

Lesson Thirteen

Key Developments in the 1930s

Aims

The aim of this lesson is to enable you to learn about:

- the Simon Commission
- the Salt March
- the Round Table Conferences
- the Government of India Act 1935
- Jinnah and the Muslim League

Context

In the last lesson, we studied Gandhi's aims, methods and role in campaigning for Indian independence from British rule; we also looked at a variety of attitudes towards social issues in India between 1917 and 1929. In this lesson we will be studying further moves towards independence in the 1930s.



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The Simon Commission

The Government of India Act of 1919 had promised a Commission within ten years to review the effectiveness of the arrangements it announced. (To review the terms of this Act, please refer back to Lesson 11.) So in 1927 the British government announced a Commission that would go to India, gather information and produce a report.

Indian nationalists were very angry when they learned that no Indian person would be a member of the Commission. It was to be made up of seven British Members of Parliament and included Clement Attlee, (who was actually the British Prime Minister in 1947 when India did become independent). Its chairman was to be Sir John Simon.



Sir John Simon

When the Simon Commission arrived in India in February 1928, the Indian National Congress organised a nationwide *hartal* (strike) in protest at the lack of Indian representation on the Commission. The Commission was met by large crowds of protesters, many carrying black flags. There were protest demonstrations organised by Congress in every major city it visited. Police responded strongly, using their *lathis* (sticks) with vigour. The worst incident took place in Lahore, the major city of Punjab. There a prominent nationalist, Lala Lajpat Rai, was badly beaten by police during a demonstration. Although badly injured, he spoke at a meeting that evening “*Every blow aimed at me is a nail in the coffin of British imperialism*” he said. He never recovered his health and he died in late November that year.



Lala Lajpat Rai

The Simon Commission published its seventeen-volume Report in 1930. It recommended that all the Provinces of British India should become self-governing. (British India was divided up into large Provinces such as Bombay or Bengal, each with its own Governor or senior official.) Its findings were the basis of the Government of India Act of 1935.

The Salt March

The Government of India levied a tax on any salt produced in India whether for domestic or commercial purposes. Indian nationalists suspected that this was to protect the export of British salt as well as to earn a small amount of revenue. On 12 March 1930, Gandhi set out from the Sabarmati ashram at Ahmadabad on a march to the sea at a place called Dandi, some 390 kilometers away on the Gujarat coast. At Dandi he planned to make salt from the salty mud on the beach without paying the salt tax demanded by the authorities and so break the law. (Anyone making salt in India in 1930 had to pay a tax on it even if they were only making a small amount for personal use and making it in a public place. This tax helped to protect the salt industry in the UK.)

It was a protest against the rules imposed on India by the British. It was to be a peaceful protest and it is sometimes called the Salt Satyagraha.

Many joined the march before it eventually reached Dandi on 6th April. News of the march spread around the whole of India and there were many demonstrations against the salt tax all over the country. The next month Gandhi planned a march to the Dharsana Salt Works but he was arrested on 5 May a few days before this march was due to set off. There were even more demonstrations around India when news of his arrest became known. Some 80,000 Indians were arrested by the authorities as a result of these disturbances.

