



## A Challenge to British: Civil Disobedience Movement

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### ABSTRACT

In this article I discussed about the situation arose after failure of the non-cooperation movement and preparation of another movement. In this regard after effects of newly formed various organizations and arrival of the Simon Commission to check the impact of Government of India Act-1919 through Simon Commission well explained. Provocation to organize another movement, death of Lala Lajpat Rai, arrival of Simon Commission are the factors that are described nicely. Also covered support provided by the Textile Labour Association (Ahmedabad-1918), (All India Trade Union Congress-1920), and the Worker's and Peasant's Parties (1927) to sharpen the Civil Disobedience Movement. In this article I have also briefed about Nehru Report, all Parties Conferences of 1928, Jinnah's demand of 14 points, Calcutta A.I.C.C. Session-1928, A.I.S.A. (All India Spinners Association) etc. I have also mentioned about Background of Civil Disobedience Movement, A.I.C.C. Session of Lahore-1929 and demand for Poorn Swaraj including the Reasons of Civil Disobedience Movement with Efforts of Gandhiji to Stop the Conflict. The 11 points of demands of Gandhiji is well written. The starting Planning of Civil Disobedience Movement and Rules of the Journey, Rules of Dandi March is described in detail. The Commencement of the Dandi March, other Activities to Strengthen the Movement in Various Parts of India, Celebration of National Week and Arrest of Gandhiji and its impact, Government Repression on Satyagrahis are part of this article. End of



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the movement and compromise between Gandhiji and Erwin took place  
is also well covered

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### **Introduction:**

It is well known that Gandhiji came from South Africa on 9<sup>th</sup> January 1915. On that time W.W.-II was going on. He cooperated in that as British authority approached him. He agreed but asked for decision making power after war, for which Government gave node. But when he was refused the promise made by British then he started the non-cooperation movement, which was called off due to some reasons. This gave the way to extremist to form the Hindustan Republican Association (H.R.A.) in October 1924, Punjab Naujawan Bharat Sabha (1926) and Hindustan Socialist Republican Association (H.S.R.A.) on 17<sup>th</sup> December, 1928 at Lahore by Bhagat Singh. Even women wings also developed for national movement. The true example is seen during Chittagong Armoury Raid in which young women participated shoulder to shoulder with men under the leadership of the Surya Sen. Undoubtedly, these movements gave good boost to the national movement and enforced the leaders to demand for the Purna Swaraj. But the main problem was occurred when the Government of India Act-1919 was implemented and Simon Commission came to check its impact. It is known as 'All-White Commission' as there was no Indian representative in this Commission, hence Indian leaders opposed it. When on 30<sup>th</sup> October, 1928, the Simon Commission reached Lahore and Lala Lajpat Rai marched against it, he was beaten up by sticks and lathis. He was badly injured and died after a fortnight. At this time Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel's Bardoli Satayagrah, (1928), Delhi Pact by Gandhiji and its opposition and the Karanchi Session of the Congress (29<sup>th</sup> March, 1929) regarding the Fundamental Rights and the National Economic Policy Programme were the main events that have took place. These days were of extreme care as the movements were entering their adolescent age and a lot of internal changes were taking place. But again, leaving aside the violent approach Gandhiji planned to organise another movement. To sharpen the Textile Labour Association (Ahmedabad-1918), (All India Trade Union Congress-1920), and the Worker's and Peasant's Parties (1927) started playing active role. Thus, after incident of Simon Commission the Civil Disobedience Movement (1930) was started.

All Parties Conferences were held in February, May and August 1928 to finalize an urgent needed, Government Dominion Status for India. As the proceedings of the meetings were prepared by Motilal Nehru hence the report is popularly known as the Nehru Report. But Jinnah and other Muslim League members did not agree with this report. On this issue, Motilal Nehru and other secular leaders found themselves on crossroads because: if they agree on Muslim's communal demand then Hindu



communalists will not support and vice-versa. Thus, the ultimate result was that Jinnah withdrew his support but suggested minimum demand of 14 points according to the population of that time in N.W.F.P. and East Bengal. They were also disagreed by some leaders.

