

GANDHI JI

Vision of a Free South Africa



E. S. Reddy

GANDHIJI'S VISION OF A FREE SOUTH AFRICA

A collection of articles

E. S. REDDY

"If we look into the future [of South Africa], is it not a heritage we have to leave to posterity, that all the different races commingle and produce a civilisation that perhaps the world has not yet seen?"

- M.K. Gandhi, in a speech in Johannesburg in 1908

[NOTE: The following is a revision of a book published in 1995 by Sanchar Publishing House, New Delhi, in 1995. It includes an additional article entitled: "Mahatma Gandhi - South Africa's Gift to India".]

DEDICATED

TO

NELSON MANDELA AND HIS COLLEAGUES

IN THE STRUGGLE FOR A NEW SOUTH AFRICA
WHERE, IN THE WORDS OF GANDHIJI, "ALL THE
DIFFERENT RACES COMMINGLE AND PRODUCE A
CIVILISATION THAT THE WORLD HAS NOT YET SEEN"

FOREWORD

With the establishment of a non-racial democratic government in South Africa, under the leadership of Nelson Mandela, in a remarkable spirit of reconciliation, the vision of Gandhiji, during the satyagraha he led in that country, remains an abiding source of strength and inspiration to the South African people. He had said in 1908:

"If we look into the future, is it not a heritage we have to leave to posterity, that all the different races commingle and produce a civilisation that perhaps the world has not yet seen?"

Interest in Gandhiji, his method of struggle, and his vision for the future of humanity has been rekindled of late across the globe, not least in South Africa. As Nelson Mandela said in September 1992: "Gandhiji was a South African and his memory deserves to be cherished now and in post-apartheid South Africa. We must never lose sight of the fact that the Gandhian philosophy may be a key to human survival in the twenty-first century."

It is most appropriate at this time to recall the role of Gandhiji in the movement for emancipation of South Africa and in clear perspective that provided him for directing the Indian freedom struggle. The publication of this book is intended to meet that timely requirement.

The author, an international civil servant with the United Nations (1949-85), has rendered valuable service towards globalising the problem of South Africa through his writings, initiatives and actions. While a student in the United States he met a delegation of the South African freedom movement in 1946 and since then he has unswervingly helped the struggle of the South African freedom fighters to secure genuine independence from apartheid rule. His contribution to that cause as the Principal Secretary of the Special Committee against Apartheid as well as the Director of the Centre against Apartheid in later years was indeed "formidable", as was noted by the late Olof Palme, the Prime Minister of Sweden. On retirement from the UN, he continued to promote the international campaign against apartheid as a member of the Council of Trustees of the International Defence and Aid Fund for Southern Africa, and in other capacities.

While championing the cause of South African freedom he was inexorably drawn towards analysing the phenomenal part that Gandhiji played as one of the prime motive forces behind the struggle to obliterate the tyrannical system founded in racism. The collection of articles comprising this publication is a vivid testimony of his scholarship and comprehension of both the Gandhian approach and the essence of the movement for freedom in South Africa. He effectively brings out the symbiotic relationship between the two while also

pointing to the "South African roots of the ideas of Gandhiji" (to explore which he has called for further indepth study).

Mr. Reddy's words are of special significance in the current context. While recounting Gandhiji's observation in 1946 - "that he would not shed a single tear if all the Indian satyagrahis were wiped out (in South Africa), for they would thereby point the way to the Africans and vindicate the honour of India" - he projects the "true Gandhiji" and not the caricature drawn in some supposedly scholarly studies. Gandhiji repeatedly emphasised until the end of his life that he was an Indian and a South African. He does not belong to Indian South Africans alone but to all South Africans. He then asserts without any trace of ambiguity: "The spirit of Gandhiji lives not only in the hearts of Indians struggling against racism and for a non-violent democratic society, but in those of Nelson Mandela, Oliver Tambo, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, the Reverend Beyers Naude and many, many others."

His article on Gandhiji's influence on Dr. Yusuf Dadoo focuses attention on how Dr. Dadoo, an outstanding South African freedom fighter of Indian origin, carried forward the Gandhi legacy "by building an alliance of Indians and Africans as the basis for widest unity of the people against racism".

Of particular value is the illuminating article on Gandhiji's association with the remarkable European women - pacifists, feminists and socialists - who helped him in South Africa. Gandhiji's unpublished letters also throw light on this association. It is necessary here to underscore what Mr. Reddy has written in conclusion: "those who assumed that he must be a reactionary if he wore peasant's clothes or professed religion; and those who called him an agent of Gujarati capitalists because he did not advocate class struggle and tried to unite the Indian community in the struggle for its dignity and honour - could not understand Gandhiji nor the admiration he evoked among the greatest men and women of this century. I hope that the new information which is becoming available will persuade scholars in India and South Africa to reconsider their assumptions and understand the real Gandhi."

This book, we are confident, would prove invaluable both for scholars engaged in Gandhian studies and for those concerned with promoting friendship and cooperation between India and the new South Africa.

New Delhi
August 15, 1994

SUMIT CHAKRAVARTTY
Editor, *Mainstream*

INTRODUCTION

I have put together a collection of articles and papers as my modest contribution to Indian-South African relations and to the observance of the 125th birthday of Gandhiji.

It was in South Africa where he had gone in search of gainful employment - first as an employee of a merchant and later as an advocate in Durban and attorney in Johannesburg - that Gandhiji found his vocation because of his spirit of service and the influence of emergent Indian nationalism.

The precarious position of the small Indian community, the experience of rabid racism against Indians, and the repeated betrayals of promises by the authorities in South Africa and Britain did not lead him to despondency or to a lack of faith in humanity. He discovered *satyagraha* and became convinced that it was invincible. His philosophy was tested in South Africa in an unequal contest between the determined racist authorities and the small Indian community divided by class, language and religion. The seven-year *satyagraha* climaxed in the heroism of tens of thousands of working people - coupled with the sacrifices of many professionals and youth, as well as some prosperous merchants - and forced the government to negotiate an honourable settlement.

This experience transformed M.K. Gandhi, the "Indian patriot in South Africa", into a leader whose efforts to spiritualise politics inspired many struggles around the globe for freedom, justice and a sane society.