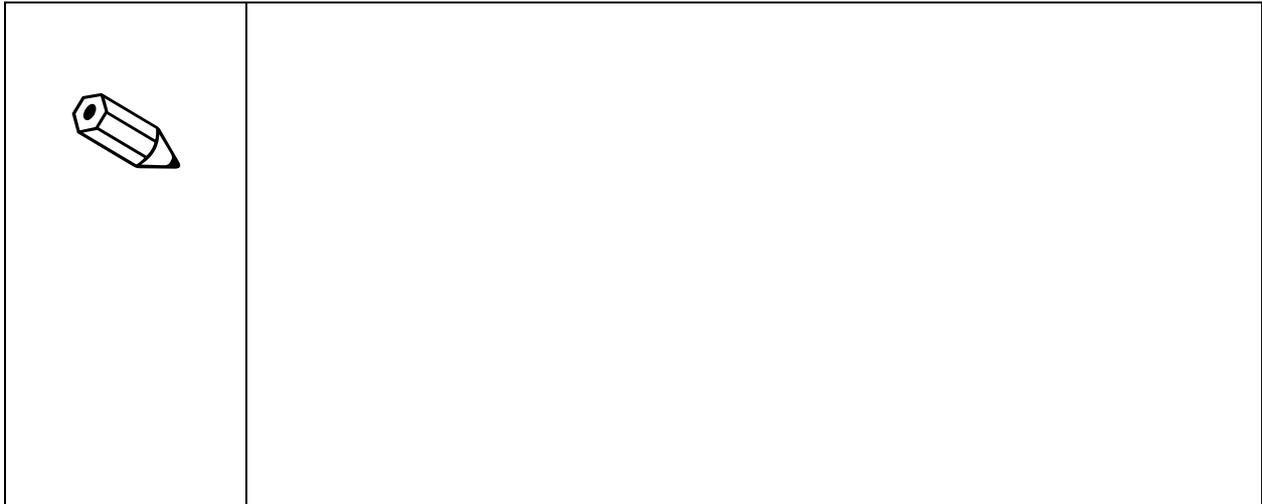
The Government of India made no immediate concessions over the Salt Tax but for many Indians the campaigns brought them into active participation in the struggle for independence. The Salt Satyagraha showed that millions right across India were now prepared to risk beatings by police, arrest and even imprisonment for the nationalist cause. Gandhi had become an inspirational, even revered, leader. Millions of Indians and not just his immediate followers now called him Mahatma (Great Soul) Gandhi.



Gandhi leads the Salt March, 1930

Activity 1

As an active nationalist living in Madras (over 1800 kilometers from Gujarat), explain to a friend why you have been inspired by Mahatma Gandhi to join the struggle for independence by demonstrating against the Salt Tax in April 1930.



Round Table Conferences

The Simon Commission had been received in India with so much hostility that the British government arranged a series of 'Round Table Conferences' in London between 1930 and 1932. These conferences were supposed to bring together all of the parties interested in the future of India and enable them to discuss the way forward to independence. The name implies that they were to be gatherings where everybody invited has an equally important voice, but as the conferences were to be in London, the British government issued the invitations and set the Agenda, these conferences were not very equal. Those invited to attend included the Muslim League, the Indian National Congress, the Indian Princes, representatives of the Sikh, Buddhist and Untouchable communities and some of the smaller Hindu nationalist parties, as well as representatives of the British Government. Even so, it was a great improvement on the process of the Simon Commission with its seven British MPs and their visit to India in 1928.

An important shift in British public opinion showed that it now seemed to be accepted on all sides that India was heading for independence from Britain in some form. The British Government had stated that 'Dominion status' similar to Canada or Australia, was the logical outcome of the process of constitutional change before the publication of the Simon Commission Report in 1930, but that rather vague statement did not appeal to the Indian National Congress and Indian nationalist feelings.* That all shades of opinion in India were now getting together to discuss how minority interests could be protected in an independent India was an important advance within India itself.

*Dominion status: a dominion was a self-governing colony, or autonomous state within the British Empire. Canada was formerly called 'The Dominion of Canada' but this name is no longer used. Countries with dominion status are now referred to as 'the

Commonwealth, but each country is self-governing and independent.

The **First Conference** was officially opened in London by King George V on 13 November 1930. It was to last three months until January 1931. The chairman was the British Prime Minister at the time, Ramsay MacDonald. The Indian National Congress were invited but did not attend. Many of its leaders, including Gandhi, were in jail. Leaders of India's Muslims did attend, as did B. R. Ambedkar representing Untouchables. Although the Indian National Congress wished to be seen as representing the interests of all communities in India, this was not always how it was perceived by some minority communities. Gandhi, in particular, was insistent that it should be accepted that the INC spoke for all Indians. That the INC did not persuade all communities that it represented their interests as well as those of the majority Hindu community is at the heart of many of the arguments about Indian independence and the tragedy of Partition in 1947. As noted above, Untouchables had their own association and voice at the Conferences, as did India's millions of Muslims through The Muslim League. So, too, did leaders of the Sikh community and a number of the rulers of India's many princely states. There was useful talk at the Conferences about guarantees for India's minority communities and much discussion about an All-India Federation, but there could be no real progress without Congress representation. This first conference ended in January 1931.

