



Be Mains Ready

The role of Mahatma Gandhi was supported by the circumstances surrounding the Indian freedom struggle. Critically examine. (250 words)

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Approach / Explanation / Answer

Approach

- Briefly highlight the role of Mahatma Gandhi in Indian Freedom struggle.
- Explain the additional factors besides role of Gandhi which aided Indian freedom struggle.
- To critically analyze the statement emphasizes the importance of Gandhi in Freedom movement.
- Give conclusion.

Body

The success of Indian freedom struggle is usually attributed to the supreme spirit and leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. Yet, besides his contribution in the late 19th and beginning of 20th century there were many political currents which significantly aided Indian national movement.

Circumstances which supported Mahatma Gandhi in building Indian freedom struggle

- **Rising tide of nationalism:** During the last decades of the nineteenth century factors such as growth of nationalist sentiments, emergence of new economic forces, introduction of railways, spread of education, the impact of modern Western ideas and culture and increased nationalist consciousness.
- **Foundation laid by moderates and extremists:** Indian National Congress laid solid foundation by political works by both the moderates and extremist leaders. Moderates' contribution through 'Drain of wealth' helped raise awareness of exploitation. Extremist idea of Swaraj and militant methods like boycott were also later implemented in Civil Disobedience and Non-Cooperation movement.
- **Experience of mass movement like Swadeshi movement:** Participation in the Swadeshi and anti-partition and the Home Rule movements during the opening decades of the twentieth century was a significant learning experience for masses which was later utilized by Mahatma Gandhi.
- **Exploitative policies of Britishers fuelled mass resentment:** The First World War in 1914 and British government's posture during WW I created unrest among the Indian people. This resentment was capitalised by Gandhiji for the mass movements later on.
- **Legislations like Rowlatt Act and Jallianwala Bagh incidents:** British government brought repressive acts like Rowlatt Act, Amritsar's Jallianwala Bagh caused immense resentment among

Indians setting stage for popular movements.

- **Emergence of socialist and communist parties:** Ideas of Marx and Socialist thinkers inspired many groups to come into existence as socialists and communists. These young nationalists, inspired by the Soviet Revolution began advocating radical solutions for economic, political and social ills of the country. Communist groups and workers' and peasants' parties, Trade unions remained an integral part of the national movement and worked along with the Congress.
- **Peasant movements:** The peasant movements of the 20th century were deeply influenced by and had a marked impact on the national freedom struggle. Mahatma Gandhi realizing their contribution integrated their struggle with national movements. Ex: Bardoli movement, Eka movement etc.
- **Indian National Army:** INA Prisoners of War (POWs) were brought back to India after the war to be court-martialed, a powerful movement emerged in their defence. In mid 1940s issue of INA also raised sympathy among serving military personnel thus weakening British government position in India.
- **Elections in Britain:** Although the war in Europe came to an end in May 1945, the Japanese threat still remained. The Conservative government in Britain led by Churchill was keen to reach a solution on the constitutional question in India.
- **Sporadic, localised and united mass action** by workers, peasants and states' peoples which took the form of a countrywide strike wave e.g. INA Release Movement, Royal Indian Navy (RIN) revolt, Tebhaga movement, Worli revolt, Punjab Kisan Morchas, Travancore peoples' struggle (especially the Punnapra-Vayalar episode) and the Telangana peasant revolt set the stage and created a feeling of imminent fall of British in India.

Gandhiji's Unique Contribution

Despite the presence of these situations, Gandhiji had marked decisive impact on Indian national freedom movement as below:

- **Belief in the power of masses:** Gandhi permanently altered the approach of Indian National movement by insisting participation of masses like workers, peasants, students, women, middle class etc.
- **Unique Gandhian methods of protests:** His unique method of passive resistance was amenable to contribution from masses by simply refusing to follow British diktats. Through movement like Salt Satyagraha Gandhi inspired people to oppose unjust British laws and removing fear of colonial government from the minds of people.
- **Non violent struggle:** Gandhi's unwavering non-violent approach to mass movement dealt with brute oppressive machinery available with British government. The non-violent approach ensured Indian national movement remained a mass movement rather than an underground sporadic violent movement.
- **Gandhi's belief in secular values** prevented Indian national movement from turning into a civil war. His emphatic rejection of two nation theory based on religious identity also helped India to emerge secular nation post independence.

Conclusion

- Thus, despite the presence of circumstances which aided role of Mahatma Gandhi in Indian national freedom movement, he, through his unique and innovative approach to mass movement maneuvered Indian national movement successfully to achieve its aim of free India.
- His ethos of non-violent satyagraha also played an important role in post independent period as unsatisfied groups sought to find redressal through non-violent movements e.g. Chipko movement was inspired by Gandhian approach.

