



130th Anniversary of Natal Indian Congress

[Source: DL](#)

Why in News?

Recently, 22nd August 2024 marked the 130th foundation year of **Natal Indian Congress (NIC)** which was established in **August 1894**, based on a proposal by **Mahatma Gandhi** on 22nd May 1894.

- It was formed to fight discrimination faced by Indians in South Africa.

What was the Natal Indian Congress?

- The **Natal Indian Congress (NIC)** was the **first Indian Congress** established, founded by **Mahatma Gandhi** in 1894 to **fight against discrimination** faced by Indian in Natal (province of South Africa).
- From the 1920s, the NIC operated under the **South African Indian Congress (SAIC)**.
- The organisation underwent a shift towards more **radical leadership** in the **1930s-1940s** with the emergence of **Dr. G.M. Naicker**, who became its leader in 1945.
- The NIC's increased militancy led to the **imprisonment of several leaders** by the 1950s and 1960s.
- Despite **not being officially banned**, repression and harassment led the NIC to halt activities until its **revival in 1971** with a focus on civic work.
- In the mid-1980s, the NIC was key in forming the **United Democratic Front (UDF)**.
 - The UDF's goal was to establish a "**non-racial, united South Africa**."

What was the Role of Mahatma Gandhi in Satyagraha in South Africa?

- **Mobilisation of Indian Community and Satyagraha:**
 - **Natal Satyagraha:** On 7th June 1893, Mahatma Gandhi faced racial discrimination when he was forced off a first-class train compartment at Pietermaritzburg railway station in South Africa. This incident ignited his spirit of civil disobedience through his **first non-violent protest** in the **Natal Satyagraha**.
 - Gandhi established the **Natal Indian Congress (NIC)** to unite the Indian community and address issues like voting rights and discriminatory laws.
 - **Transvaal British Indian Association:** In 1903, Gandhi founded this association to continue **advocating for rights of Indian**, particularly against increasing restrictions in the Transvaal region.
 - **Launching Satyagraha:** In 1906, **Gandhiji initiated his first satyagraha** (nonviolent resistance) campaign in Johannesburg against the Asiatic **Registration Act**, leading to mass protests and civil disobedience.
 - The **Asiatic Registration Act of 1906** in Transvaal required male Asians, particularly Indians and Chinese, to **register, provide fingerprints, carry a registration certificate**, and submit to physical examinations. It aimed to **control and restrict the entry and movement of Asians** in the region.
 - Indians in South Africa resisted a discriminatory law by forming the **Passive Resistance Association**. They publicly burned their registration certificates, which brought negative attention to the South African government. Ultimately, the conflict

ended with a compromise settlement.

▪ **Organising the Ambulance Corps:**

- During the [Anglo-Boer War \(1899-1902\)](#), Gandhi formed an Ambulance Corps of **Indian volunteers to support the British**, hoping for improved treatment of Indians, though this hope was not realised.

▪ **Establishment of Communal Living:**

- Gandhi founded the **Phoenix Settlement in Durban in 1904** as a community living experiment.
 - He had set up this farm after being inspired by a reading of **John Ruskin's Unto This Last**, a critique of capitalism.
- He established the **Tolstoy Farm near Johannesburg in 1910** to prepare Satyagrahis (followers of nonviolence).
- These initiatives aimed to foster self-reliance, promote communal harmony, and provide training in practical skills.

▪ **1913 Satyagraha Campaign:**

- Gandhi led a major satyagraha against the **poll tax, Registration of Marriages Act**, and passed laws, with significant participation from Indian women, including his wife, Kasturba.
 - Also, the Supreme Court had **invalidated all marriages not conducted according to Christian rites**, drawing the anger of the Indians and others who were not Christians.

▪ **Legal Reforms and Recognition of Indian Rights:**

- The sustained pressure from Gandhi's protests forced the South African government to pass the **Indian Relief Act, 1914** addressing several of the Indian community's grievances.

▪ **Impact of Gandhian Movements:**

- **Development of Satyagraha:** Gandhi's experiences in South Africa were crucial in developing his **philosophy of nonviolent resistance**, which he later applied in India's struggle for independence.
- **Global Impact:** Gandhi's methods in South Africa laid the foundation for **future civil rights movements** worldwide and significantly influenced global efforts against **racial and colonial oppression**.
 - Both [Nelson Mandela](#) and [Martin Luther King](#) were greatly influenced by Gandhiji and his satyagraha.

//

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi



“The weak can never forgive. Forgiveness is the attribute of the strong.”

Brief Description

Birth: 2nd October 1869, Porbandar (Gujarat).

2nd October is observed as **International Day of Non-Violence**.

Profile: Lawyer, Politician, Social activist, Writer and led Nationalist Movement.

Father of the Nation (first called by Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose).

Ideology: Believed in the ideas of non-violence, Truth, Honesty, Care for Mother Nature, Compassion, Welfare of Downtrodden etc.

Political Mentor: Gopal Krishna Gokhale

Death: Shot dead by Nathuram Godse (30th January, 1948).

30th January is observed as **Martyrs' Day**

Nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize five times.



Gandhi in South Africa (1893-1915)

Used satyagraha against racist regime (Native Africans and Indians were discriminated).

Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (PBD) is celebrated every year on 9th January, to commemorate his return from South Africa.

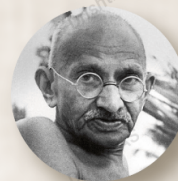
Contribution in India's Freedom Struggle

Small-scale movements like Champaran Satyagraha (1917)—First Civil Disobedience, Ahmedabad Mill Strike (1918)—First Hunger Strike, and Kheda Satyagraha (1918)—First Non-Cooperation.

Nationwide Mass Movements: Against Rowlatt Act (1919), Non-Cooperation Movement (1920-22), Civil Disobedience Movement (1930-34), Quit India Movement (1942).

Gandhi-Irwin Pact (1931): Between Gandhi and Lord Irwin that marked the end of a period of civil disobedience.

Poona Pact (1932): Between Gandhi and **B.R. Ambedkar**; this abandoned the idea of separate electorates for the depressed classes (Communal Award).



Books Written

Hind Swaraj, My Experiments with Truth (Autobiography)

Weeklies

Harijan, Navjivan, Young India, Indian Opinion.

Gandhi Peace Prize

is given by India for social, economic, and political transformation through Gandhian methods.

“Happiness is when what you think, what you say, and what you do are in harmony.”

“You must not lose faith in humanity. Humanity is an ocean; if a few drops of the ocean are dirty, the ocean does not become dirty.”

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Prelims

Q1. Who among the following is associated with ‘Songs from Prison’, a translation of ancient Indian religious lyrics in English? (2021)

- (a) Bal Gangadhar Tilak
- (b) Jawaharlal Nehru
- (c) Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi
- (d) Sarojini Naidu

Ans: (c)

Q2. With reference to the British colonial rule in India, consider the following statements: (2019)

1. Mahatma Gandhi was instrumental in the abolition of the system of 'indentured labour'.
2. In Lord Chelmsford's 'War Conference', Mahatma Gandhi did not support the resolution on recruiting Indians for World War.
3. Consequent upon the breaking of Salt Law by Indian people, the Indian National Congress was declared illegal by the colonial rulers.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 1 and 3 only
- (c) 2 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

Ans: (b)

PDF Reference URL: <https://www.drishtias.com/printpdf/130th-anniversary-of-natal-indian-congress>