In March 1931 the Viceroy (the top British official in India) Lord Irwin, had a meeting with Mahatma Gandhi. The outcome of their discussions became known as the **Gandhi-Irwin Pact**. This was an agreement that Congress would suspend all its campaigns of protest in India and take part in the Round Table Conference in London. In return, Lord Irwin offered 1) to release all nationalist prisoners then in jail except those found guilty of killing British officials; 2) to withdraw all laws that prevented the nationalists from campaigning, and 3) to abandon the Salt Tax for individual production.

Gandhi accepted these terms on behalf of Congress and attended the **Second Round Table Conference** in September 1931 as the only representative of Congress. This conference lasted for three months until December 1931. As usual, he upstaged everyone else there. Both British officials and the Indians present all wore formal suits. The Indian Princes swept around London impressively in their grand cars. Small and slim, Gandhi arrived on foot wearing sandals and dressed in a traditional dhoti and loin cloth, made of Khadi cloth. He stayed in a house in London's East End, the poorest part of the city. By dressing as he did and by staying in the East End of London rather than at some grand hotel in the centre of the city, Gandhi was making clear that he was an ordinary, simple man and understood how ordinary people thought. Other delegates to the Conferences did not mistake the criticism of their own grand ways that was implied by Gandhi's modest approach. In a speech at the end of the conference in December 1931 he said of the East End:

In that settlement, which represents the poor people of the East End of London, I have become one of them. They have accepted me as a member, and as a favoured member of their family. It will be one of the richest treasures that I shall carry with me. Here, too, I have found nothing but courtesy and nothing but a genuine affection from all with whom I have come in touch. I have come in touch with so many Englishmen. It has been a priceless privilege to me...

While in England for the second Round Table Conference, he visited the cotton mills in the Lancashire town of Darwen, and was mobbed by cheering factory workers there:

It has enhanced and deepened my irrepressible faith in human nature that although English men and English women have been fed upon lies that I see so often disfiguring your Press, that although in Lancashire, the Lancashire people had perhaps some reason for becoming irritated against me, I found no irritation and no resentment even in the operatives. The operatives, men and women, hugged me. They treated me as one of their own. I shall never forget that.



Gandhi in Darwen, Lancashire, UK, September 1931

I am carrying with me thousands upon thousands of English friendships. I do not know them but I read that affection in their eyes as early in the morning I walk through your streets. All this hospitality, all this kindness will never be effaced from my memory, no matter what befalls my unhappy land. I thank you for your forbearance.

At the Conference Gandhi argued against separate arrangements for the minority groups of India, including Indian Muslims and untouchables. He argued that an independent India could represent all communities. Two weeks before this Second Conference, the Labour government in Britain had fallen and Ramsay MacDonald was now the Prime Minister of a National government dominated by the Conservative party, with different political ideas and aims. The British side was further distracted by a major economic crisis. On 21 September the new National Government was forced to leave the Gold Standard* and allow the value of the pound to find its own exchange level, especially against the US dollar, in order to protect British exports. This economic crisis and political uncertainty was certainly a distraction for the British delegation to the Conferences and did nothing to secure a successful outcome. Most delegations left London for India after the Second conference.

* the Gold Standard was a system of exchange whereby bank notes could be exchanged for their value in gold. It is no longer in use.

