

# Dandi March - Relevant Facts for UPSC GS-1

The Dandi March, also known as the Salt March, Dandi March and the Dandi Satyagraha was an act of nonviolent civil disobedience led by Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi. The march lasted from March 12th 1930 to April 6th 1930 as a direct action campaign of tax resistance and nonviolent protest against the British salt monopoly.

## Background of the Dandi March

The Indian National Congress had raised the tricolour on the banks of the Ravi river at Lahore publicly issuing the declaration of self-rule or Purna Swaraj. The declaration also included the readiness to withhold taxes and the belief that it is “the inalienable right of the Indian people to have the freedom and to enjoy the fruits of their toil and the necessities of life.”

To drive home this point the Congress Working Committee tasked Gandhi the responsibility for organising the first act of civil disobedience, with Congress itself ready to take charge after Gandhi's inevitable arrest. Mahatma Gandhi chose to begin the civil disobedience campaign against the British salt tax.

## Dandi March - Why did the Salt Law Become a Focus of Protest?

The 1882 Salt Act gave the British a monopoly on the collection and manufacture of salt, levying a tax in the process. The violation of this act was a criminal offence. Even though salt was freely available to those living on the coast, Indians were forced to buy it from the colonial government

Initially, Gandhi's choice was met with incredulity from Congress. Even the British themselves were finding it hard to take such a measure seriously with the Viceroy, Lord Irwin, himself stating that “At present, the prospect of a salt campaign does not keep me awake at night”.

Gandhi provided sound reasons for his decisions, however. He reasoned that an item of daily use would resonate better with citizens of all classes than a broad demand for greater political rights. Since the salt tax accounted for more than 8.2 % of the British Raj tax revenue and hurt the poorest Indians the most significantly. He reasoned that this would hurt the British even more significantly.

Gandhi felt that this protest would dramatise Purna Swaraj in a way that was meaningful to every Indian. He also reasoned that it would build unity between Hindus and Muslims by fighting a wrong that touched them equally.

## The March to Dandi

On 5 February, newspapers reported that Gandhi would begin civil disobedience by defying the salt laws. The salt satyagraha would begin on 12 March and end in Dandi with Gandhi breaking the Salt Act on 6 April. On 12 March 1930, Gandhi and 80 satyagrahis, set out on foot for the coastal village of Dandi, Gujarat, over 390 kilometres (240 mi) from their starting point at Sabarmati Ashram.

The first day's march of 21 kilometres ended in the village of Aslali, where Gandhi spoke to a crowd of about 4,000. At Aslali, and the other villages that the march passed through, volunteers collected donations, registered new satyagrahis, and received resignations from village officials who chose to end cooperation with British rule.

As they entered each village, crowds greeted the marchers, beating drums and cymbals. Gandhi gave speeches attacking the salt tax as inhuman, and the salt satyagraha as a "poor man's struggle". Each night they slept in the open. The only thing that was asked of the villagers was food and water to wash with. Gandhi felt that this would bring the poor into the struggle for sovereignty and self-rule, necessary for eventual victory.

Thousands of satyagrahis and leaders like Sarojini Naidu joined him. Every day, more and more people joined the march until the procession of marchers became at least two miles long.

Gandhi arrived at the seashore on April 5th. The following morning he raised a lump of salty mud and declared, "With this, I am shaking the foundations of the British Empire." He then boiled it in seawater, producing illegal salt. He implored his thousands of followers to likewise begin making salt along the seashore, "wherever it is convenient" and to instruct villagers in making illegal, but necessary, salt.

## Impact of the Dandi March

Mass civil disobedience spread throughout India as millions broke the salt laws by making salt or buying illegal salt. The Salt Satyagraha had galvanised the Indian population into action. Salt was sold illegally all over the coast of India. A pinch of salt made by Gandhi himself sold for 1,600 rupees (equivalent to \$750 at the time). In reaction, the British government arrested over sixty thousand people by the end of the month.

What had begun as a Salt Satyagraha quickly grew into a mass Satyagraha. British cloth and goods were boycotted. Unpopular forest laws were defied in the Maharashtra, Karnataka and

Central Provinces. Gujarati peasants refused to pay tax, under threat of losing their crops and land. In Midnapore, Bengalis took part by refusing to pay the chowkidar tax.

The British responded with more stringent laws, including censorship of correspondence and declaring the Congress and its associate organisations illegal. None of those measures slowed the civil disobedience movement.

British documents show that the British government was shaken by satyagraha. The nonviolent protest left the British confused about whether or not to jail Gandhi. John Court Curry, a British police officer stationed in India, wrote in his memoirs that he felt nausea every time he dealt with Congress demonstrations in 1930. Curry and others in the British government, including Wedgwood Benn, Secretary of State for India, preferred fighting violent rather than nonviolent opponents.