**The Calcutta A.I.C.C. Session-1928:** Being in dilemma, Motilal requested Gandhiji to attend annual meeting of A.I.C.C. in Calcutta as he was on all India tour to preach for constructive works. Gandhiji was of opinion that now India should develop her own strength. His next step was to demand the planning of the Constitution but the communal violence between Hindu-Muslim took place because of reserve constituencies for Muslims according to the Nehru Report. So, he dropped the idea to attend the A.I.C.C. meeting of Calcutta. Another reason was that Swadeshi exhibition of mill made clothes was organised and the A.I.S.A. (All India Spinners Association) was not invited. Simultaneously, in this situation, he did not want that the organisers should be in an embarrassing condition in Calcutta. Though, with the effort of B.C. Roy, Khadi was included in exhibition and Gandhiji agreed to attend the exhibition for which he refused in the beginning. Like this, the desire of Motilal Nehru fulfilled. But, before gearing-up of the Congress, a high voltage drama took place that over 50,000 workers entered and occupied the exhibition ground. In that ground, the workers passed the resolution of the Complete Independence for India, while Nehru's report demanded the Dominion Status only to avoid the communal enmity. Gandhiji was also of the same opinion. Hence, in this meeting on 26<sup>th</sup> December, 1928, a resolution was moved to adopt the Nehru Report in front of the Subjects Committee with the warning that if the British Government did not accept the report by 31<sup>st</sup> December, 1930 Congress will restart non-violent Non-Cooperation against all the Government activities. But, after two days Subjects Committee advanced the date to 31<sup>st</sup> December 1929. The resolution was passed by 118 votes to 45. But another problem occurred in this annual session of the Congress when S.C. Bose and J.L. Nehru joined with other supporters and demanded not less than 'Purna Swaraj'.

**Background of Civil Disobedience Movement:** In Britain, the general election was conducted in May 1929. In these elections the Labour Party got the majority and came to power. The Ramsay Mac Donald was elected as the Premier of the Britain. He appointed Lord Irwin as Viceroy of India. After taking over the charge the new Premier Mr. Mac Donald declared in Conference of Commonwealth's Countries of Labour Party that: *'I hope that within a period of months rather than years, there will be another dominion added to the commonwealth of nations, a Dominion of another race, a Dominion which will find respect as an equal within the commonwealth, I refer to India'*. This statement opened the door of hope to India's freedom. The Viceroy Lord Irwin was called to London for consultation about India. After return from London, he announced on 31<sup>st</sup> October, 1929: *'I am authorized on behalf of His*



*Majesty's Government to state clearly that in their judgement it is implicit in the Declaration of 1917 that the natural issue of India's progress as there contemplated, is the attainment of dominion status.* He also promised that a Round Table Conference will be organised soon to discuss about provision of the Constitution after submission of Simon Commission report.

There was discussion in the House of Lords on 5<sup>th</sup> November, 1929 on the demand of the Indians which raised the question on British Government. Gandhiji met Mr. Irwin on 23<sup>rd</sup> December, 1929 who said that: *'he is in no position to give the assurance about their demands'*. Further, he told that: *'it is not necessary that Round Table Conference will be called to establish completely responsible government'*. By this Congress leaders became hopeless but this hopelessness gave energy to them which was seen during Civil Disobedience Movement

**A.I.C.C. Session of Lahore-1929 and demand for Poorn Swaraj:** The Session of A.I.C.C. held in Lahore. Dr. Saifuddin Kitchlew was chairman of Reception Committee. In the opening session of the Congress on 29<sup>th</sup> December 1929, in his welcome speech he demanded a good debate on Civil Disobedience so that peasants and workers can be satisfied. He was of the opinion that if the peasants and workers joined the movement, they can well-organize the masses and Individual Civil Disobedience in selected areas. He said: *'my appeal is... to Mahatmaji. He is the one leader in whom the masses have faith. He is the one leader who commands nation-wide respect and affection. I appeal to Mahatmaji to lead us in our struggle for..... National Independence'*. Significantly he added that: *'there should be no suspension of Civil Disobedience like that which Gandhi imposed after Chauri-Chaura violence in 1922, which severely disappointed the workers and the country and played havoc with morale'*. This was the session in which J.L. Nehru demanded the 'Complete Independence' with economic and political boycotts of the Government. Gandhiji moved the resolution of independence and Civil Disobedience which was forwarded by Motilal Nehru. After a long debate of two and a half hours with some amendments and suggestions in resolutions, it was accepted. In addition to this Madan Mohan Malviya suggested to organise an All-Parties Conference to take decision to attend the Round Table Conference. But Subhash Chandra Bose was in favour of the movement and proposed to involve the peasants, workers and youngsters. He also advised to go for general strikes during the movement and form the parallel Government. J.M. Sen Gupta and Vishwanath from Andhra supported the resolution because there was no alternate of Gandhiji. Even he asked: *'Do you have in India today any other leader who can lead the country to victory than Mahatma Gandhi?'* The members said: 'No-No'. Gandhiji, advocated Civil Disobedience for complete independence. Initially, he wanted to unite scattered Indians through Satyagraha and develop the qualities to show the strength to the Government. This strength was visible



