

Women in the Indian Independence Movement - the Salt Protests of 1930

Grades: High School

Suggested Curriculum Area: World History, World Geography, Social Studies

Amount of time

1-3 sessions (forty-five minute sessions)

Goals:

This lesson will examine women's involvement in the Indian independence movement through their participation in the 1930's Salt March.

The activities and materials are designed to address the following questions: What were the experiences of women in the Indian Salt Protests of 1930? What effects did women's participation have on the Indian movement for independence? How do different individuals remember and understand the role of women in the Salt March and the larger independence movement? How can primary source documents provide students additional perspectives on this historical event?

Objectives:

- Students will be able to describe the role of women in the salt protests of 1930 and interpret different perspectives on women's participation in the Indian Independence movement.
- Students will learn to use, analyze to synthesize information from primary source materials (written texts and photographs) to gain an understanding of multiple perspectives of an historical event.

Background Information for Teachers:

As part of the larger independence movement, Gandhi called for an end to the British monopoly and tax on salt in January 1930. Roughly a month later, Gandhi announced he would march to Dandi, a coastal city to illegally manufacture salt. On the famous Dandi march through the villages of Gujarat, Gandhi started off with 70 peaceful, non-violent protesters (*satyagrahi*). Along the way, people from villages and towns spontaneously joined the group. When the procession reached Dandi, thousands of people were walking with Gandhi. Among them were many women.

Gandhi included no women in his original group of 70 *satyagrahi* and this drew considerable resentment from many women. Some wrote to him passionately urging him to invite women to participate. On the last day of the march, Sarojani Naidu, Gandhi's close friend, and a nationalist leader in her own right, insisted on joining him. Sarojini Naidu was among the most visible leaders of pre-Independent India. As president of the Indian National Congress and the first woman governor of free India, she was a fervent advocate for India, avidly mobilizing support for the Indian Independence movement. She was also the first woman to be arrested in the salt march. Her presence signaled thousands of other women to join the protest. Some of the women who joined the salt

march were wealthy women from cities, but the majority were ordinary village women. Soon thousands of women were breaking the salt law and leading protests all over the country. In fact, the salt protest was made so successful because of the many women who not only made salt, but who also sat openly in markets selling and buying it. This time marked a new level of participation by Indian women in the nationalist movement. The event is generally remembered as the first time masses of Indian women participated in the struggle for independence and marked the involvement of women from all walks of life, extending the movement out of its upper class enclave.

At first, Gandhi's choice of salt as a symbol of protest had amused and bewildered many people—the British, as well as those in his own Congress Party. But Gandhi recognized the symbolic power of salt and the significance of the seemingly trivial but essential details of daily living, which were often relegated to the woman's sphere. Salt is one of the cheapest commodities and an item that every woman buys and uses routinely almost without thought. Making salt in defiance of British laws became a way for Indians to declare independence in a very personal way and in their own daily life. The action also revolutionized an understanding of the kitchen as linked to the nation; and of private, domestic space as linked to the public, political realm. This protest movement galvanized such large numbers of women into action, precisely because the action, though simple, touched the everyday life of all Indian women.

The role of women in the salt protests fit into a larger understanding of the role of women in India's fight for freedom from British rule. At this time, ideas on women's participation in the nationalist movement grew out of commonly held cultural beliefs on the nature of Indian women, as essentially self-sacrificing and thus ideally suited to non-violent protest. Emphasizing these feminine qualities and their role as mothers empowered women to find places in the public arena of protest. Gandhi and other nationalist leaders believed women were specifically well-suited to spread a message of non-violence and to bear the hardships of protest. The emphasis on her essential nature created a new place for women in public life, a new self-view, where women could become agents of reform in public spaces.

Lesson Outline and Activities:

1. Introduction to 1930 Salt March

Start by introducing students to the 1930 Salt March using “Background information for teachers” to create short lecture or by having students research the event on their own by going to the Website *Mahatma Gandhi Foundation - The Salt March: 75 Years* (<http://www.saltmarch.org.in/index.html>). This site includes documentary clips of the 1930 Salt March that you can also show in the classroom as part of a lecture.

