

ANANTAM IAS · OPTIONAL NOTES

History Optional Rise of Gandhi

Paper 2 · Unit 9

Champaran to Quit India, satyagraha as method and the constructive programme: 50 marks in four years, less than the revolutionaries and the left, which surprises most candidates.

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UPSC SYLLABUS

Rise of Gandhi; character of Gandhian nationalism; Gandhi's popular appeal; Rowlatt Satyagraha; the Khilafat Movement; the Non-Cooperation Movement; national politics from the end of the Non-Cooperation Movement to the beginning of the Civil Disobedience Movement; the two phases of the Civil Disobedience Movement; Simon Commission; the Nehru Report; the Round Table Conferences; nationalism and the peasant movements; nationalism and working class movements; women and Indian youth and students in Indian politics, 1885 to 1947; the election of 1937 and the formation of ministries; Cripps Mission; the Quit India Movement; the Wavell Plan; the Cabinet Mission.

What Gandhi changed

The 2025 paper asked whether his emergence signified the Indianisation of the national movement. Answer it by naming precisely what was new, because most of the elements had precedents.

- South Africa between 1893 and 1914 was the laboratory, and **satyagraha** was developed there against the registration and immigration laws before it was ever tried in India.
- Method was the first change: **satyagraha** meant open, disciplined, non-violent resistance in which the resister accepts suffering and refuses to injure, and it is distinct from passive resistance because it seeks to convert rather than to coerce.
- **Language and idiom** were the second, since Gandhi used **swaraj, ahimsa, tapasya, sarvodaya, Ramrajya** and the imagery of the village, which reached an audience that constitutional English could not.
- Social base was the third and the most consequential, because Congress under Gandhi drew in **peasants, artisans, women, small traders and students** on a scale the Moderates and Extremists never approached.
- **Organisational reform** in the Nagpur constitution of 1920 reorganised Congress on **linguistic provincial committees**, created a working committee, introduced a four anna membership fee and made it a mass organisation with a permanent structure.
- **Constructive programme** distinguished him from every predecessor, comprising khadi and spinning, removal of untouchability, Hindu-Muslim unity, prohibition, village industries and basic education, and it gave the movement work to do between agitations.
- The **Indianisation** claim in the 2025 question is defensible on idiom, base and method, and it should be qualified by noting that the Swadeshi movement had already used boycott and national education, so the change was of scale and discipline rather than of invention.
- **Ashram** as an institution, at Sabarmati from 1917 and Sevagram from 1936, made the movement's leadership a visible experiment in living rather than a committee.

KEY TERMS

Satyagraha — Truth-force: open, disciplined, non-violent resistance in which the resister accepts suffering and seeks to convert the opponent.

Constructive programme — Gandhi's between-agitations work of khadi, anti-untouchability, communal unity, village industry and basic education.

The first Indian satyagrahas, 1917 to 1919

Three local campaigns established the method before any national one was attempted, and the 2025 question asked specifically about 1917 to 1922.

- **Champaran in 1917** in Bihar addressed the **tinkathia** obligation on indigo cultivators, and Gandhi's refusal to leave when ordered made the legal confrontation itself the demonstration.
- Outcome was the Champaran Agrarian Act of 1918, and the campaign brought **Rajendra Prasad, J. B. Kripalani and Mazharul Haq** into his circle.
- **Ahmedabad in 1918** was a mill workers' dispute over the plague bonus, and Gandhi used his **first fast** as a method of pressure, which drew criticism then and since as coercion of the mill owners.
- **Kheda in 1918** was a no-revenue campaign after crop failure, and it brought in **Vallabhbhai Patel** and Indulal Yagnik and established the revenue satyagraha as a template.
- **Rowlatt Satyagraha of 1919** was the first national campaign, against emergency powers extending wartime detention without trial, and Gandhi called for a nationwide hartal on 6 April.
- Violence in Punjab and elsewhere led Gandhi to suspend it, calling the launch a **Himalayan blunder** because he had not trained the people in disciplined non-violence first.
- **Jallianwala Bagh on 13 April 1919**, in which Dyer's troops fired on a penned crowd at Amritsar killing several hundred, transformed Indian opinion permanently and led Tagore to renounce his knighthood.
- The **Hunter Committee** and the House of Lords' support for Dyer, together with the public subscription raised for him in Britain, destroyed whatever moral credit the Raj retained among moderate Indians.

