

# **GANDHI-IRWIN PACT**

## **MARCH 5, 1931**

Dr. Jijo Jayaraj

- ▶ During the course of the Civil Disobedience movement the Simon Commission Report had been published and to consider its recommendations the First Round Table Conference was summoned in London, in November 1930.
- ▶ The Congress boycotted the Conference, but other parties such as the Liberals, the Muslim League, the Hindu Mahasabha and the Princely States attended it.
- ▶ The absence of the Congress, however, rendered the conference pointless. Some of the Liberal leaders like Tej Bahadur Sapru, V.S. Sastri and M.R. Jayakar, on their return from the Conference appealed to Mahatma Gandhi to seek an interview with the Viceroy.
- ▶ To create appropriate conditions for talks between the Viceroy and the Congress leaders, other Congress leaders were released and Viceroy Lord Irwin invited the Congress for talks.
- ▶ The Congress authorised Gandhiji to negotiate a settlement with the Viceroy. After prolonged Gandhi-Irwin talks an agreement, known as the Gandhi-Irwin Pact, was signed between the two on March 5, 1931.

# The highlights of this agreement were

- i. On behalf of the Congress, Gandhiji agreed to discontinue the Civil Disobedience movement.
- ii. The Congress agreed to join the Second Round Table Conference for drafting the constitutional reforms on the basis of: (a) Federation, (b) Responsibility and (c) Safeguards or reservations in the interest of India for such matters as defence, external affairs, minorities and the financial credit of India.
- iii. The Viceroy agreed to withdraw ordinances promulgated in connection with the Civil Disobedience movement.
- iv. The Government agreed to release the agitators arrested in connection with the movement and to return properties confiscated on account of the movement.
- v. The Government agreed to permit the people living within a certain distance of the seashore • to collect or manufacture sea salt free of duty
- vi. The Government agreed to permit peaceful picketing of liquor and opium shops.

## Second Phase of the Civil Disobedience Movement—(1932-1934)

- ▶ Meanwhile Lord Willingdon had succeeded Irwin; as the Viceroy and he flouted many provisions of the Gandhi-Irwin Pact.
- ▶ On his return to India, Mahatma Gandhi witnessed Government repression in full swing.
- ▶ Most of the important Congress leaders were also arrested.
- ▶ The Congress Working Committee, which met on January 1, 1932, therefore decided to resume the Civil Disobedience Movement if the Government did not make some positive gestures.
- ▶ The Government continuing with its repressive measures, the movement was resumed in early 1932.

- ▶ The Government declared the Congress as an illegal body, and arrested most of the leading Congress leaders, including Jawaharlal Nehru and Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan. Nearly 90,000 men, women and children were arrested for participating in the movement.
- ▶ The movement was gaining strength when it was suddenly side-tracked, with the announcement by the British Prime Minister Ramsay Macdonald of his infamous Communal Award on August 16, 1932.

# Communal Award and Poona Pact

- ▶ The Second Round Table Conference having failed to resolve the questions of electoral representation to different religious communities and the depressed classes, authorised the British Prime Minister to resolve it.
- ▶ Accordingly, Prime Minister Ramsay Macdonald announced his 'Communal Award' on August 16, 1932.
- ▶ According to this Award the Muslim, European and Sikh voters would elect their candidates by voting in separate communal electorates.
- ▶ There was also provision for separate electorate for the Depressed Classes, officially described as Scheduled Castes, as a separate community.
- ▶ Macdonald, however, promised to accept any alternative scheme mutually agreed upon by the Hindus and the Depressed Classes.

# Gandhi's Fast unto Death and Podna Pact— September 25, 1932:

- ▶ At the Round Table Conference, Mahatma Gandhi had strenuously opposed the idea of a separate electorate for Depressed Classes and had declared that he would resist it with his life.
- ▶ True to his resolve Gandhiji wrote to the British Prime Minister on August 18, 1932 that he would commence the fast on September 20 in the Yervada prison, where he was lodged and it would cease only if the scheme was reviewed and the common electorate restored.



## Poona Pact:

- ▶ Gandhiji's fast caused great alarm and anxiety all over the country and Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya summoned a conference of various castes and political parties, including Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, the leader of the Depressed Classes League.
- ▶ The conference finally arrived at an agreement in Poona on September 25, 1932, the sixth day of Gandhiji's fast.
- ▶ A common electorate of all the Hindus was agreed upon, subject to two conditions:
- ▶ First, 148 seats in different Provincial Legislatures were reserved for the Depressed Classes in place of 71 as provided in the Communal Award, Secondly, 18 per cent of the seats in the Central Legislature were reserved for the Depressed Classes.



# The End of the Civil Disobedience Movement

- ▶ In the background of the Communal Award and Gandhi's fast unto death, the Civil Disobedience movement lost its momentum.
- ▶ After the Poona Pact Mahatma Gandhi lost interest in the movement and was fully engrossed in the anti-untouchability movement, which led to the foundation of the ***Harijan Sevak Sangh***.

- ▶ The Congressmen, however, continued the movement under increasing British repression.
- ▶ The Delhi Congress session (April 1932) and the Calcutta Congress session (March 1933) were held while the official ban on the Congress was still in force.
- ▶ On May 8, 1933 Mahatma Gandhi announced a self-purification fast for 21 days for purification of himself and his associates "for greater vigilance and watchfulness in connection with the Harijan cause".
- ▶ The Government, keeping in view the nature and object of his fast, released him from prison.
- ▶ Immediately after his release Mahatma Gandhi recommended to the President of the Congress suspension of the movement for a month or six weeks. Accordingly the movement was suspended for about twelve weeks.

- ▶ During these twelve weeks the mass Civil Disobedience movement virtually died out. In its place Mahatma Gandhi launched Individual Civil Disobedience on August 1, 1933.
- ▶ After a brief listless progress, this movement, too, died down and by early 1934 was no longer in effect. In January 1934, the great earthquake in Bihar drew everyday's attention away from the political movements.
- ▶ In October 1934, Gandhiji decided to withdraw himself from active politics to devote all his time to the cause of Harijans.

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Thank you