I became particularly interested in Gandhiji during the many years I spent, as Director of the United Nations Centre against Apartheid, in promoting international action against racism in South Africa. These articles are a result of my search for an understanding of the evolution of the freedom struggle in the country and its continuing relevance. They were written over several years - before and after mass defiance forced the regime to negotiate with the liberation movement - and will need to be understood in that context.

I am most grateful to a number of friends for their encouragement, advice and assistance in my research - notably the editors of *Mainstream* (New Delhi) and *The Leader* (Durban) where most of the articles appeared; to Haridev Sharma, Deputy Director of the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi; to the Southern Africa Research Program at Yale University and its Director, Prof. Leonard Thompson; to the Librarians at the Yale University, the University of Witwatersrand and the University of Cape Town - Moore Crossey, Anne Cunningham and Leonie Twentyman Jones - to the University of Durban-Westville and its Documentation Centre; and, above all, to the numerous friends I cherish from the South African liberation movement.

E. S. Reddy

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MAHATMA GANDHI - SOUTH AFRICA'S GIFT TO INDIA?¹

Eighty years ago, on January 9, 1915, M.K. Gandhi returned to Bombay after 21 years in exile, wearing a loin cloth and travelling from London in the lowest class of the ship. He was acclaimed by the whole nation which was inspired by his struggle and sacrifice in South Africa for the honour of the "Motherland". As he went around the country with Kasturba, the heroine of the last phase of the South African struggle, huge receptions were held and addresses presented to him in every city. "Moderates" welcomed him as much as "extremists", Muslims and Parsis as much as Hindus.

This Gandhi had little relation to the M.K. Gandhi, the 23-year-old barrister in a suit, who had sailed from Bombay in April 1893 by first class in the hope of finding opportunity in a new land.

In later years, Gandhiji said that he was born in India but "made" in South Africa;² "it was after I went to South Africa that I became what I am now".³

He told the Kanpur Congress in 1925 that "Indians of South Africa claim that they have given me to you. I accept that claim. It is perfectly true that whatever service I have been able to render... to India, comes from South Africa."⁴

To understand the evolution and transformation of Gandhiji in South Africa, it is necessary to note, as he himself stressed on several occasions, that he was not a born saint and had not had an extraordinary childhood or youth.

He said in a speech in 1925:

"I never had a brilliant career. I was all my life a plodder. When I went to England... I couldn't put together two sentences correctly. On the steamer I was a drone... I finished my three years in England as a drone."⁵

And further in a speech in 1937:

"At school the teachers did not consider me a very bright

¹ Published in *Mainstream*, weekly, New Delhi, January 21, 1995

² *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* (hereinafter referred to as *Collected Works*), Volume 84, page 380.

³ *Collected Works*, Volume 87, page 257.

⁴ *Collected Works*, Volume 29, pages 358.

⁵ Speech at Law College in Travancore, March 1925. Mahadev H. Desai, *Day-to-Day with Gandhi*, Volume VI, pages 103-04.

boy. They knew that I was a good boy, but not a bright boy. I never knew first class and second class. I barely passed. I was a dull boy. I could not even speak properly. Even when I went to South Africa I went only as a clerk."⁶

His primary concern as a student in London and on his return to India was to make money. He was unsuccessful as a barrister and could only earn some 300 rupees a month as a writer of petitions and memorials, a profession in which he was to excel later. Frustrated, he accepted an offer of employment from a friend of his brother in Durban. He was to get first class fare, but only £105 and local expenses for the year. He was in fact put up as a boarder in Pretoria.

He showed little interest in politics and had no organisational experience except for his work with the Vegetarian Society in London. His main assets were his honesty, spirit of sacrifice and innate love of his country.

The Gandhi who returned from South Africa was an inspiring leader - fearless, selfless and with a vision - who had led a small community in a long and difficult, yet victorious, struggle against a stubborn racist government. He had developed a philosophy of life and of non-violent defiance of injustice which were to influence millions of people around the world. He had also formed definite views on reform of the Indian society and means to secure *Swaraj*.

In considering the influences which moulded Gandhiji in South Africa, we are handicapped by the serious gaps in knowledge about his life in that country. He said in 1939 that he had intimate relations with many Africans and had the privilege often advising them.⁷ He was a close friend of Olive Schreiner, a prominent writer and a very progressive South African⁸ and he was in contact with many other South Africans of all backgrounds. But no information is available on his discussions with them. The evolution of his thinking has often been described - relying mainly on his book, *My Experiments with Truth* - as the result of his "ethical experiments" and of his study of religions and some Western writers. I would suggest that a major influence on him was the Indian national movement in the early years of this century.

The incident soon after his arrival in South Africa, when he was thrown out of a train in Pietermaritzburg in bitter cold, has often

⁶ Speech to Gandhi Seva Sangh, Hudli, April 17, 1937. *Collected Works*, Volume 65, pages 100-1.

⁷ *Collected Works*, Volume 69, page 377.

⁸ *Collected Works*, Volume 29, page 361 and Volume 31, page 208.

been cited as a landmark in his transformation. He himself said in an interview with Dr. John Mott:

"I was afraid for my very life... What was my duty, I asked myself. Should I go back to India, or should I go forward, with God as my helper, and face whatever was in store for me? I decided to stay and suffer. My active non-violence began from that date. And God put me through the test during that very journey. I was severely assaulted by the coachman for my moving from the seat he had given me."⁹

Gandhiji was, I believe, particularly shocked as he was a well-dressed barrister who had only recently returned from Britain where he would have been treated with respect. The conductor and the constable who evicted him were British and would have been considered of lower class. The fact that he was humiliated in a foreign country, especially a British colony, outraged him and aroused his patriotism.

While this incident was a turning point in his life, it did not have a significant effect on his activities for many years. Returning to India was not a serious option for him at the time. His only public activity in the following year was to encourage meetings of Indians in Pretoria to consider their grievances and to draft petitions to the authorities. One of the first petitions was to secure assurance from railway authorities that first and second class tickets would be issued to "properly dressed" Indians.

