

Chauri Chaura Incident, Background, Causes, Impacts, UPSC Prelims 2025

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The Chauri Chaura incident, which took place on February 4, 1922, in Uttar Pradesh, marked a significant turning point in India's freedom struggle. A violent clash erupted between protesting Indian villagers and the British police, resulting in the death of 22 policemen when a police station was set ablaze. This incident led **Mahatma Gandhi** to halt the **Non-Cooperation Movement**, fearing it would lead to more violence despite its growing momentum.

What is the Chauri Chaura Incident?

The Chauri Chaura Incident occurred on **4th February 1922** in the small town of **Chauri Chaura** in the **Gorakhpur** district of the United Provinces (now **Uttar Pradesh**), India. This incident marked a pivotal moment in the Indian independence movement and highlighted the complexities and challenges faced by the leaders and participants involved in the struggle for freedom.

Chauri Chaura Incident Background

The Chauri Chaura Incident occurred during Mahatma Gandhi's 1920 launch of the **Non-Cooperation Movement**. The movement aimed to achieve self-rule for India by withdrawing cooperation from the British government. Gandhi envisioned a **nonviolent struggle** in which Indians would boycott British goods, institutions, and services, demonstrating their discontent with colonial rule.

- By 1922, the movement had gained significant momentum, but tensions were also rising due to the oppressive actions of the British authorities and the passionate response of the Indian populace.

Chauri Chaura Incident Events

On the day of the Chauri Chaura incident, a group of around 2,000 to 3,000 protesters gathered to picket a liquor shop as part of the Non-Cooperation Movement. The protest escalated into a confrontation with the local police, who attempted to disperse the crowd by firing warning shots.

- **Police Firing:** The police fired upon the crowd, resulting in the deaths of three protesters. This act of violence by the authorities incited anger among the protestors.
- **Retaliation:** In response, the infuriated mob attacked the police, forcing them to retreat to the local police station. The protesters then set the police station on fire, resulting in the deaths of 22 policemen who were trapped inside.
- **Legal Defence:** After the **Chauri Chaura incident** in 1922, the British authorities arrested and tried several people. **Madan Mohan Malaviya** provided legal defence to many of the accused. His efforts helped save several individuals from the death penalty.

Chauri Chaura Incident Causes

Understanding the causes of the Chauri Chaura Incident requires examining the socio-political environment of the time and the factors that contributed to the growing unrest among the Indian populace.

- **British Colonial Policies:** The British colonial government imposed harsh laws and policies that oppressed the Indian people, leading to widespread discontent and anger. High taxes, forced labour, and discriminatory laws created an atmosphere of resentment.
- **Economic Hardships:** The **economic impact of World War I** exacerbated the hardships faced by the Indian population. Rising inflation, unemployment, and food shortages contributed to the growing frustration.
- **Political Mobilisation:** Mahatma Gandhi's call for non-cooperation with the British government resonated with millions of Indians. The movement encouraged Indians to boycott British goods, schools, and institutions, promoting self-reliance and national pride.
- **Local Factors:** In Chauri Chaura, local grievances against corrupt officials and police brutality fueled the fire. The local population was already disillusioned with the authorities and saw the **movement as an opportunity to express their dissent**. Previous incidents of police brutality had instilled strong resentment in the local population.
- **Immediate Trigger:** The immediate trigger for the incident was the arrest of several non-cooperation activists, which sparked anger among their supporters and led to the clash with the police.

Chauri Chaura Incident Withdrawal of Non-Cooperation Movement

The Chauri Chaura incident significantly impacted the non-cooperation movement. On February 12, 1922, Mahatma Gandhi, shocked by the violence, called for its suspension, believing people needed more preparation for disciplined satyagraha. This decision divided the Indian National Congress, leaving leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru astonished as the civil resistance had solidified their position. In response, Motilal Nehru and CR Das expressed their dismay and formed the Swaraj Party.

Following are the reasons why Gandhiji withdrew the non-cooperation after the Chauri Chaura Incident.

- **Commitment to Non-Violence (Ahimsa):** Gandhi's commitment to nonviolence was the cornerstone of his philosophy. He believed that true resistance could only be achieved peacefully and that violence would undermine the movement's moral authority.
 - Gandhi viewed the incident as a failure to maintain the discipline of non-violence and saw it as a warning sign that the movement was veering off course.
- **Moral Accountability:** Gandhi felt a deep sense of moral responsibility for the violence that occurred during the movement. He believed that leaders must hold themselves accountable for the actions of their followers and that the movement's success depended on its moral integrity.
- **Need for Introspection:** Gandhi saw the suspension of the movement as an opportunity for introspection and re-evaluation of strategies to ensure adherence to non-violence.
- **Risk of Further Violence:** Gandhi feared that the incident at Chauri Chaura could lead to a cycle of violence, with retaliatory actions by both the British authorities and Indian protesters.
- **Preserving Public Confidence:** Gandhi was concerned that continued violence could erode public confidence in the movement and alienate moderate supporters who valued peaceful protest.

Chauri Chaura Incident Impact on Freedom Struggle

The Chauri Chaura Incident and the subsequent suspension of the non-cooperation movement had a profound impact on India's freedom struggle, shaping its future course and influencing the strategies of leaders and participants.

- **Shift in Strategy:** The suspension of the movement led to a period of introspection within the Indian National Congress. It highlighted the need for better preparation and discipline among the masses for future movements.
- **Rise of New Leaders:** The incident and its aftermath saw the emergence of new leaders and ideologies within the Indian independence movement.
 - Leaders like **Jawaharlal Nehru** and **Subhas Chandra Bose** began to gain prominence, advocating for more radical approaches to achieve independence.
- **Emphasis on Constructive Work:** Gandhi shifted his focus towards constructive programs, such as **promoting khadi (hand-spun cloth), improving rural sanitation, and eradicating untouchability.** These initiatives aimed to prepare the masses for self-reliance and non-violent resistance.
- **Focus on Non-Violence:** The incident reinforced the importance of non-violence as a guiding principle for the independence movement, shaping the strategies of future campaigns.
- **Rise of Revolutionary Movements:** The movement's sudden halt disillusioned some supporters, who felt betrayed by **Congress's decision to stop the agitation.** This led to the rise of revolutionary movements

advocating armed resistance.

Chauri Chaura Incident Significance

The Chauri Chaura incident is significant for highlighting the challenges of maintaining nonviolence in mass movements. It marked a turning point in the Indian freedom struggle, temporarily halting civil disobedience and prompting a rethinking of strategies. Ultimately, it serves as a powerful reminder of the complexities of the independence movement and the critical importance of discipline and nonviolence in achieving political goals.

Chauri Chaura Incident UPSC PYQs

Question 1: Bring out the constructive programmes of Mahatma Gandhi during the Non-Cooperation Movement and Civil Disobedience Movement. **(UPSC Mains 2021)**

Question 2: Who provided legal defence to the people arrested in the aftermath of Chauri Chaura incident? **(UPSC Prelims 2025)**

- a) C.R.Das
- b) Madan Mohan Malaviya Krishna Kant and
- c) Dr. Saifuddin Kitchlew and Khwaja Hasan Nizami
- d) M. A. Jinnah

Ans: (b)

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