when the tri-colour flag was unfurled on the bank of the river Ravi, at midnight on 31<sup>st</sup> December and declared that the Congress will organise a public meeting all over the country on 26<sup>th</sup> January at which the Independence Pledge would be taken by one and all. Everybody took the pledge in their respected languages and hoisted the tri-colour to attain the Poorna Swaraj.

**Reasons of Civil Disobedience Movement:** When the ultimatum given up to 31<sup>st</sup> January by Gandhiji was ignored by Lord Erwin, the Congress Committee held a meeting in Mid-February of 1930 in Sabarmati Ashram. The Committee chose him unopposed leader to launch and led the Civil Disobedience Movement from wherever and whenever he wants. In the last week of February Gandhiji said: *'There is no article like salt outside water by taxing which the State can reach even the starving millions, the sick, the maimed and the utterly helpless. The tax constitutes therefore the most inhuman toll tax the ingenuity of man can devise.'*

The following were the reasons that Gandhiji started the Civil Disobedience Movement against the British Government.

- i) By not accepting Nehru report the Government did not leave any other option except to go for Civil Disobedience Movement at any way, ii) Because of economic depression, the inflation rate of commodities became very high and the peasants were unable to purchase ration and clothes iii) The businessmen and industrialists were also dissatisfied. The Government devalued the rupee in terms of Ponds for the benefit of the Britishers. Hence these groups also started participating in movements against the government iv) Because of pitiable economic condition of labour, the strikes became order of the day. Many labourers put behind the bars because of agitations and strike v) The social condition was so explosive that it was ready to burst,

**Efforts of Gandhiji to Stop the Conflict:** In the Session of 1929, the Congress Committee authorised Gandhiji to start the Civil Disobedience Movement. In this connection, he puts 11 demands before the Government and clearly said through an article in Young India that if the government accepts these demands, then we will postpone the Movement. He explained his plans to all and gave the directions for future action. The 11 demands of Gandhiji were: i) Salt Tax to be abolished, ii) Complete prohibition of liquor iii) Imposed custom duty on foreign-clothes, iv) Rate of inflation should be reduced to 1 Ceiling and 4 Pence v) Salary of higher posts should be reduced by 50%, vi) Reduce the military expenditure by 5%, vii) Abolish the C.I.D. or its control should be given to the public, viii) The law resolute that the Indian harbours should be kept safe for Indian Ships only, ix) Except the people, charged for murders or



attempt to murders, all other political prisoners should be relieved and those are booked under section 144-A and 1818 Regulation Act should be freed. Further, all Indians those are exiled should be called back, x) Arms Licence should be issued to the public for self-defence xi) Reduce the land revenue rate to half and it should have control of the council.

Gandhiji said: *'I prescribe only one condition, viz., let our pledge of truth and non-violence as the only means for the attainment of Swaraj should be faithfully kept.'*

Later, on 2<sup>nd</sup> March, he wrote a letter to the Viceroy and sent it through his friend Mr. Rayold to stop the conflict and compromise to the demand of the Congress but Lord Irwin did not agree and he wrote back in brief and in regret expression that: *'Gandhi would be contemplating a course of action which is clearly bound to involve violation of the law and danger to the public peace.'* For this Gandhi replied: *'I asked the bread on knees but I got stone'*. Further Gandhiji said: *'I shall proceed with such co-workers of the Ashram as I can take, to disregard the provisions of the salt laws. It is, I know open to you to frustrate my design by arresting me. I hope that there will be tens of thousands ready, in a disciplined manner, to take up the work after me, and, in the act of disobeying the Salt Act to lay themselves open to the penalties of a law.'*