After his initial contract expired, he agreed to stay on in Durban and undertake public service. It was decided in his discussions with the local Indian merchants that he would be provided retainers of at least £300 a year so that he could set up an independent household and live in a style usual for barristers. He was firm that he would not charge for public work.

He enrolled as a barrister and his practice developed. He rented a house at Beach Grove and entertained Europeans and Indians. His service to the Natal Indian Congress, essentially an organisation of the Indian merchants, was mainly in drafting petitions to authorities and letters to the newspapers. He gave legal services to the poor Indians and indentured labourers at no charge and did volunteer work as a compounder in a hospital. He devoted much time to the welfare and improvement of the Indian community. He organised debates and other programmes for young Indians - most of them Natal-born and educated - and even

⁹ *Collected Works*, Volume 68, pages 165-73.

led sporting activities. He gained respect as a public-spirited barrister but had not become a fighter for justice. He lived comfortably and apparently sent money to his family.

Returning in 1902 after a brief stay in India, he decided to settle in Johannesburg and enrolled as an attorney. He sought no retainers, but had a successful practice, earning as much as £5,000 a year, though devoting much of his time to public service. He spent part of his income to finance *Indian Opinion* and the Phoenix Settlement.¹⁰

The establishment of the Phoenix Settlement in 1904 was a new phase in his experiments, especially as regards simple living. This was followed in 1906 by two crucial decisions in his life - the vow of *brahmacharya* and a letter to his brother that he had no interest in worldly possessions. These decisions were also a preparation for a new level of public service, and were followed by the abandonment of legal practice in 1908, when his friend, Mr. Hermann Kallenbach, undertook to look after his simple needs.

It was in 1906 that Gandhiji decided to defy a humiliating law and soon became a leader in struggle rather than an adviser to the community. I believe Gandhiji was greatly influenced by the rise of national movement in India in taking this step.

He had visited India for five months in 1896 and met a number of public leaders to secure their support to redress the grievances of Indians in South Africa. But it was his second visit for a year in 1901-2 which had a profound effect on him. He attended the Congress session in Calcutta and spent more than a month with G.K. Gokhale whom he admired greatly for his efforts to "spiritualise" politics and to organise a corps of "servants of India" for whom politics would be a wholetime occupation.

Returning to South Africa, he began to follow the national movement in India. He called for united opposition by Hindus and Muslims against the partition of Bengal, and supported the *swadeshi* movement. Soon after, he abandoned "petition politics" as useless, unless there was some sanction behind the petitions, and decided to defy the Transvaal Asiatic Ordinance. One of the most dramatic events of the *satyagraha* was the burning of the passes, similar to the burning of British cloth in the *swadeshi* movement. Throughout the *satyagraha*, Gandhiji emphasised that it was not so much for the rights of the Indians in South Africa as for the honour of the "motherland". Many young people who were not particularly

¹⁰ He spent nearly £5,000 for this purpose. He transferred the Settlement to a Trust in 1912.

affected by the discriminatory laws repeatedly went to prison for that cause. Significantly, the first biography of Gandhiji, by the Rev. J.J. Doke, was entitled "*An Indian Patriot in South Africa*".¹¹

During this time, Gandhiji began to express his views on the situation in India and they reflected his own experience with the Indian community in South Africa which included people of many religions and castes who spoke many languages and were mostly illiterate.

He repeatedly stressed the need for Hindu-Muslim unity. He was strongly opposed to untouchability, especially as all Indians were treated almost like untouchables by South African whites. (Many of the Indians in South Africa were descendants of untouchables.)

In an article in *Indian Opinion* on July 8, 1905, he called for the abolition of the salt tax in India. In another article in August 1906, he advocated the adoption of Hindustani as the common language for India. He "discovered" the spinning wheel while on a deputation from South Africa to London in 1909.¹²

He had already been advocating total prohibition, especially because of the effect of liquor in degrading the indentured workers.

(Non-violence was not an issue in South Africa as armed resistance by the small Indian community was unthinkable. Gandhiji's emphasis was on the duty to defy unjust laws and on the need for sacrifice. He wrote about non-violence mainly in relation to terrorism in India and his discussions with Indian revolutionaries in London.)

But perhaps more important was the experience he gained in the seven-year *satyagraha* in which thousands of Indians courted imprisonment and suffered brutal assaults with hardly a single instance of weakening or apology. Tens of thousands of workers went on strike, with little organisation, even while he was in prison and defied intimidation and violence by the police and military.

Gandhiji was inspired by the heroism of the people even as they were inspired by his example.¹³ The courage and sacrifice of

¹¹ Gandhiji approved this biography.

¹² *Collected Works*, Volume 37, page 288. He said he had referred to the handloom in *Hind Swaraj* which he wrote that year, as he did not know the distinction between the spinning wheel and the loom.

¹³ Gandhiji said in a speech in Madras on April 21, 1915:

"You have said that I inspired these great men and women, but I cannot accept that proposition. It was they, the simple-minded folk, who worked away in faith, never

women, who responded to his invitation to join the *satyagraha* in its final phase, was particularly striking. He had closely followed the suffragette movement in Britain and admired the tenacity of the women. He was perhaps also inspired by the sacrifices of Boer women during the Anglo-Boer War.¹⁴ Yet his call to the Indian women was bold and their response magnificent.

Equally impressive was the discipline and steadfastness of the poor workers. Gandhiji recognised: "These men and women are the salt of India; on them will be built the Indian nation that is to be."¹⁵

Benefiting from this experience, Gandhiji was able to lead the Indian national movement to an entirely new stage by encouraging the active participation of peasants and workers, as well as women, and by making people lose fear of jail.

Gandhiji - or rather his philosophy and outlook - was thus a gift from South Africa to India, but it had its roots both in India and in South Africa.

expecting the slightest reward, who inspired me, who kept me to the proper level, and who compelled me by their great sacrifice, by their great faith, by their great trust in the great God to do the work that I was able to do."(*Collected Works*, Volume 13, pages 52-53.)

¹⁴ Gandhiji said in a speech to college students in Lahore in 1920: "Every woman in the Transvaal was a Rani of Jhansi. When will our women be so brave?" (*Collected Works*, Volume 18, page 364.)

