

FREEDOM STRUGGLE IN DELHI ROWLATT SATYAGRAHA TO CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE MOVEMENT

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The genesis of freedom struggle in Delhi can be traced to the Great Revolt of 1857. The flames which lit in Meerut on 10 May 1857 reached Delhi the next day and engulfed the entire city. The soldiers proclaimed Bahadur Shah as Emperor of India. In the resultant violence many Europeans and Indian Christians were killed. By September 1857 the Britishers were able to suppress the revolt but the cruelty perpetrated by them was never forgotten by the people, who had to stay out of their houses for days and months.

The Delhi Durbar of 1876, the formation of Indian National Congress in 1885, the second Delhi Durbar of 1903, the partition of Bengal in 1905, the change of Capital from Calcutta to Delhi in 1912, the hurling of bomb on Lord Hardinge in 1912 were some of the major events in the history of Delhi which contributed in preparing the base for the freedom struggle in the subsequent decades.

The transfer of capital in 1911 turned Delhi into a center of political activity. It gained in stature and the areas around looked up to it for guidance. Naturally, this caused a lot of anxiety to the British rulers even in far away districts of Multan and Gujarat.

The period of one and half decades starting with Rowlatt Satyagraha in 1919 and ending with Civil Disobedience Movement in 1934 however, constitutes the most important phase of the freedom struggle in India and also in Delhi. The enactment of Rowlatt Act in March 1919 was the most vital event of Indian freedom struggle. The Act was enacted by the British to contain the violent activities of the terrorist groups of the country.

Gandhi emerged as the most dominant leader of the freedom struggle in the wake of Rowlatt Satyagraha. Prior to the Satyagraha, Gandhi was little known and enjoyed little political support in the country. In fact, he was not even recognized as a leader of Indian National Congress. The political awakening in the country in general and Delhi in particular and emergence of Gandhi as a mass leader were two principal factors which directed the course of freedom struggle in the subsequent years and ultimately brought freedom to the country.

The Non-cooperation Movement in the early twenties was again the direct outcome of Rowlatt Satyagraha. Gandhi led the movement on the ground prepared by the political awakening during the Satyagraha. The coming together of the Khilafat and Non-cooperation Movements lent great strength to the latter. If the country had not been caught in the unfortunate communal divide after the suspension of Non-cooperation Movement perhaps, India would have gained its independence some two decades earlier.

Though the battle for freedom did not progress on the desired lines, the discontent of the people forced the British Government to take some remedial measures to assuage

their feelings. The appointment of Simon Commission was the outcome of this thought process. It is notable that this action was pre-poned by two years keeping in view the political opposition in the country. It was a prudent measure but the constitution of the Commission without any Indian representation ensured its failure. However, the visit of the Commission to India aroused public discontent and laid ground for a fresh bout of struggle.

Subsequently, when British Government refused to implement the report of the Commission as per the expectations of Indian leadership the unrest again surfaced. The Indian communal divide has to be blamed for this as much as the British insincerity to grant dominion status to India forthwith.

Finding the Government unresponsive to people's aspirations, Gandhi launched the Civil Disobedience Movement which stirred the country as never before. It lasted from 1930 to 1934 and found manifestation in salt satyagraha, boycott, no-tax campaign and *swadeshi* movement. There was some thaw in these activities after the Gandhi Irwin Pact and during the Congress participation in Round Table Conference in 1931, but owing to failures the movement again picked up and lasted till 1934.

The fifteen years of freedom struggle beginning with Rowlatt Satyagraha in 1919 and ending with Civil Disobedience Movement in 1934 did not usher in independence but it did firmly laid the ground for it. All major events related to freedom struggle viz. the Rowlatt Satyagraha, Khilafat Movement, Non-cooperation Movement, Simon Commission and Civil Disobedience Movement occurred during this period and these finally led to the independence of the country. These aspects of the freedom struggle, in so far as they relate to Delhi, have not been investigated by scholars in sufficient measure and need therefore, a thorough study.

The objective of this study is to investigate the impact of the said events on the course of freedom struggle in Delhi as they unfolded over the years. I have tried to study the subject with the help of original records available in the National Archives of India and the Delhi Archives. The study has been divided into nine chapters with a view to examine the various facets of the freedom struggle in Delhi from Rowlatt Satyagraha to Civil Disobedience Movement. The introduction deals with the political background of freedom struggle. The first chapter entitled 'Road to Rowlatt Satyagraha' covers the events leading to it. The other chapters relate to Rowlatt Satyagraha, Khilafat Movement, Non-cooperation Movement, Communal Politics, Simon Commission and Constitutional Reforms, Revolutionary Phase, Civil Disobedience Movement and the Role of Delhi Villages, as these aspects are considered fundamental to the freedom struggle in Delhi.

It is pertinent to mention that the battle which started with the Rowlatt Satyagraha continued unhindered till the suspension of the Civil Disobedience Movement in 1934. Though the communal virus occasionally slackened and disturbed its direction, the struggle went on. It is notable that in this struggle the contribution of Delhi Villages, Delhi revolutionaries and Delhi women has not been generally highlighted. The *no-tax* campaign launched by Delhi villages was a matter of grave concern for the Government. The revolutionaries carried on their violent activities despite police repression. The women of Delhi enthusiastically participated in boycott agitation and this infact led to drastic fall in the import of foreign goods. Women freedom fighters suffered great hardships and many of them were imprisoned in Lahore jail.