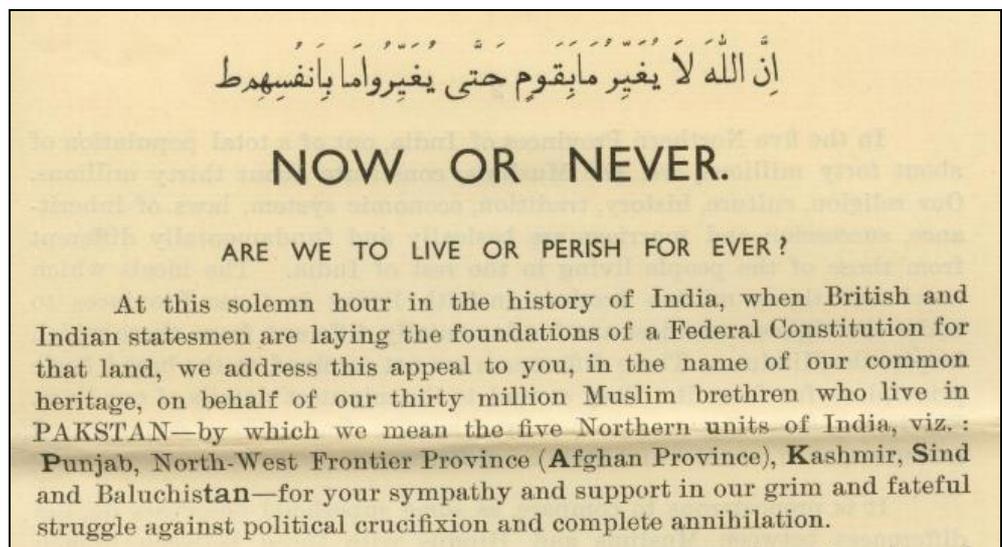
Activity 2

As one of the cotton mill workers in Darwen, Lancashire, shown in the photo above, describe to a friend Mahatma Gandhi's to the mill in September 1931.



The outcome of the first two conferences was disappointing. It was useful to have gathered so many shades of Indian nationalist opinion, if only to confirm just how complex a problem faced the British Government as far as Indian independence was concerned. The debates informed many of the parts of the Government of India Act of 1935. However, no firm decisions were taken or agreements reached at the Conferences themselves.

The **Third Conference** lasted just a few weeks from November to December 1932. In the absence of all other delegations, little was achieved at this short conference. Most of the main Indian politicians had left London and returned home. The one notable event was that an Indian Muslim college student attending the conference, Chaudhury Rahmat Ali Gujjar, then studying law at Cambridge, coined the term PAKISTAN for a Muslim Indian homeland. The word means 'Land of the Pure' and the P is taken from Punjab, the A from Afghan Province (North-West Frontier Province), the KI from Kashmir, the S from Sindh and the TAN from Baluchistan. Gujjar was not an official Muslim League delegate to the conference, but was an active and interested nationalist. The following year he published a pamphlet in India called 'Now or Never'. This idea was later taken up by Jinnah and The Muslim League and a separate Muslim homeland for Indian Muslims became official League policy in 1940.



'Now or Never' by Chaudhury Rahmat Ali Gujjar, published in 1933 in India



Chaudhury Rahmat Ali Gujjar as a law student

Government of India Act 1935

This very long and complicated piece of legislation put together ideas that had come from the Round Table Conferences. It was an attempt by the government of India to meet some of the many demands it faced – from Congress, the Indian Muslims, the Princes, the Untouchables, the Sikhs, and others.

The Act included the following terms:

1. The old system of government of the Provinces of British India such as Bombay or Bengal called 'dyarchy' established by the Government of India Act 1919 was to be scrapped. Instead there was to be a large amount of self-government, with a majority of Indians on the Provincial Councils. However, the British Governors of these Provinces held important reserve powers.
2. A new system of voting was introduced, having direct elections to the Councils that would run the Provinces, expanding the electorate in India from seven to thirty-five million.
3. A Federation of India was proposed to include all of British India and some or all of the Princely States.
4. There was to be a major re-organisation of India, with Burma and Aden being split off and the Muslim-majority area of Sind separated from Bombay Province.
5. The establishment of a Federal Court for India.

This Act was full of safeguards to protect British interests in India. Provincial Governors were left with emergency powers which seemed to mean that they could take back control if they considered British interests in India were under serious threat. It was, however, about as liberal a piece of legislation as the Conservative majority in the British House of Commons would accept.

The Act was not well received in India. The most moderate nationalists may have accepted, it but Congress did not. The Indian Princes rejected the idea of a Federation of States, fearing that their interests would not be properly protected in such an arrangement. A new Viceroy, Lord Linlithgow, was sent to India in 1937 to put the Act into practice.

Activity 3

Do the main terms of the Government of India Act of 1935 outlined above explain the fact that the Indian National Congress did not accept it?



Jinnah and the Muslim League

Mohammed Ali Jinnah was a British-trained barrister like Mohandas Gandhi, but in other respects quite different from the Mahatma. Born in Sind in 1876, he went to London as an apprentice in a shipping company before studying law. After becoming a successful barrister he returned to India in 1896 and joined the Indian National Congress.