¹⁵ Speech in London on August 8, 1914. *Collected Works*, Volume 12, page 524.

GANDHIJI AND SOUTH AFRICA¹⁶

"...the striking role of India in the development of the struggle for national and social liberation in South Africa has its firm roots in the early campaigns led by Mahatma Gandhi in that country, coupled with the continuing and active interest he took in the South African situation. All South Africans have particular cause to honour and remember the man, who was in our midst for 21 years and went on to enter the history books as the Father of Free India. His imprint on the course of the South African struggle is indelible."

-Oliver Tambo, in his speech in New Delhi accepting the Jawaharlal Nehru Award for International Understanding on behalf of Nelson Mandela, 1980

"Gandhiji was a South African and his memory deserves to be cherished now and in post-apartheid South Africa. The Gandhian philosophy of peace, tolerance and non-violence began in South Africa as a powerful instrument of social change... This weapon was effectively used by India to liberate her people. The Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., used it to combat racism in the United States of America..."

"We must never lose sight of the fact that the Gandhian philosophy may be a key to human survival in the twenty-first century."¹⁷

-Nelson Mandela, in his speech opening the Gandhi Hall in Lenasia, September 1992

Speaking at a prayer meeting in New Delhi on June 28, 1946, commending the passive resistance movement launched by Indian South Africans, under the leadership of Dr. Yusuf M. Dadoo and

¹⁶ Published in *India Perspectives*, New Delhi, July 1993; and *Times of India*, New Delhi, June 24, 1993.

¹⁷ *The Leader*, Durban, October 2, 1992.

G.M. Naicker, Gandhiji said that he was born in India but was "made" in South Africa.¹⁸

When Dr. Dadoo and Dr. Naicker called on him in 1947, he told them:

"Truly speaking, it was after I went to South Africa that I became what I am now. My love for South Africa and my concern for her problems are no less than for India..."¹⁹

It was in South Africa - where he spent two decades in the prime of his life - that Gandhiji realised his vocation and developed his philosophy of life. It was there that his views on the problems of India crystallised. It was there that he discovered and first practised *satyagraha* - a most civilised and humane form of resistance to injustice, with a willingness to suffer rather than hurt, to love rather than hate the adversary.

When he was leading the *satyagraha* in the Transvaal, Count Leo Tolstoy wrote to him from Russia on September 7, 1910, that his activity in the Transvaal "is the most essential work now being done in the world, and in which... all the world will undoubtedly take part."

Today, as South Africa looks forward to redemption from the centuries-old legacy of racist domination - after an essentially non-violent struggle of the oppressed people, supported by the solidarity of governments and peoples around the world - the centenary of the arrival of Gandhiji in South Africa takes on a special significance. The South African people have now the opportunity to realise Gandhiji's vision of a South Africa in which "all the different races commingle and produce a civilisation that perhaps the world has not yet seen."²⁰

A public servant

M.K. Gandhi, a 23-year-old barrister, arrived in South Africa in May 1893, on a one-year assignment to assist an Indian merchant in a civil suit. He had shown little interest in politics, and had little experience in organising and leading people. But he had a strong sense of duty, an attachment to truth, an urge to serve humanity, a love of his motherland and an open mind.

¹⁸ *Harijan*, July 7, 1946; *Collected Works*, Volume 84, page 380.

¹⁹ *Collected Works*, Volume 87, page 257.

²⁰ *Collected Works*, Volume 8, pages 242-48.

Within days of his arrival, he was thrown off a train, assaulted by a white coachman, denied hotel rooms and pushed off a sidewalk - all because of his colour. He saw the dispossession and oppression of the Africans, the children of the soil. And he learnt of the harassment and humiliations suffered by Indians - not only the indentured labourers who were forced to work under semi-slave conditions, but those who had completed indenture, their children born in South Africa, and the traders who had arrived on their own. He agreed to extend his stay in South Africa and try to help improve the situation.

Gandhiji's first concern was to educate and unite the Indian community consisting of a little over 50,000 in Natal and about 12,000 in the Transvaal. It was dispersed, and divided by class, religion and language. Of those in Natal, one-third were indentured labourers in plantations and mines; about 30,000 were "free Indians" who had completed indenture and their children; and 5,000 who belonged to the trading community. There was little contact between the traders and the poorer sections of the community.

The Indians were mainly Hindus and Muslims, with a few Parsis and a number of Christians. They spoke many languages - Tamil, Telugu, Gujarati, Hindi, Urdu etc. Most of them were illiterate and communication among them was difficult.

Gandhiji helped establish the Natal Indian Congress in 1894 and the Transvaal British Indian Association in 1903 to defend Indian rights. These were mainly associations of traders, as membership fees were too high for the poorer sections of the community. But Gandhiji developed close relations with the youth and helped associate them in public work. He provided free legal services to indentured labourers and acted as a volunteer in a charitable hospital, thereby getting to know the workers and their families.

Gandhiji, at that time, had great faith in the principles professed by the British Empire. He felt that the colour prejudice in Natal was local and temporary, and would give way to the British sense of justice. He sought to persuade the Europeans that Indians were a civilised people entitled to equal rights under solemn commitments by Britain.

He lived in a European area and entertained Europeans and Indians in the hope of promoting better understanding. He drafted many appeals and petitions, organised deputations and meetings, and wrote numerous letters to the press. He led an Indian ambulance corps in the Anglo-Boer War, and later a stretcher-bearer corps

during the "Zulu rebellion" - though his sympathies were with the Boers and the Zulus - to demonstrate that Indians were willing to shoulder the responsibilities of citizenship.

On visits to India and Britain and through extensive correspondence, he secured understanding and sympathy among Indian leaders and British friends for the plight of Indians in South Africa.

These efforts, however, proved almost fruitless, as more and more measures were enacted to make the life of Indians miserable.

Gandhiji came to recognise that petitions could help only when they had some sanction behind them - either physical force or the immensely superior soul force, *satyagraha*.

Meanwhile, he had continued his quest for self-realisation, drawing inspiration from thinkers like John Ruskin and Leo Tolstoy and from Hinduism and other religions which he considered different paths to God.

Concerned with human equality and quality of life, he believed that physical and manual labour was essential. He rejected uncontrolled industrial development which turned workers into slaves of machines and caused alienation.