2. Do first two parts of Student Activity: KWL

3. Student Activity: Photograph Analysis Activity

This activity can be done in a class discussion format or with students breaking out into groups to analyze the photographs and then presenting their findings to the class.

4. *Student Activity: Reading Primary Source Documents*

This activity can be done in a class discussion format or with students breaking out into groups to analyze the documents and then presenting their findings to the class.

5. Lead students in a discussion of the differences between the written documents and the photographs. How do the two mediums differ in terms of the kind of information they provide? How effective would each be on its own? How do the two different mediums work together to create an understanding of the event?

6. Conclude lesson by completing third part of *Student Activity: KWL*.

Materials list

- Student Activity: KWL
- Student Activity: Photograph Analysis
- Photographs 1-6
- Photograph Analysis Worksheet
- Student Activity: Reading Primary Source Documents
- Documents 1-8
- Document Analysis Worksheet

Resources:

Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay. *Inner recesses, outer spaces : memoirs*. New Delhi : Navrang. 1986.

Dennis Dalton. *Mahatma Gandhi: nonviolent power in action*. New York : Columbia University Press. 1993.

Geraldine Forbes. *Women in Modern India*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1996.

Radha Kumar. *A History of Doing: an Illustrated Account of Movements for Women's Rights and Feminist in India 1800-1990*, London: Verso. 1993.

Mahatma Gandhi Foundation – The Salt March: 75 Years
<http://www.saltmarch.org.in/index.html>

Sarojini Naidu. *Selected letters, 1890s to 1940s*. selected, edited, and introduced by Makarand Paranjpe. New Delhi : Kali for Women, 1996.

Sakuntala Narasimhan. *Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay : the romantic rebel*. New Delhi : Sterling Publishers. 1999.

Student Activity: KWL

TIME NEEDED: 8 minutes

OBJECTIVE: To recall details from the *Introduction to 1930 Salt March* and identify questions that students would like answered about women's participation in this protest movement. At the end of the day, or unit, students will complete this activity by sharing what they learned.

SUPPLIES FOR THIS ACTIVITY:

- Blank 3x5 note cards or notebook paper

WARM-UP: KWL – What do you KNOW? What do you WANT to know?

The KWL activity is a way for teachers to find out what their students Know (K) and what students Want to know (W) about the 1930 Salt March and women's participation in the Indian Independence Movement. This warm-up activity helps the teacher choose the activities that best suit their schedule and students' interests. Through this warm-up, the teacher assesses the knowledge that students retained from the teacher's introductory lecture or by reviewing the Website *Mahatma Gandhi Foundation - The Salt March: 75 Years*. This activity provides an opportunity for students to share prior knowledge and can also be used to review key ideas.

- Students write down their K (Know) and W (Want to know) on a blank 3x5 note card or on a sheet of paper. Give students two minutes to do their K and W and then have students share with the class.

WRAP-UP: KWL – What did you LEARN? (This closing activity can be done at the end of the lesson)

- Students share in written form or orally with the class what they learned from the lesson.

Student Activity: Photograph Analysis Activity

TIME NEEDED: 20-30 minutes

OBJECTIVE: Students will analyze historical photographs of the 1930 Salt March to develop a more detailed understanding of the impact of women's participation in this protest and the larger Indian independence movement.

SUPPLIES FOR THIS ACTIVITY:

- Computer with an LCD projector and internet access.
- Print out of photos from this lesson. The Website *Mahatma Gandhi Foundation - The Salt March: 75 Years* has many more photos, if you would like to expand this activity and examine more photographs with students.
- OPTIONAL: Photo Analysis Worksheet (for *Alternate Activity* below)

ACTIVITY: Photo Analysis – Interactive PowerPoint Lecture Format

The length of this activity is flexible depending on how many images you choose to have students analyze.