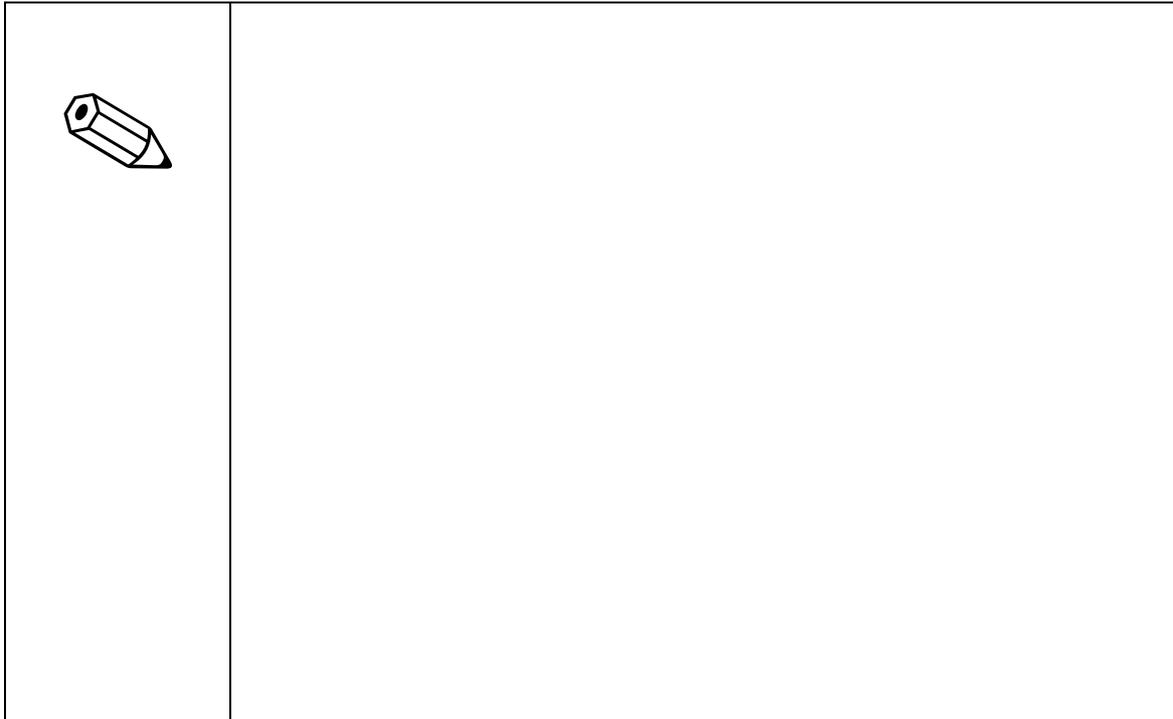
Jinnah as a lawyer in London in the 1880s

The All-India **Muslim League** was founded in Dhaka in 1906. At the time Jinnah thought that they were too focused on fighting for the rights of India's millions of Muslims. However, he joined the Muslim League in 1916, and by 1919 he was their President.

In 1916 Jinnah had been one of the Muslim League leaders who reached an agreement with Congress called The **Lucknow Pact**. Under this agreement, Congress and the Muslim League would work together to put pressure on the Government of India to grant further freedoms for Indians. This was a considerable change of direction for the Muslim League as it meant recognizing the legitimacy of British India if only to work towards its end.

Activity 4

As a Muslim League supporter of Jinnah living in Lunknow in 1919, write a letter home to your family in Karachi explaining why you think him a good champion of the rights of Indian Muslims.



In 1920 Jinnah resigned from the Indian National Congress mainly because he thought Gandhi's methods would lead to further tensions between Muslim and Hindu communities in India. For the remainder of the 1920s he worked hard to find a way towards an independent India that would protect the rights of all communities, especially Muslim and Hindu.



Mohammed Ali Jinnah with his sister Fatima (left) and daughter Dina (right) in Bombay

In 1923 Jinnah was elected as a member for Bombay of the new Legislative Assembly. This was the governing assembly for Bombay Province as established under the system known as dyarchy by the Government of India Act of 1919. He attended the First Round Table Conference in London in November 1930 as leader of the Muslim League delegation but was frustrated by the lack of progress there. He continued to seek guarantees of the rights of India's millions of Muslims.