By 1903, he began to give up most of his income for public work, established the weekly *Indian Opinion* to inform the Indian community and the Europeans, and set up the Phoenix Settlement as a place for simple communal living. He took a vow of celibacy in 1906, and subsequently gave up his lucrative legal practice to live in poverty and identify himself with the poor.

Non-violence, love and truth became to him indispensable in human relations. His attachment to non-violence was strengthened by his experience nursing the Zulus who had been brutally lashed by the European militia and left unattended.

In 1906, when the Transvaal Government issued the Asiatic Ordinance (later enacted as Asiatic Registration Act), he saw it not only as a measure designed to ruin the Indian community but as an affront to the dignity and honour of India. He decided to defy the law, whatever the consequences. The Indian community followed his lead and refused to register under the Act.

Thus began a new phase in the life of Gandhiji to which the years

of petitions and appeals were a preparation. He discovered *satyagraha* - an active, yet non-violent, defiance of injustice with fearlessness, sacrifice and suffering. He said in 1909:

"A *satyagrahi* must be afraid neither of imprisonment nor of deportation. He must neither mind being reduced to poverty, nor be frightened, if it comes to that, of being mashed into pulp with a mortar and pestle."²¹

The Satyagraha

The resistance by the small Indian community against the racist laws was difficult and lasted eight years from 1906 to 1914. But thousands of people, young and old, joined the struggle and displayed great heroism.

Gopal Krishna Gokhale, who visited South Africa in 1912, observed that Gandhiji had shown "the marvellous spiritual power to turn ordinary men around him into heroes and martyrs."

In January 1908, after 150 Indians went to prison in defiance of the Act, a compromise was reached between General Jan Smuts, the Interior Minister, and Gandhiji, but it soon broke down as the Government refused to repeal the Act. *Satyagraha* was resumed and over two thousand persons out of a total Indian community of a little over ten thousand went to prison, several of them repeatedly.

The *satyagraha* was again suspended in 1911, after the formation of the Union of South Africa, in the hope of a negotiated settlement, but again the talks failed. The Union Government, moreover, declined to take action when the Supreme Court ruled that all marriages not performed according to Christian rites - that is, most Indian marriages - were invalid. It prevaricated on its promise to Gokhale to repeal the Natal law requiring former indentured labourers and members of their families to pay an unjust and exorbitant annual tax of £3 each.

So the third phase of the *satyagraha* was launched in September 1913 all over the country. Gandhiji invited women to join and called on the workers to strike until the £3 tax was abolished.

"The whole community rose like a surging wave. Without organisation, without propaganda, all - nearly 40,000 - courted imprisonment. Nearly ten thousand were actually

²¹ *Indian Opinion*, October 30, 1909; *Collected Works*, Volume 9, page 447.

imprisoned..."²²

Gandhiji led the great march of 2,200 workers and their families from Newcastle to the Transvaal border and was jailed for the fourth time. There was then a spontaneous strike by all Indian workers in Natal, the biggest general strike that the country had ever seen. Thousands were confined in prisons and mine compounds and the prisoners were subjected to cruel treatment. Many striking workers were brutally assaulted and a number of them were killed or wounded.

Gandhiji led in sacrifice and members of his family repeatedly went to prison. The resisters included men and women of all faiths, rich and poor, and none flinched at the increasing severity of prison conditions and repression. Even when Gandhiji and other leaders were in prison, the resisters showed commendable discipline and adherence to non-violence.

Europeans like Henry Polak, Hermann Kallenbach and A.H. West, who had become admirers and associates of Gandhiji, identified themselves with the Indian cause and even went to prison. Supporters of the struggle in the European community, though a small minority, included many churchmen and prominent public figures - such as Olive Schreiner, the writer, William Hosken, leader of the Progressive Party, and Vere Stent, an editor.

General Smuts was obliged in the face of the determination of the Indian community, backed by a powerful national agitation in India and pressure from Britain, to sign an agreement with Gandhiji, conceding all the main demands of the *satyagraha*.

Gandhiji then left for India on July 18, 1914 - exactly four years before Nelson Mandela was born - leaving behind him the example of a righteous struggle which knows no defeat.

South Africa to India

Gandhiji carried with him to India not only his philosophy of *satyagraha*, but firm views derived from his South African experience on the problems of India.

His close association with the Muslims in South Africa, and their contribution to the *satyagraha*, convinced him that Hindu-Muslim unity must be an essential tenet of the Indian national movement. Outraged at the treatment of Indians in South Africa as virtual

²² *Young India*, April 20, 1921; *Collected Works*, Volume 20, page 15.

untouchables, he sought to eliminate the scourge of untouchability in India. His experience in trying to unite the Indian people in South Africa led him to advocate a national language for India.

He also brought with him respect for women who played a crucial role in the final stage of the *satyagraha*, braving imprisonment with hard labour, many of them with their infants. Valliamma, a 16-year-old girl, gave her life for the cause rather than accept early release from prison, and his own wife, Kasturba, came out of prison in shattered health.

Gandhiji was most impressed by the way the poor workers had acquitted themselves in the struggle. He said in London on August 8, 1914:

"These men and women are the salt of India; on them will be built the Indian nation that is to be."²³

He proceeded to bring the mass of the people of India, including women, into action while leading the struggle for the independence of India. He combined political struggle with a constructive programme to promote respect for manual labour, the regeneration of village industries and simple living.

The heritage of Gandhi

Gandhiji was against any cult of his followers. He disliked the term "Gandhism", as much as the title *Mahatma*, bestowed on him by a grateful nation. What he left for posterity was the example of his life, his search for truth and his actions in practising what he believed. "My life is my message," he said.

His outlook was universal. To him all religions make for "peace, love and joy in the world". "Let us all merge in each other", he exhorted, "like drops of ocean."

The example of Gandhiji and the *satyagraha* he led in South Africa and India have encouraged and inspired the struggles for freedom of oppressed peoples in many lands around the world where the leaders absorbed his thought and creatively applied it in the light of their own traditions and situations.