**Planning of Civil Disobedience Movement and Rules of the Journey:** After getting a letter of blunt reply from the Viceroy, Mahatma Gandhi in his prayer meeting of the 5<sup>th</sup> March, 1930 fixed the date of Civil Disobedience campaign: 12<sup>th</sup> March 1930. He said to the Satyagrahis to get ready within these 7 days because: *'We shall march in the direction of Pethapur.'* But a crowd reached to Ashram on 10<sup>th</sup> March also to whom he said: *'Though the battle is to begin in a couple of days, how is it that you can come here quite fearlessly? I do not think any one of you would be here if you had to face rifle-shots or bombs. But you have no fear of rifle-shots or bombs? Why?'* The crowd gave their nod by lifting the hands in his favour. Gandhiji drafted some rules of journey that were as follows:

**Rules of Dandi March:** Gandhiji instructed the Satyagrahis to follow certain rules and regulations during their march on foot.

- i) The Satyagrahis will reach at 8:00 a.m. and he will take them between 10.00-10:30 a.m. ii) The Satyagrahis will stay in clean shaded place at noon or night and no room should be expected iii) The Satyagrahis will eat whatever simplest food provided by villagers to them by volunteers, cooked or uncooked. It may be roti or rotla or khichri, vegetables and milk or curds. If sweets presented, would be declined. For himself he said 'for me goat's milk, if available, all three times



(morning, noon and night) and raisins or dates with three lemons are sufficient, iv) Gandhiji told that Satyagrahis will have their own bedding so villagers should arrange only clean places for rest v) No Satyagrahi will expect any expense on account of betal-leaves, betal nuts or tea from villagers.

**The Commencement of the Dandi March:** Gandhiji with 78 Congress volunteers was ready to begin the historic march to Dandi village from Sabarmati Ashram to breach the law of salt. The volunteers were from almost every region and religion of India. On 12<sup>th</sup> March, 1930 at 6:10 a.m. Gandhi came out from his room very calmly accompanied by Prabhashankar Patani, Mahadev Desai and Pyarelal, his secretary. He completed his daily prayers, looked at his watch and it was exactly 6:30 a.m. He took a look to Ashram and started his march with seventy-eight volunteers. As the news spread early morning, this day was celebrated all over India. In Calcutta between shouts of ‘Gandhiji ki jai’, J.M. Sen Gupta appealed to all men and women to enroll them as volunteers of Civil Disobedience Movement. In Bombay a meeting was held under the president ship of K.F. Nariman. He told the audience to get ‘ready to fight’. In south the public meeting was organised at all district headquarters of the Congress Committee. In the same way Delhi, Allahabad, Ahmadabad, Malabar (K. Kelappan) the meetings were organised on Civil Disobedience Day by renowned leaders and in Nagpur the tri-colour was hoisted. The day was celebrated as festival all over the country. The same day Gandhiji reached at small village, Aslali where Gandhiji briefed about the importance of salt and criticized the Government for tax levied on it. Like this Gandhiji carried on his journey explaining about khadi, spinning, cleanliness, untouchability, salt tax, prohibition of liquor, boycott of foreign goods and use of swadeshi items etc. He entered the Kheda district via village Bareja, where he said about economic importance of Khadi; at Vasana-abolition of the salt tax, at Nadiad-about the slavery. In many villages like Borsad, approx. 20 village headmen gave an immediate resignation in favour of salt satyagrah. On 19<sup>th</sup> March, the party of Satyagrahis reached Ras taluka and on 20<sup>th</sup> March A.I.C.C. organised a meeting at banks of river Sabarmati under the Presidentship of Jawaharlal Nehru. It was attended by N.C. Kalelkar, Kasturba Gandhi, Anasuiyabehn, Maulana Abul Kalam, Sarojini Naidu, Abbas Tyyabji, P.D. Tandon, Gopaldas, and J.B. Kripalani. Under the social boycott such as in Borsad (Surat) approximately, 150 headmen resigned but Gandhiji said them not to withdraw the resignation of headmanship later, otherwise it will be considered as cowardice. At Surat, Gandhi and his Satyagrahis were given a warm welcome when they reached on 1<sup>st</sup> April. 1930. On this place, the Gandhiji told for salt tax as: *‘bestly, inhuman and a Satanic Law’*.