- Show photos one at a time and ask students to analyze what they see in each photo. The idea is for students to discover the meaning and context for the photos, by way of open-ended questions (How are men and women portrayed differently in the photographs? Compare clothing, activities they are involved in, placement within the frame of the photograph, etc.)

ALTERNATIVE ACTIVITY: Photo Analysis – Group Work Format

The length of this activity is flexible depending on how many images you choose to have students analyze.

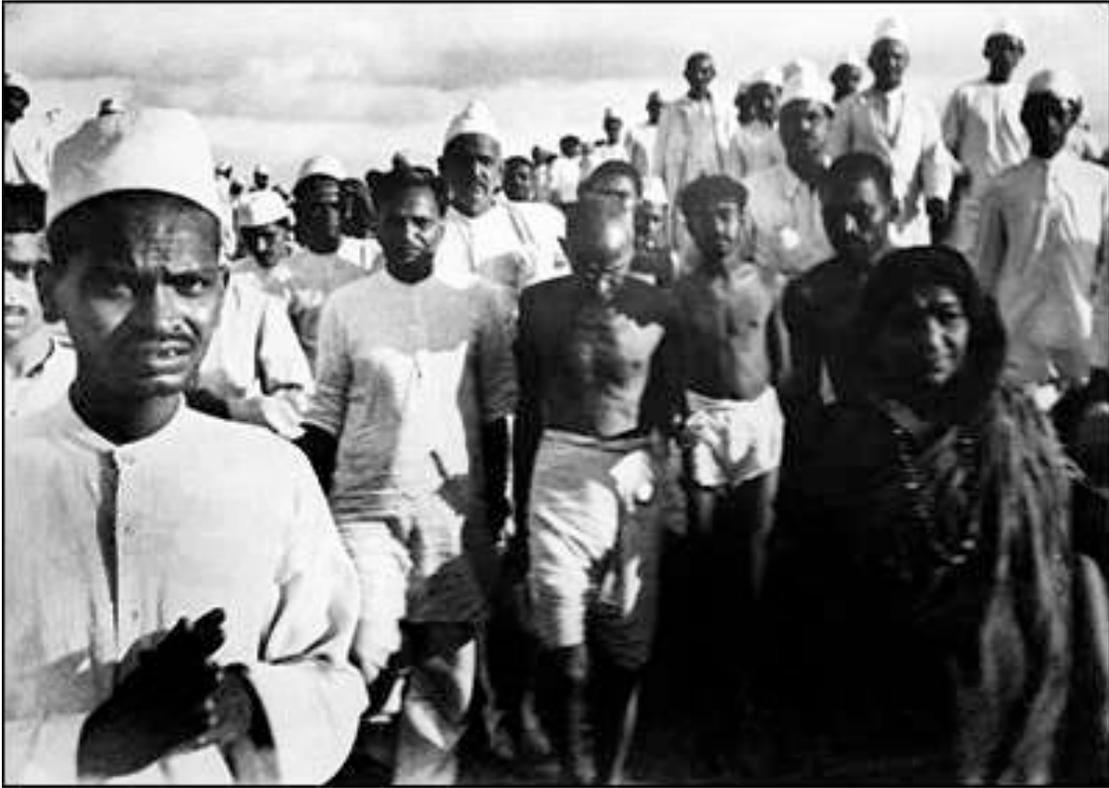
- Print out the photos you have selected on regular or photo paper.
- Break the students up into groups of 3-4 to analyze each photo (multiple groups may work on the same photo). Direct students to use the Photo Analysis Worksheet and to identify important elements in the photo (How are men and women portrayed differently in the photographs? Compare clothing, activities they are involved in, placement within the frame of the photograph, etc.).
- Project each image onto a screen and have groups lead a discussion of their image and point out what they saw to the class.

