

“India was granted independence in 1947 because of Gandhi’s policy of non-cooperation.” How far do you agree with this statement?

In 1947 India was granted with its independence from the British Empire that had ruled over India since the 19th century. The campaign for independence began with the formation of the Indian National Congress party in 1885, the congress was a party for Indians to play a part in the running of the country. However, in 1914 World War 1 broke out and Indian people supported Britain and the Empire, sending food, materials and money. In exchange for their support during the war Congress demanded the British fix a date for India to become self-governing. This was agreed by the British but no date was actually set. In 1920 Gandhi persuaded Congress to vote for the first time for self-rule (self-government and self-control).

Gandhi changed Congress by making it appeal to a wider population instead of just the wealthy. He also started most of the major campaigns against the British. Perhaps the most famous of these were the protests against the British control of salt and cloth imports from England that that led to them making their own cotton and salt. Gandhi’s policy of non-cooperation (civil disobedience) and peaceful protest was the major strength of his protest movement and popularity. It contrasted with those who previously wanted a violent uprising against the British.

I think that if there had been violent protest against the British the government would have argued that their troops act in self-defence against armed rebels. However, in the Amritsar massacre the contrast of unarmed people being brutally massacred showed the world how wrong the British were. A large unarmed crowd had gathered in an open space enclosed by walls. Along came 50 soldiers and without ordering the crowd to leave fired upon the innocent men, women and children. After about six minutes 300 lay dead and another 1,000 injured. There was no escape for the crowd and the British only stopped firing as they had run out of ammunition.

In 1921 Gandhi launched his first campaign of non-violent protest against the new constitutional arrangements announced by British in 1919. Before it had become a part of the British Colonies India used to make its' own salt and its' own cotton and they did not pay any taxes. All this had changed under British rule and Gandhi helped to organised demonstrations all over India. One act of civil disobedience involved Gandhi leading a march to the sea where he and his followers made salt from the seawater. People were arrested for making and selling the salt butt the protest helped to show how powerless the army were in the face of individuals acting together. By 1922 the British had imprisoned around 30,000 Congress members none of whom had been violent in any way but many had been beaten the British army. Gandhi had persuaded Congress to use non-cooperation. He said the individuals should learn to control their anger and other passions, and to live simple lives, so that they would develop a quality within themselves called 'soul force' (*satyagraha*, in Hindi) He knew that the British would be defeated by soul-force, rather than by violence and the force of arms.

Gandhi was correct the British knew what they were doing was wrong, as throughout all the protests and marches not one person fought back against them. They knew it was wrong to hurt the innocent but they were being ordered to do so, so eventually they would have had to change the way they dealt with them.

I think non-cooperation was only one of several important factors that led to India's independence. The Second World War had left the British realising India no longer brought massive economic advantages to them and as a result it no longer made economic sense to rule India. They also realised that the cost of defending India would be far too high a price to pay. By the end of the second World War the British were facing there own economic problems and the continuing cost of India was becoming too great. Indian people were starting to see that the British were vulnerable and the army which until then had remained loyal were beginning to stop acting against Indian nationalists.

I have described in the above essay, the ways in which Gandhi has influenced the independence of India. It is fair to say that Gandhi did play quite a major in independence but it is also fair to say that his was not the only factor. As in the rest

of the essay I have been talking about other influences that led to its independence, including the World Wars, India's Army and non-cooperation. The latter statement I agree with very much, as if this had not been done Britain would have no need to think of dropping India as there would be a continuing economic reasons from both cheap manufactured goods and a very large market.