Non-violent defiance has been a major phenomenon in the world, especially in recent years, when powerful dictatorships have been toppled by popular resistance. It has been practised by many public

²³ *Indian Opinion*, September 30, 1914; *Collected Works*, Volume 12, pages 523-26.

movements for causes which Gandhiji cherished - such as peace, disarmament, and protection of the environment.

These struggles and movements have, in turn, enriched the heritage of Gandhiji.

As Nelson Mandela declared recently, the spirit of Gandhiji - that is, the *satyagraha* conceived and tested in Africa at the beginning of this century - may well be a key to human survival in the twenty-first century.

THE FIRST MARTYRS OF SATYAGRAHA²⁴

Gandhiji often stressed that *satyagraha* is not mere jail-going. He warned, during the first *satyagraha* in South Africa, as early as 1909:

"A *satyagrahi* must be afraid neither of imprisonment nor of deportation. He must neither mind being reduced to poverty, nor be frightened, if it comes to that, of being mashed into pulp with a mortar and pestle."²⁵

It was already clear that though *satyagraha* is a totally non-violent and civilised form of resistance, the oppressors would try to break it by resort to an escalation of brutality, together with "dirty tricks" to confuse and divide the ranks of the resisters.

The *satyagrahis* in South Africa were at first sentenced to short terms of simple imprisonment. But as the movement proceeded, the courts handed down longer sentences with hard labour, even for women with small children. Prison conditions became harsher. The Government resorted to illegal deportations to India and pressure was exerted by European creditors on Indian merchants to force them into insolvency. At the last stage of the *satyagraha* in 1913, when Indian workers went on strike, they were subjected to brutal assaults by the army and mounted police, as well as mine and estate managers.

The *satyagraha* led to the martyrdom of several resisters, and injuries and shattered health to many more.

Gandhiji in *Satyagraha in South Africa*, and earlier in *Indian Opinion*, wrote moving accounts in tribute to four martyrs: Sammy Nagappan, a teenager who died of pneumonia after being forced

²⁴ Published in *Mainstream*, New Delhi, August 14, 1993.

²⁵ *Indian Opinion*, October 30, 1909; *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Volume 9, page 447.

to break stones in bitter cold; A. Narayanaswami, who was not allowed to land for two months when he returned from illegal deportation to India, though shivering on the open deck without adequate clothes; Valliamma, the young girl who refused to seek release from prison despite serious illness and died soon after completing her sentence; and Harbat Singh, an illiterate 70-year-old worker who insisted on serving imprisonment.

One of the last acts of Gandhiji before leaving South Africa was to attend the unveiling of memorials to Valliamma and Nagappan at the Braamfontein Cemetery in Johannesburg. I was shocked on my last visit to South Africa, when I wished to pay tribute to them, to hear that the tombstones of these martyrs - precious not only for the Indian community in South Africa but for India - had been removed by the Johannesburg municipality, under United Party management, during the era of apartheid. I hope that the Indian Government and the Indian community in South Africa - as well as the African National Congress - will denounce this act of desecration and ensure the restoration of the memorials.

But there were many more martyrs in the struggle who have been forgotten and deserve to be recalled and honoured.

Gandhiji mentioned in *Satyagraha in South Africa* that two infants died during the Great March of Indian workers in October-November 1913 - one of exposure and the other of drowning, falling from the arms of its mother while she was crossing a spruit. Little is known of their parents.

Gandhiji, however, did not refer to the workers who were killed in the last phase of the *satyagraha* while he was in prison. He wrote his account from memory, mostly in Yeravda prison, and did not attempt to write a detailed history of the struggle.

Reports in *Indian Opinion*, the weekly founded

by Gandhiji, indicate that many workers had been killed and wounded, and several may have subsequently died of the injuries. The following accounts are mainly based on reports in *Indian Opinion*, between November 1913 and March 1914.

Firing at Mount Edgecombe

Five Indians were killed and nine wounded at Blackburn and Hillhead barracks of Natal Estates Ltd., Mount Edgecombe, on November 27, 1913. Those who gave their lives were:

Pachiappen
Ragavan
Selvan
Guruvadu
Soubrayen Gounden

One more died of injuries in Avoca hospital, but the name was not published.

At the inquest, which was held before the Acting Magistrate of Verulam, the doctor who examined the dead said that the five were shot from the back.

Evidence at the inquest disclosed that Colin Campbell, the estate manager, went to the barracks at Blackburn estate, and threatened to shoot the indentured workers unless they returned to work. He shot Pachiappen (aged about 35). Then the troopers (police) fired. Ragavan was killed; Pancham was wounded in the right leg, and Hoosenigadu in the left shoulder.

An hour later, the workers walked towards Hill Head: they had relatives there and were anxious to see what was happening to them. They were met on the main road by the police and by Campbell who fired two shots at them.

Campbell then went to the Hill Head barracks and ordered a roll-call. While calling the roll, he asked Selvan whether he was going to work.

Selvan had completed indenture and was free.

He said he would wait until the *satyagraha* was over before entering into a contract of re-indenture. "The whole of Natal has struck, and when they go back to work, we will start too." Some other workers said that they would not return to work until the £3 tax was abolished.

Campbell decided that Selvan must be the leader. He asked Selvan to hold his horse but as he came near, struck him with a stick. Selvan fell. Then, under orders of Campbell, a Zulu guard handcuffed Selvan and stabbed him with an *assegai*. As Selvan's eldest son, Antonimuthu, ran screaming to his father, there was firing: Selvan died and his son got three bullet wounds.

Several others were shot and injured. Thathaya and his wife were shot in their hut in the presence of their two small children. Kullen was shot in the left thigh.

The troopers then charged the Indians and ran over them.

The Magistrate, however, exonerated Campbell. Instead, 22 Indians, including some wounded, were kept in jail for six months and then charged with public violence. Eight Indians, including Antonimuthu, were charged with perjury. They were discharged after several weeks.

The widow of Selvan returned to India with her children. Gandhiji arranged a small allowance for her; Antonimuthu joined Gandhiji's *ashram* in Ahmedabad.

The death of Soorzai

On the same day that the killings took place at Blackburn and Hill Head, Soorzai (also known as Amhalaram), an employee of the Phoenix Wattle Plantations, was brutally flogged by the manager, G.J. Todd, who suspected him of leading a strike. He died two weeks later.