Photograph 1: Women at Salt march, April 1930



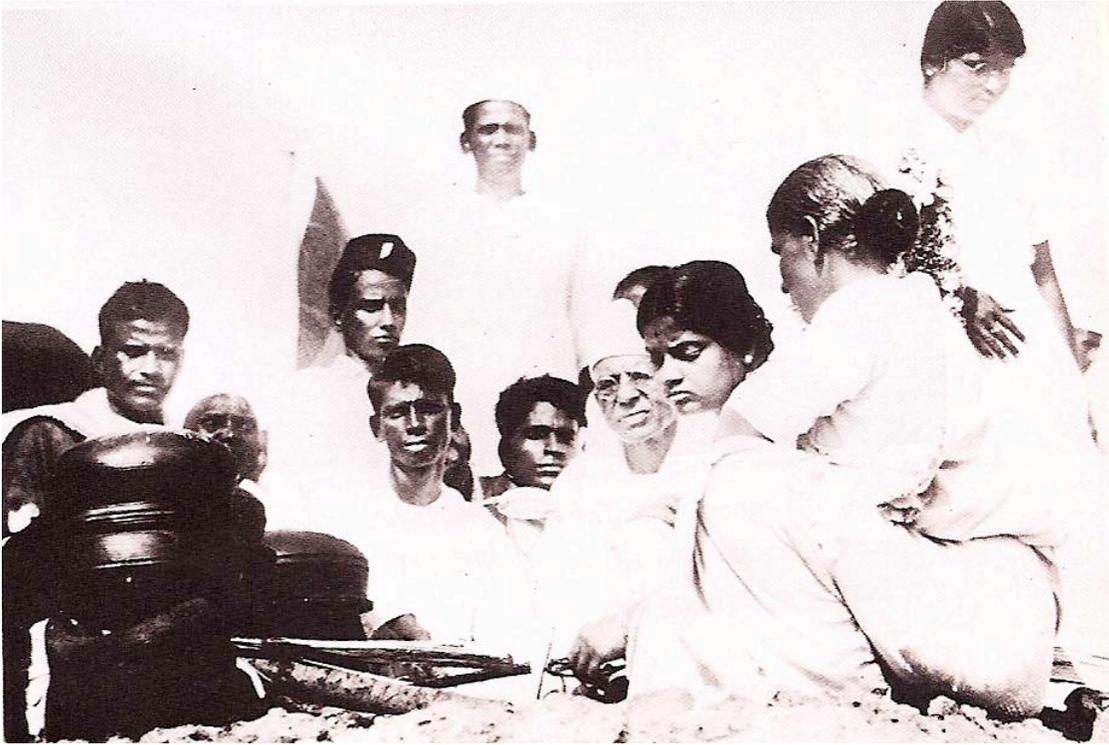
(http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Image:Salt_March_meal_preparation.jpg)

Photograph 2: Sarojani Naidu (lower right) accompanying Gandhi on Salt March, March-April, 1930



(http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Image:Gandhi_Salt_March.jpg)

Photograph 3: Manufacturing contraband salt at the beach in Madras



(Anil Dharker. *The Romance of Salt*. New Delhi Lotus Collection Roli Books. 2005. Insert)

Photograph 4: Gandhi at Dandi, South Gujarat, picking salt on the beach at the end of the Salt March, 5 April 1930



(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Image:Salt_March.jpg)

Photograph 5: Mahatma Gandhi and Sarojini Naidu (lower right) on Salt March, 1930



(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Image:Mahatma_%26_Sarojini_Naidu_1930.JPG)

Photograph 6: Women bringing brine to salt pans in Vile Parle Camp, Bombay during the civil disobedience movement, 1930



(Geraldine Forbes. *Women in Modern India*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1996. Pg. 133)

Photograph Analysis Worksheet

A. Observation

Study the photograph for 2 minutes. Form an overall impression of the image and then examine individual items in the image. Divide the image into four sections and study each to see what new details become visible. Use the chart below to write down your observations. List people, objects and activities in the image.