It was really a proud moment to all Satyagrahis that wherever they passed through, the crowd greeted them and followed them with banners, ply cards, and flags. The nearby 300 village officials who resigned from their posts on the appeal of Gandhiji were preaching about the movement orally. In between they were also distributing the newspapers and making them aware about the movement. This journey continued for 25 days. In this whole tour, Gandhiji was on silent journey for three days and rest 22 days he awakened the audience of more than 40 villages and towns about salt law and other related issues. After 200 miles of hectic journey the Satyagrahis arrived at Dandi village on 5<sup>th</sup> April 1930 where they were welcomed by the great revolutionary Sarojini Naidu. In an interview to press reporter Bombay Chronicle, Gandhi said: *'Government, perhaps, deserves congratulations for their policy of non-interference.'* On 6<sup>th</sup> April 1930 at 8:30 a.m. Gandhiji picked up a lump of salt in his hand and said: *'with this, I am shaking the foundations of the British Empire.'* and then kept it in small pit. As soon as the message of breach of salt law spread, in all directions from east to west, and north to south and in central regions, everywhere salt laws were broken and where it was impossible to do so, there other laws were broken. There was big coverage of breaking of salt law in all newspapers. Some of the Englishmen thought it is as hoax. An Englishman reporter Brailsford said: *'The king Emperor can be unseated by boiling sea-water in a kettle.'* In response of this Statement wrote: *'Mahatma Gandhi will carry on boiling water till India did not get self-rule from colonial rule'*. Thus, the Dandi March became worldwide famous. Next day, Gandhiji cleaned the salt himself (two tolas) and it was auctioned for Rs. 525/ in the hands of a mill owner Seth Ranchhodlal.

**Other Activities to Strengthen the Movement in Various Parts of India:** When Gandhiji was on his historic march, the Congress leaders and workers were enlarging its base through enrolling the volunteers and making members at village level to strengthen the congress. They were forming local committees, collecting the funds, reaching to the people of villages and towns to make them aware about current political scenario of the country. They were also explaining to the people about launch of salt Satyagraha and preparing volunteers for the movement. They motivated the people, which resulted in taking out prabhat-pheris with national song, distributing hand written pamphlets against the British press and taking the nationalist messages, holding meetings and making aware the people about salt law, training the children through Vanar Sena and Manjari sena etc.

On 9<sup>th</sup> April Gandhiji kept following points in front of the nation:

- i) Every village should receive or make the salt, ii) The women should agitate in front of liquor shops and opium shops, iii) The women should also agitate in front of shops of foreign clothes and burn



- them iv) Hindu should leave the untouchability, v) Students should leave the Government schools, vi) Government servants should resign from their services.

**Celebration of National Week and Arrest of Gandhiji:** After 6<sup>th</sup> April, everywhere there was breach of salt and other laws. In Delhi, the leaders of the 'National Week' celebration were Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya, Devdas Gandhi, Faridul Ansari and Lala Deshbandhu Gupta who was a local leader. In July when monsoon knocked the door then only raids on depots were stopped because air evaporation of sea water was impossible during this season. In United Province, the first day of the 'National Week' i.e., 7<sup>th</sup> April 1930 was celebrated with great zeal at Allahabad. A march (procession) was organised by Satyagraha volunteers led by Kamala Nehru and Vijayalaxmi Pandit. At evening a gathering was briefed by Motilal Nehru about the importance of the day. A group of volunteers led by J.L. Nehru and M.L. Nehru on 10<sup>th</sup> April, 1930, prepared the salt in Allahabad which was sold @ 175/ per packet. In this T.A.K Sherwani and other leaders were also present. In protest of arrest of Jawaharlal Nehru on 14<sup>th</sup> April, due to the breach of salt law, public agitated on the road and clashed with the police. In Madras, the 'National Week' was celebrated in collaboration of Andhra and Tamil Nadu Congress Committees. The volunteers took out the procession from various streets of various places. They were singing songs devoted to the nation and carrying the tri-colour in their hands. Here, salt Satyagraha was launched on 13<sup>th</sup> April 1930. T. Prakasam, K. Nageswara Rao and Kurupaniidhi were the main leaders. Another Congress leader of North West Frontier Province, Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan, arrested on 23<sup>rd</sup> April, his Khudai-Khidmatgar (Red-Shirts), a band of non-violent but revolutionaries played a vital role during the Civil Disobedience Movement. Besides them many leaders were arrested in different parts of India. Now pressure of Governors and other Government establishment came on Viceroy to arrest the Gandhiji. So, on 4<sup>th</sup> May he passed the bail-able order to arrest the Gandhiji under Section 117 of the Indian Penal Code. It means, after bail, he can walk on his path. On 5<sup>th</sup> May, Gandhiji was arrested by the District Magistrate who was accompanied with Superintendent of Police and some constables from Karadi at night 12:45 a.m. when he was in deep sleep. He was arrested and sent to Yervada Jail Pune (Maharashtra).