Soorzai had been ill for three years; his left arm was paralysed. He was late for work that

morning as he waited for the rain to stop - as did other workers. Todd saw Soorzai standing near the doorway of his hut, flogged him several times and kicked him in the presence of his common law wife - Iyamah. He then assaulted several other workers with a whip.

A group of Indian labourers then took Soorzai to the Phoenix Settlement nearby. Todd went there a few days later with constables, threatened A. H. West, who was then in charge of the Settlement, for giving refuge to Soorzai, and took Soorzai away. The latter was jailed on December 3rd and five days later, taken from jail in an unconscious state to Verulam Indian hospital. He died on December 10th.

Four hundred mourners, led by leaders of the Natal Indian Association, followed the funeral procession as the body was taken to the Umgeni Crematorium. Among those in the procession was Miss Elizabeth M. Molteno, sister of the Speaker of Parliament, who had seen Soorzai when he arrived at the Phoenix Settlement and later testified at the inquest on the wounds.

Todd was only charged with common assault and acquitted.

Y

Other Cases

During November and December 1913, striking Indian workers in the mining area were being whipped and beaten, and taken down the mines by force. There were several cases of firing on the plantations. But only sketchy information is available in press reports.

In Ballengeich mine, the men were brutally whipped for refusing to work. Some fell unconscious, and 186 were sent to prison.

Narjia, a worker, died at Ballengeich Prison. The government claimed that he died of tuberculosis.

On November 16, police fired on Indian strikers in Durban: one died and 16 were injured.

On November 25, 1913, police fired at strikers at the Beneva Estate, Esperanza. Two were killed and a number of others wounded.

In all cases, the victims of violence - Indian workers - were punished while the criminals went scot free.

Appeal to historians

The violence by the employers and the mounted police was so outrageous that the Indian community in South Africa, and public opinion all over India, demanded an impartial investigation. The Viceroy of India felt obliged to support the demand. The Natal Indian Association collected affidavits and other information on brutality against the *satyagrahis*.

Under pressure from India and Britain, the Union Government set up a Commission of three members, two of whom were notorious for their hostility to Indians. When demands for a balanced composition were rejected, the Indian community decided, on the advice of Gandhiji (who was released from prison on December 18th, not to present evidence to the Commission.

The records of the NIA, if found, would provide fuller information on the martyrs and the great sacrifices made by the working people in the *satyagraha*.

I do hope Indian historians and Indian South Africans will undertake research to document the heroism and sacrifices of these early freedom fighters who gave their lives for the honour of India. Let it not be said that they were ignored because they were poor and illiterate; for it was they who inspired Gandhiji to recognise that the future of India depends on workers and peasants - the salt of the earth.

MAHATMA GANDHI AND JOHN DUBE²⁶

The historic relationship between the national movements of India and South Africa goes back to the early years of this century when Mahatma Gandhi and the Reverend John Langalibalele Dube, who was to become the first President-General of the African National Congress, developed friendship and mutual respect.

The early lives of Gandhiji and Dube were largely parallel. Gandhiji was born in 1869 and Dube in 1871. Gandhiji studied in Britain from 1888 to 1891 and Dube in the United States from 1887 to 1892. Dube returned to South Africa in 1892 and was employed as a teacher for several years; Gandhiji went to South Africa in 1893 and stayed on for 21 years as a barrister and public worker.

Dube was very much influenced by Booker T. Washington, the conservative Black leader in the United States who stressed self-help and vocational education for the Blacks. Overcoming great difficulties, he established, in 1901, an Industrial School at Ohlange, modelled after the Tuskegee Institute of Dr. Washington.

Gandhiji too greatly admired Dr. Booker T. Washington and his educational methods. In 1904, he bought about a hundred acres of land in Phoenix, about a mile or two from Ohlange, and established a settlement dedicated to simple living. He set up a school for Indian children which stressed manual work as much as the three R's.

Both men were involved in public work for their communities. Gandhiji founded the Natal Indian Congress in 1894; Dube helped found the Natal Native Congress in 1900. Gandhiji began publishing *Indian Opinion* - a weekly in English, Gujarati, Hindi and Tamil - in June 1903. Dube launched the *Ilange lase Natal*, an African weekly in English and Zulu, in the same year; it was printed in the same press as *Indian Opinion* until Dube acquired a press for the Ohlange Institute.

We do not know when Gandhiji and Dube became acquainted. But in August 1905 they met at the residence of Marshall Campbell at Mount Edgecombe when the latter hosted a reception for delegates of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, which had held its annual meeting in South Africa. Gandhiji was impressed by Dube's speech on that occasion.

²⁶ Published in *Hindustan Times*. New Delhi, January 26, 1992; and *The Leader*, Durban, June 5, 1992.

Dube told the gathering that to deprive the Africans of their land and rights in Natal, the land of their birth, was like banishing them from their home. Without the Africans, he said, the whites could not carry on for a moment. It was unfair to burden them with taxes. Members of the British delegation were moved to subscribe and present 60 pounds on the spot to Dube for his school.

Gandhiji, writing about this meeting in *Indian Opinion* (September 2, 1905), said that Dube was an African "of whom one should know."

There was frequent social contact between the inmates of the Phoenix Settlement and the Ohlange Institute, as well as the mission at Inanda. Zulus and whites used to attend Gandhiji's prayer meetings at Phoenix. He was often seen playing with Indian and Zulu children.

The Bambata rebellion of 1906 was a time of trial for both Gandhiji and Dube.

Two white police officers were killed by Africans in February 1906, near Richmond, during the unrest following the imposition of a poll tax on all adult African males in Natal. The government declared martial law and sent its militia to crush African resistance. Chief Bambata and his followers carried on guerilla warfare for more than a year but were brutally suppressed. Almost four thousand Africans were killed and thousands were sentenced to whipping.

Gandhiji did not realise the scale of resistance and the strong feeling among the Zulus. He felt that Indians, who were seeking rights as citizens of the Empire, should shoulder their responsibilities to the government. He led a small stretcher-bearer corps which nursed the wounded Zulus whom the whites despised and left to suffer.