PEOPLE

OBJECTS

ACTIVITIES

B. Deductions

Based on your observations above, list three things you might deduce from this image.

1.

2.

3.

C. Questions

What questions does this images raise in your mind? List two.

1.

2.

How might you go about finding answers to your questions?

Student Activity: Reading Primary Source Documents

TIME NEEDED: 30 minutes

OBJECTIVE: Students will analyze primary source documents related to the 1930 Salt March and women's participation in the Indian Independence movement to evaluate the strengths and the limitations of primary source materials and to evaluate the different perspectives provided by different sources. Students will be able to use primary source documents for analysis of a historical event.

SUPPLIES FOR THIS ACTIVITY:

- Computer with an LCD projector
- Copies of documents for students
- Copies of the *Primary Source Document Questions*
- OPTIONAL: Photo Analysis Worksheet (for *Alternate Activity* below)

ACTIVITY: Document Analysis – Interactive PowerPoint Lecture Format

- Project documents one at a time. Begin by asking the students to identify the narrator. Ask students to analyze what each narrator says, using the *Primary Source Document Questions* to guide an open-ended discussion. End by asking students to draw comparisons between the different documents. Ask students what might account for differences in the perspectives of each narrator.

ALTERNATIVE ACTIVITY: Document Analysis – Group Work Format

- Print out the document from the lesson or from the Website regular or photo paper.
- Break the students up into groups of 3-4 to analyze document (multiple groups may work on the same document). Direct students to write down answers to the *Primary Source Document Questions*.
- Project each document onto a screen and have groups lead a discussion of their document, beginning by identifying the narrator of their document, and then going through the answers to the *Primary Source Document Questions*. End the discussion by having students draw comparisons and contrasts between the different perspectives. Ask students what might account for differences in the perspectives of each narrator.

Primary Source Document Questions

Does your narrator...

- Support women's participation in the Indian independence movement and/or the 1930s Salt Protests? Describe what they say.
- List qualities of women that make them suited /not suited for political protest? Give examples.
- Describe different classes or categories of women? List differences and cite the documents.
- Give reasons for women's participation in the protest? If so, what are they?
- Think that Indian Independence will change the roles of Indian women? Or discuss how roles have changed / will change for women?

Document 1: Letter Sarojini Naidu wrote to her daughter Leilamani Naidu on 4 March 1921

Only remember that you are an Indian girl and that puts upon you a heavier burden than if you were an English girl born to a heritage of freedom. Remember that you have to help India to be free and the children of tomorrow to be free-born citizens of a free land therefore - if you are true to your country's need you must recognise the responsibility of your Indian womanhood. Nothing in your speech or action should cause the progress of Indian women to suffer, nothing in yourself should give room for wretched reactionary slave - minds to say "This comes of giving too much education and freedom to our women." Think over it my darling. You are not free - one is - in the sense of being a law unto yourself in defiance of all existing tradition in our country - for freedom is the heaviest bondage in one sense - since it entails duties, responsibilities and opportunities from which slaves are immune... Noblesse oblige! and the ampler the liberty the narrower the right to do as one pleases. And you my friend of delight... you must shine as a foremost gem in the crown of India's freedom... You have in you all the seeds of true greatness: be great my little child, fulfill yourself nobly in accordance with all the profound and beautiful impulses and ideals of your nature... but always remembering that you are the symbol of India.

(Sarojini Naidu. *Selected letters, 1890s to 1940s*. selected, edited, and introduced by Makarand Paranjpe. New Delhi : Kali for Women, 1996, pp. 156-157.)

Document 2: Letter to to Gandhi from Miss J. Kabraj, February 26, 1930 suggesting the organization of a band of women as Peace=Volunteers

Women who bring life into the world are the greatest haters of bloodshed, for life is too precious to the. Give women a chance therefore to show what they can do.