Khilafat and Non-Cooperation, 1920 to 1922

The high point of Hindu-Muslim political cooperation and the movement that made Gandhi the undisputed leader. The 2023 paper asked what produced it.

- **Khilafat** grievance arose from the Allied treatment of the Ottoman Sultan as Caliph after the war, and the **Ali brothers, Maulana Azad and Hasrat Mohani** led the agitation.
- Gandhi's decision to link Khilafat with the Punjab wrongs and with swaraj was a calculated bid for **Hindu-Muslim unity on a mass basis**, and it succeeded to a degree never repeated.
- The 2023 quotation about awakened political consciousness bound with dishonourable insults captures the combination exactly: Jallianwala Bagh, the Khilafat betrayal and the failed Rowlatt agitation together produced the movement.
- **Non-Cooperation** as adopted at Calcutta in September 1920 and Nagpur in December meant boycott of legislatures, courts, schools, foreign cloth and titles, with civil disobedience to follow if needed.
- Participation was genuinely mass: **students left government colleges, lawyers including Motilal Nehru and C. R. Das gave up practice**, foreign cloth imports fell sharply and national institutions such as Jamia Millia and Gujarat Vidyapith were founded.
- Regional movements attached themselves to it, including the **Awadh Kisan Sabha**, the Akali agitation in Punjab, and the Moplah rising in Malabar, which the leadership could not control.
- **Chauri Chaura on 4 February 1922**, where a crowd burned a police station killing twenty two policemen, led Gandhi to withdraw the movement at Bardoli.

- Withdrawal was bitterly contested, with **Motilal Nehru, C. R. Das and Subhas Bose** opposing it, and it is the origin of the standing charge that Gandhi demobilised the movement at its peak.
- Gandhi's defence rested on the principle that a movement which turned violent would fail and would corrupt those who won by it, and judging that defence is the substance of most questions on 1922.

The interval, 1922 to 1929

Named in the syllabus as a period in its own right, and it is where the constitutional and revolutionary alternatives both revive.

- **Swarajists**, led by **C. R. Das and Motilal Nehru** from 1923, argued for entering the legislatures to obstruct from within, against the No-changers who preferred constructive work.
- Their record was mixed, with real obstruction in the Central Legislative Assembly and the defeat of finance bills, but the strategy lost momentum after Das's death in 1925.
- **Communal deterioration** marked the decade, with riots increasing after the Khilafat coalition dissolved, and organisations including the Hindu Mahasabha, the RSS founded in 1925 and the Tabligh and Tanzim movements growing.
- **Simon Commission**, appointed in 1927 with no Indian member, was boycotted with the slogan Simon Go Back, and the lathi charge at Lahore that injured **Lala Lajpat Rai**, who died soon after, radicalised a generation.
- **Nehru Report of 1928**, drafted under Motilal Nehru, proposed dominion status, joint electorates with reserved seats and fundamental rights, and it was rejected by Jinnah, whose **Fourteen Points** of 1929 set out the alternative Muslim position.
- **Youth radicalism** grew through the Naujawan Bharat Sabha, the Hindustan Socialist Republican Association and the Independence for India League of Nehru and Bose.
- **Lahore Congress of December 1929** adopted **Purna Swaraj** as the goal and authorised civil disobedience, and 26 January 1930 was observed as Independence Day.
- That date's later adoption as Republic Day in 1950 is a deliberate act of memory linking the constitution to the demand made at Lahore.

Civil Disobedience and the Round Tables

The syllabus names two phases, so treat them separately. Most scripts collapse them and lose marks.

