o *Prasad (1 July 1936)*: complained that Nehru acted as “mouthpiece of the minority” and that the conservatives were treated as “persons whose time is over”.
 - o *Nehru (5 July)*: felt “weak in body and troubled in mind”; defended his socialist views.
 - o *Gandhiji (15 July)*: “Keep it on (the crown of thorns), though the head be bruised.” He urged Nehru to see it “in a lighter vein”.
 - o Shows how **Congress ideals developed**, Gandhiji’s role as **mediator and moral anchor**, and the internal functioning of the Congress.
- **Source 8 (Fortnightly Reports, March-April 1930):** Reports from provinces (Madras, Bengal, Bihar and Orissa, Central Provinces, United Provinces, Punjab). They say the march was “**theatrical**”, that meetings “excite little or no interest”, and that the **peasantry was busy with rabi harvest** and **students with exams**, yet they also note **ladies attending in increasing numbers**, open **defiance of the Salt Act** in the United Provinces (Agra, Cawnpore, Benaras, etc.), and **Nehru’s arrest (14 April)**. This shows the **gap between official perception and reality**.
- **Fig. 11.17:** Popular print showing Gandhiji as the central figure in the “**tree of nationalism**”, with other leaders and sages around him.