**Repercussion of Arrest of the Gandhiji:** At early morning, news spread about the arrest of the Gandhiji, a huge crowd gathered on each and every road and streets of Bombay. The thousands of textile and railway workers came into protest of Gandhiji's arrest. The clothe-merchants went on a six-day hartal w.e.f. 7<sup>th</sup> May. Approximately 50,000 workers of mills, and railways were on the road against the arrest of the Gandhiji. They burnt the liquor shops and destroyed the Government offices like; railways, municipal offices, police stations and courts buildings. In Patna Rajendra Prasad and Abdul Ban took



over the command of the mass rally. During lathi charge Rajendra Prasad was injured. But police were unable to control them in rural areas. After the arrest of Gandhiji, Mr. Abbas Tayyabji, became leader of the volunteers in place of Gandhiji. Mr. Tayyabji said in a meeting: *'Let it not be thought that after Mahatmaji's arrest, the movement will be slackened.* Later, he was also arrested while marching with his 58 volunteers on 22<sup>nd</sup> May, 1930, just ahead of Karadi Satyagraha Ashram. It was pre-decided by Mahatma Gandhi that in case of arrest of Tayyab ji, Mrs. Sarojini Naidu will take over. So, she took over the charge of the volunteers. She led the group of 50 volunteers who showed a high level of discipline during the march and even after her arrest with volunteers. They stayed 28 hrs without single drop of water.

**Government Repression on Satyagrahis:** The Government used her full powers to suppress the movement but it did not get success because the Civil Disobedience Movement was all over the country. When the police were beating one group, another group was ready and it was like a chain of volunteers everywhere. After facing the blows of lathis, the volunteers fell on the ground and again they got-up bravely and were ready for another blow. Mrs. Kasturba Gandhi visited the wounded volunteers in the hospital and was deeply shocked to see their condition. The Muslim volunteers were the first to break the police barrier, and got injured besides Parsis, Sikhs and even Christians. The police went in villages and started beating to even ladies and children showing totally inhuman act. In villages, police reached on its extreme cruelty. This was reported by a lady correspondent Miss Madeleine Slade, a disciple of Gandhi. About this condition she reported when she visited to Bulsar (Gujarat) on 6<sup>th</sup> June and saw the atrocities of the police at the Dharasana salt depot. She wrote in Young India and gave evidence of the injuries perpetrated on Satyagrahis volunteers. She had seen that on volunteers police blow lathis on head, chest, stomach and joints; stripped the people naked before beating; tearing loin-clothes, dragging of wounded men by legs and arms after beating them; throwing of wounded men into hedges or into salt water; thrusting of pins and thorns into men's bodies etc. About Dharsana another reporter Web Miller said: *'in eighteen years of my reporting in twenty countries during which I have witnessed innumerable civil disturbances, riots, street fights and rebellions, I have never witnessed such harrowing scenes as at Dharsana'.*

In a conciliatory gesture, the Viceroy on 9<sup>th</sup> July, 1930, suggested a Round Table Conference and reiterated the goal of Dominion Status. During Civil Disobedience Movement, some prominent leaders tried to compromise between Congress and the Government but they did not get success. The representatives of famous daily newspaper 'Daily Herald' Mr. Slocomb met Gandhiji in Yavada jail who declared that the Gandhiji is ready to suspend the Civil Disobedience Movement and participate in Round



Table Conference with some assurance. After end of Civil Disobedience Movement the political prisoners were released.

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