- **Dandi march** from 12 March to 6 April 1930 covered about 385 kilometres to break the salt law, and salt was chosen because it was a universal necessity taxed by the state, which made the grievance legible to everyone.
- First phase spread widely, with **salt manufacture on both coasts, forest law defiance in Maharashtra and Karnataka, no-revenue campaigns in Gujarat and the United Provinces**, and the Khudai Khidmatgar movement under **Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan** in the North West Frontier Province.
- **Women participated on an unprecedented scale**, with **Sarojini Naidu** leading the Dharasana raid and Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay prominent, and picketing of liquor and cloth shops became substantially a women's activity.

- **First Round Table Conference** of 1930 met without Congress, and the **Gandhi-Irwin Pact of March 1931** secured release of prisoners and the right to make salt for personal use in exchange for suspension.
- **Second Round Table Conference** of 1931, which Gandhi attended alone as Congress representative, failed over the question of separate electorates for minorities.
- **Communal Award of 1932** granted separate electorates to the Depressed Classes, Gandhi fasted against it at Yerwada, and the **Poona Pact** with **Ambedkar** substituted reserved seats within joint electorates and increased their number substantially.
- Second phase of civil disobedience from 1932 was met with far harsher repression, with Congress declared illegal and over a hundred thousand arrests, and it was formally withdrawn in 1934.
- **Government of India Act 1935** followed, providing provincial autonomy and a federation that never came into being, and Nehru's description of it as a charter of slavery with a machine of brakes is the standard nationalist verdict.
- **1937 elections** under that Act gave Congress ministries in most provinces, and their twenty eight months in office produced real work on agrarian debt and civil liberties along with the League's Pirpur and Sharif reports alleging discrimination.

War, Quit India and the endgame

The 2026 paper asked about Quit India as a decisive phase rooted in the war, colonial policy and growing nationalism. That framing is accurate and should be argued rather than assumed.

- Congress ministries **resigned in 1939** because the Viceroy declared India a belligerent without consulting the elected provincial governments, and the League observed the day as Deliverance Day.
- **August Offer of 1940** and the **Cripps Mission of 1942** both offered post-war dominion status with a right of provinces to opt out, and Gandhi's description of Cripps as a post-dated cheque on a failing bank is the phrase to quote.
- **Quit India** was launched on 8 August 1942 with the call to **do or die**, and the entire leadership was arrested within hours, which left the movement without direction from the start.
- What followed was the most violent phase of the national movement, with railways, telegraph lines and police stations attacked, parallel governments at **Satara, Ballia, Tamluk and Talcher**, and underground leadership by **Jayaprakash Narayan, Ram Manohar Lohia, Aruna Asaf Ali and Usha Mehta's Congress Radio**.
- Repression was severe, with over a hundred thousand arrests, aerial strafing in some districts and roughly a thousand killed by official figures and more by others.
- Assessment for the 2026 question: Quit India failed militarily and organisationally, and it succeeded politically by demonstrating that British rule now depended entirely on force and could not be sustained after the war.
- The **Bengal famine of 1943**, with two to three million deaths under a functioning administration that declined to declare a famine, destroyed the moral case for continued rule more completely than any agitation.
- **INA trials from November 1945** and the **Royal Indian Navy mutiny of February 1946** shifted the decisive question from Indian opinion to the reliability of the Indian armed forces.

- **Wavell Plan and Simla Conference of 1945** failed over Jinnah's claim to nominate all Muslim members, and the **Cabinet Mission of 1946** proposed a three-tier federation with grouping that both parties accepted and then interpreted differently.
- Direct Action Day in August 1946, the Calcutta killings and the subsequent violence made partition the price of transfer, and the Mountbatten Plan of June 1947 fixed the terms.

Assessment and the standing criticisms

Four questions in four years and every one of them evaluative. Prepare the criticisms honestly, since an uncritical answer reads as hagiography.