In 1931 he returned to India where he became very ill. His sister Fatima supported him and became a close adviser. He returned to London that year, intending to resume his career as a barrister in the UK, but he was persuaded by many Muslim leaders to return and take charge of the Muslim League.

In 1933 the idea of a separate Pakistan for India's Muslims was published in a pamphlet by Chaudury Rahmat Ali and received much attention. Jinnah was converted to the idea. His failure to work with Congress had convinced him that '**The Two Nation Theory**' which stated that the rights of India's Muslims could only be protected in a country separate from an independent India, was the right basis for working towards independence. The idea of Pakistan now gained the support of the Muslim League, the main Muslim political voice. It became official League policy after their meeting in Lahore in 1940.

Self Assessment Test: Lesson Thirteen

1. Why did the British Government announce in 1927 that a Commission under Sir John Simon would visit India the following year, and why did this arouse hostility among Indians?
2. Who was Lala Lajpat Rai?
3. What was the Law in India in 1930 on producing salt?
4. Why were The Round Table Conferences that took place in London 1930-32 given this name?
5. How did Mahatma Gandhi upstage every other delegate to the Second Round Table Conference in 1931 by his dress and behaviour?
6. What new method for governing the Provinces of India was proposed by the Government of India Act of 1935?
7. What safeguard did the Government of India have in the Act of 1935?
8. Why did Mohammed Ali Jinnah resign from Congress in 1920?
9. Who was Fatima Jinnah?
10. Why did Jinnah come to support the idea of Pakistan?

Suggested Answers to Activities

Activity One

Well Kanta, although Gujarat is a long way from us here in Madras, Bapuji is an inspiration to all us nationalists. Why, he is listened to with great respect by all the Leaders of Congress, despite the fact that he has never run for office at all.

The Salt Tax is iniquitous and just one example of how the British oppress us. The Salt March led by the Mahatma last month was a brilliant way for us to show our feelings. It is not easy for the British or their police to deal with. Now we hear that Mahatmaji has been arrested by the British and will probably be thrown in jail. So much for British justice!

There will be such protests, against the arrest and against the Salt Tax that even the British will have to notice. I don't care if the police break my head with their lathis. Some things are just too important. Why not join us this evening, Kanta?

Activity Two

You never saw the like Enid. There I was just coming out of the mill after my shift. It was a cold November day and most of us were in thick coats. I saw a crowd gathering and there was this policeman with big moustaches. Carrying a long stick. He looked kind, so I went to stand beside him.

There in the middle of the crowd was a tiny man wearing the strangest things I have ever seen – sandals, a shawl thing round his thin shoulders and a sort of cotton nappy. He looked very cheerful and quite at home, if that's possible. The girl next to me in the crowd told me that his name was Gandy and that he was from India. It's very hot there I believe.

In his part of India, my Dad has told me since, they have lots of cotton mills. He wants us here in Lancashire to stop exporting cotton cloth to them because it ruins their industry. It seems reasonable to me, so long as it doesn't mean fewer jobs here in Darwen. Times are hard enough. They gave him three cheers but I wasn't sure so I didn't join in.

Activity Three

From the main terms of the Government of India Act of 1935 it is clear to me why Congress did not accept it. They would have liked the self-government in Provinces and an end to the system of 'dyarchy', as well as the much expanded electorates that would vote in these administrations. However, the many safeguards and

reserve powers built into the Act by the British made it unacceptable. In emergencies, the British could still retain control.

Activity Four

Dear Parents

I am so far away from you and I miss you all so. Here in Lucknow, the Muslim League is very strong although the way things are going, our leader Mohammed Ali Jinnah is getting more convinced than ever that we Muslims will find it hard to get fair treatment in an independent India.

I think he is a wonderful man, a skilled barrister and very keen to keep within the law. Not for him all those actions of Gandhi in Gujarat – breaking the law and then getting large crowds to protest even more. They are bound to encourage lawlessness and Muslims in India will suffer.

I trust Mohammed Ali Jinnah. He knows how power works in India and has spent many years in London. People listen when he speaks. Even when we negotiated that Pact here in Lucknow three years ago and had to swallow a big change, we accepted that. If we have to work with the British to benefit Muslims in the end, anything is worth it.

Please say hello to my sister Shazia.
Your loving daughter
Uzma