

## **Dandi March and India's Freedom Struggle**

### **Prahlad Singh Patel**

The historic Dandi March played a role of great significance in our freedom struggle. This is the reason why the special day marking the beginning of Dandi March was chosen to launch the grand celebrations of 75 years of India's Independence. The Dandi March has been the most influential and inspirational movement in the Indian freedom struggle. If we look at the events after the Dandi Yatra, it certainly brought colonial rule of the British under pressure. Through this movement, Mahatma Gandhi once again introduced the power of truth and non-violence to the world. The tradition of making salt in India has existed since ancient times. The traditional salt making has been carried out by the farmers, who were also called salt farmers. In Bihar and many other provinces, this work was left to a special community. Gradually, the technique of making salt had started to improve, but over time, salt was also beginning to become a commercial item.

In a letter to Lord Irwin on 2<sup>nd</sup> March 1930, Gandhiji says that politically, our position is no better than that of slaves, the roots of our culture have been hollowed out. He further writes that this letter is not intended as a threat. It is just a simple and sacred duty of a Satyagrahi. Therefore, I am sending it through a young English friend who is an advocate of the Indian view, who has full faith in non-violence and who has been perhaps sent to me for this purpose only by the Almighty. His name was Reginald Reynolds. This young man had lived with Gandhiji in the Ashram and had faith in Gandhiji's philosophy. In the letter to Lord Irwin, Gandhiji had informed about the decision to break the salt law which he felt was the biggest injustice to the poor.

The Dandi March started from Sabarmati Ashram on 12<sup>th</sup> March as per schedule. At exactly six thirty in the morning, Gandhiji left the ashram with 79 followers and started the march. They completed 241 miles up to Dandi in 24 days. During this period, Gandhiji used to address the gatherings during the yatra. His speeches were successful in influencing the minds of the people against the policies of the British.

During the March, it was clearly spelled out that the people should keep their attention focused on the Salt Law itself and at the same time it was cautioned that Civil Disobedience would not be resorted to before Gandhiji's action to break the salt law at Dandi. With the permission of Gandhiji, a pledge was written for the satyagrahis. The content of this letter stated that I am ready to go to jail and I will be happy to bear whatever hardships and punishments will be meted out to me as part of this movement. On the night of 4<sup>th</sup> April 1930, the padyatra entered Dandi. Hundreds of Gandhian Satyagrahis gathered on the Dandi coast in the morning of April 5 wearing Khadi. A press briefing was also organised at Dandi. Sarojini Naidu, Dr. Sumant, Abbas Tyabji, Mithuben Petit joined the Dandi March. In his address, Gandhiji gave information about breaking the salt law next day in the morning. Gandhiji broke the salt law by raising fistful of salt on the Dandi coast in the morning of 6<sup>th</sup> April. He was detained under British law.

Prior to his arrest, Gandhiji had clearly sent this message that Swaraj cannot be sustained without sacrifice. Therefore, it is possible that people will have to make unlimited sacrifices. A true sacrifice is one in which one side suffers without resorting to retaliation. Describing the Dandi Yatra, the reporter of the Telegraph, London Ashmead Bartlett wrote, "Who knew that this event will become historical in the future?" Is the arrest of a Mahatmaa small thing? No doubt, Gandhiji has emerged as a Mahatma and a divine man in the eyes of crores of Indians today, Bartlett wrote.

This was the most important turn in India's freedom struggle, which emerged from the seeds of the Dandi March. People now understood that non-cooperation is not only an idea but a well thought out plan for resistance to the British rule. With Gandhiji's visit to Dandi, a wave of nationalism swept across India. The symbolic Dandi Yatra created a sentiment in favour of freedom among the people. Gandhiji's Dandi March still shows the way to take the right decision in difficult times and highlights the importance of sacrifice to the people.

After about 91 years, I shall be treading on the same soil in a padyatra on the occasion of 75 years of Amrit Utsav of independence. But there is a sea change in the situation of the country between then and now. Our Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi says that the journey of India will now be defined by self-reliance and self-respect. We will no more be seekers. Our image on the world canvas will be that of a contributor. In this hour of crisis across the globe, we have delivered medicines or vaccines to various countries. That shows that our age old belief in "VasudhaivaKutumbakam" is still alive. We want to speak the language of labor and toil so that our future generations are carved out in strength. The Prime Minister envisions that when the country celebrates the centenary (100<sup>th</sup> year) of Independence, then our achievements and cultural glory should be an outshining example before the world.

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