- **Withdrawal at moments of peak mobilisation**, in 1922 and 1934, is the most persistent charge, made at the time by Bose and Das and since by Marxist historians who read it as protecting propertied interests from radicalisation.
- Gandhi's reply, that a movement which loses discipline loses its case and corrupts its victory, is a principled position rather than an evasion, and the answer should present both.
- **Caste** is the sharpest criticism, with **Ambedkar** arguing in *What Congress and Gandhi Have Done to the Untouchables* that the Harijan approach sought reform within Hinduism rather than the annihilation of caste, and the Poona Pact fast is the concrete instance.
- **Class** criticism holds that trusteeship asked capitalists and landlords to reform voluntarily and therefore protected them, and the Congress's ambivalence towards Kisan Sabha and trade union militancy supports it.
- **Communal outcome** is the hardest question, and the honest position is that Gandhi's religious idiom, however inclusive in intention, made a secular political vocabulary harder to build, while the League's growth had causes far beyond him.
- Positive assessment must be equally concrete: he made Congress a mass organisation, gave it a method that a colonial state found genuinely hard to answer, and kept a movement of that scale largely non-violent for nearly three decades.
- **Judith Brown** on his political skill, **Bipan Chandra** on the strategy of struggle, truce and struggle, and **Subaltern Studies** on the gap between the leadership's Gandhi and the peasantry's are the three citations worth carrying.
- The formulation that scores: Gandhi's leadership was a series of political judgements under constraint rather than a moral performance, and it should be assessed as such in both directions.

Last-mile revision

- South Africa 1893-1914; Champaran 1917 and tinkathia; Ahmedabad 1918 first fast; Kheda 1918 brings Patel.
- Rowlatt hartal 6 April 1919; Jallianwala Bagh 13 April 1919; Himalayan blunder; Hunter Committee.
- Nagpur 1920 reorganises Congress on linguistic provinces with a four anna fee; Chauri Chaura 4 February 1922; withdrawal at Bardoli.
- Swarajists 1923 under Das and Motilal; Simon 1927 and Lajpat Rai's death; Nehru Report 1928 and Jinnah's Fourteen Points 1929; Lahore 1929 Purna Swaraj.

- Dandi 12 March to 6 April 1930, about 385 km; Gandhi-Irwin March 1931; Communal Award 1932 and Poona Pact with Ambedkar; withdrawal 1934.
- GOI Act 1935, 1937 ministries, resignation 1939, August Offer 1940, Cripps 1942, Quit India 8 August 1942 and do or die.
- Parallel governments at Satara, Ballia, Tamluk, Talcher; Usha Mehta's Congress Radio; Bengal famine 1943; INA trials 1945; RIN mutiny 1946.
- Wavell Plan and Simla 1945; Cabinet Mission 1946; Direct Action Day August 1946; Mountbatten Plan June 1947.

Common errors to avoid

- Treating satyagraha as passive resistance. Gandhi distinguished them explicitly: satyagraha seeks to convert, not merely to endure.
- Collapsing the two phases of Civil Disobedience. The syllabus names them separately and the second met far harsher repression.
- Saying the Poona Pact was a victory for the Depressed Classes without qualification. Ambedkar accepted it under a fast unto death and regarded it as a defeat.
- Presenting Quit India as a military success. It was suppressed within weeks; its significance is that it proved rule now rested on force alone.
- Writing hagiography. The withdrawal, caste and class criticisms are standard and an answer without them reads as uncritical.
- Assuming Gandhi dominates this unit's marks. Across four papers the revolutionaries and the left scored more than the Rise of Gandhi did.

Mains Practice

'The Quit India Movement of 1942 was a decisive phase in India's struggle for independence, rooted in the circumstances of the Second World War, colonial policies and the growing strength of Indian nationalism.' Analyse.

20 marks · 250 words · 2026

“The emergence of Gandhi signified the Indianization of the national movement.” Analyze with reference to his early movements between 1917 and 1922.

10 marks · 150 words · 2025

“Awakened political consciousness of Indian masses, bound with dishonourable and cowardly insults of the British, led to the movement of Non-Cooperation.”

10 marks · 150 words · 2023

When Gandhiji launched the Civil Disobedience Movement he was “desperately in search of an effective formula.”

10 marks · 150 words · 2023