(quoted in Dennis Dalton. *Mahatma Gandhi: nonviolent power in action*. New York : Columbia University Press, 1993. pg.98)

Document 3: Interview with Kamaladevi Chattopadhaya, nationalist leader, participant in salt protests and sister-in-law of Sarojani Naidu

Even though only a few women were chosen officially to take part in the salt satyagraha with which the Indian revolution opened on the morning of April 6, 1930, by sunset of that first day it has turned into a mass movement and swept the country.

On that memorable day thousands of women strode down to the sea like proud warriors. But instead of weapons, they bore pitchers of clay, brass and copper; and instead of uniforms, the simple cotton saris of village India.

...Women young and old, rich and poor, came tumbling out in their hundreds and thousands, shaking off the traditional shackles that had held them so long.

Valiantly they went forwards without a trace of fear or embarrassment. They stood at street corners with little packets of salt, crying out: ‘ we have broken the Salt Laws and we are free! Who will buy the salt of freedom?’ Their cries never went unheeded. Every passer-by stopped, slipped a coin into their hands and held out proudly a tiny pinch of salt.

(Radha Kumar, *A History of Doing*, New Delhi. Zubaan. 1993. pp. 78)

Document 4: Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay

...this was their [women's] first appearance in any modern militant political campaign and I could hardly suppress my excitement at the enormity of the occasion and my own good fortune to be amongst the first...It seemed such a stupendous moment in my life, in the life of women of my country.

(Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay. *Inner recesses, outer spaces : memoirs*. New Delhi : Navrang, 1986. pg. 152-153)

Document 5: From lecture of woman writer and columnist, Dr. Shakuntala Narasimhan who describes Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay

When Gandhiji announced his satyagraha, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay was one of the two women (along with Avantikabai Gokhale) chosen for inclusion in the front line unit of seven volunteers at Bombay. The volunteers arrived at the beach, a sea of humanity...and began to boil seawater in small pans to make salt. She made small packets of the salt thus made and sold it to collect money for the Satyagraha movement. She went to the share market and auctioned her packets to the highest bidders. She then came up with a cheeky idea. She went inside the (High) court premises and held up a packet of salt and asked a startled magistrate if he would not buy "the salt freedom" and even the freedom movement. That was Kamaladevi; defiant and daring, but always with a touch of cheeky humour. (unfortunately) there are no records of what the magistrate's response was.

(<http://www.ignca.nic.in/nl0028.htm>)

Document 6: Autobiography of Bombay Presidency, Governor Frederick Sykes

Most remarkable of all was the attitude of the women. Many Indian ladies of good family and high intellectual attainments volunteered to assist in picketing and salt-making. Congress has no scruples in making use of them, knowing well the embarrassment which they would cause to the authorities

(Sir Frederick Sykes, *From Many Angles: An Autobiography*. London: George Harrap, 1942, pg. 392)

Document 7: Government of India Official Report, 1930

...thousands of them many being of good family and high educational attainments suddenly emerged from the seclusion of their homes and in some instances from *purdah*, in order to join congress demonstrations and assist in picketing; and their presence on these occasions made the work of the police were required to perform particularly

(*India in 1930-31: A Statement Prepared for Presentation in Parliament*. Calcutta: Government of India Central Publishing Branch, 1932, pg. 73)

Document 8: Gandhi on Women and Satyagraha

I have suggested...that woman is the incarnation of ahimsa. Ahimsa means infinite love, which again means infinite capacity for suffering. Who but woman, the mother of man, shows this capacity in the largest measure? She shows it as she carries the infant and feeds it during nine months and derives joy in the suffering involved...Let her transfer that love to the whole of humanity...And she will occupy her proud position by the side of man as his mother, maker and silent leader. It is given her to teach the art of peace to the warring world thirsting for that nectar. She can become the leader in satyagraha which does not require the stout heart that comes from suffering and faith.

(M.K. Gandhi, *Women and Social Justice*, Ahmedabad, Navjivan Publishing House, 1954. pp. 26-27.)