Gandhiji's family and friends were worried when he was in the field for a few weeks with the corps. The Phoenix settlement was in a Zulu area and the Zulus could have easily attacked it. But, happily, Gandhiji did not lose the friendship of the Zulus: "he became known as a well-wisher of the Zulus who became friends of the Phoenix Settlement..."²⁷

There was some criticism of Gandhiji in the small African press, because of his services during the Bambata rebellion, but this was forgotten when the Indians launched passive resistance later in the year, under his leadership, against the Transvaal Asiatic Ordinance.

Gandhiji was for many years reluctant to speak about his traumatic experience during the rebellion, but it had a great influence on his thinking. It helps explain his defiance of the Transvaal Ordinance, as well as his insistence on strict non-violence by the passive resisters.

²⁷ Prabhudas Gandhi, *My Childhood with Gandhi*, 1957, page 42.

Dube, for his part, came under attack by the whites for denouncing the military action against the Zulus. He was summoned before the Governor and given a reprimand. He then expressed regret and wrote:

"There are grievances to be dealt with, but I can fully realise that at a time like this we should all refrain from discussing them, and assist the government to suppress the rebellion."²⁸

He probably feared that, in the tense atmosphere at the time, he might lose all white financial assistance for the Ohlange Institute.

As the Boers and Britons agreed to form a Union of South Africa, with a colour bar, Gandhiji supported the Africans in their opposition to self-government under white rule. *Indian Opinion* wrote in an editorial on August 1, 1908: "Our sympathies go out to our oppressed fellow subjects who are made to suffer for the same cause that we suffer, viz., our slight pigment of skin."

In 1909, when discussions were held in London on the proposed Act of the Union, the African and Coloured organisations sent a delegation to lobby against the Act. Dube assisted the delegation though he declined membership for fear of retaliation by the whites against his educational enterprises. Gandhiji and Hajee Habib were then in London, on behalf of the Transvaal Indians, to make representations on discriminatory measures against the Indians.

Gandhiji felt that while indigenous African and Coloured groups could demand full equality, Indians were a small community of recent settlers who should concentrate at that stage on their civil rights, rather than political rights. But his sympathies were clear. *Indian Opinion* had written on February 13, 1909, that the draft Act amounted to a declaration of war against the black population.

While the African organisations continued with protests, petitions and deputations - and the formation of a national body, the South African Native National Congress (later renamed the African National Congress) on January 8, 1912, with Dube as its first President - the Indian people continued with direct action.

Gopal Krishna Gokhale, the highly respected leader of the Indian national movement, visited South Africa in October-November 1912, at the invitation of Gandhiji, to meet the Indian community and the Government, and try to promote a settlement. Gandhiji, acting as his secretary, arranged for him to visit the Ohlange Institute on November 11, 1912, to meet John Dube and discuss the "Native question". He received a warm reception from the staff and students at the school.

²⁸ Quoted by Andre Odendaal in *Vukani Bantu*, 1984, p. 70.

On September 16, 1913, Gandhiji launched national mass resistance by the Indians and invited women and workers to join. Sixteen satyagrahis, including Mrs. Kasturba Gandhi and three other women, left Phoenix for the Transvaal to defy the immigration law restricting inter-provincial movement by Indians.

Then followed a general strike of tens of thousands of Indian workers - in the mines, plantations and municipalities - with hardly any formal organisation. The workers were inspired, above all, by the example of Gandhiji, his family and his colleagues. They said: "When the King (Gandhiji) and the Queen (Kasturba) and their children were imprisoned by the government for demanding justice for the workers, how can we continue to work?"

Unable to break the strike, the army and police, and the employers, resorted to utmost brutality - assaults even on women, solitary confinement, flogging, shooting of demonstrators, etc., - but though Gandhiji and other leaders were in prison, the workers stood firm and disciplined.

Dube followed the Indian struggle with great interest, though he could not conceive of such direct action by the Africans at the time.

Early in 1914, the Reverend W. W. Pearson, who had come from India to investigate the condition of Indian workers, visited Dube at the Ohlange Institute to enquire about the position of the Africans. We are indebted to Raochondbhai M. Patel, an inmate of the Phoenix Settlement who accompanied Pearson, for an account of the conversation which has been little known as it was published only in 1939 in a Gujarati book in India, *Gandhijini Sadhana*.

Dube explained to Pearson that the status of the Zulus was even worse than that of Indians. "The white man even doubts if we belong to the human race."

Asked why the Africans did not fight for their birthrights as the Indians did, Dube replied:

"Yes, Mr. Pearson, I understand what you say. I have thought over it a lot. I have studied in depth the struggle fought by the Indians under the leadership of Gandhi. And after being an eye witness to the struggle, instead of taking the Indian workers as uncivilised and treating them disdainfully, I have acquired a sense of respect for all the Indians.

"Mr. Pearson, we cannot emulate the Indians. We do not possess that divine power. I have been wonder-struck to see their work with my own eyes."

Then he gave a moving eye-witness account of the heroism of the Indian workers:

"The satyagraha struggle was going on. During that period one day I was

coming from Durban. I alighted at Phoenix Station. At a little distance from that station there is an open square. There, about five hundred Indians were sitting together in a group. They had come there after going on a strike in their factory. They were surrounded from all sides by the white managers, their staff and white police. I tarried there for half an hour to see what would happen. Whiplashes began to descend on the backs of the Indians sitting there, in quick rapidity, without stop. The whites beat them with sticks and said, 'Get up, do your work. Will you go for duty or not?' But nobody rose. They sat, quite motionless. They would reply calmly, 'We will not report for duty, so long as Gandhi Raja is in jail.' When whips and sticks failed, gun butts came to be used. The whites now began to beat ladies and children also, along with the men. Some screamed, but none would budge. At last mounted police arrived and horses were made to run over them. 'Get up, otherwise you would be crushed,' they warned. The horses made their way through the legs and backs of some persons. Their skin was torn; the horses' feet caused wounds; they continued to bleed and groaned with pain, but did not move.

"Meanwhile the police brought there an Indian foreman. He was regarded as their leader. He gave bold replies. In reward to his fearless replies, cruelties began to be inflicted upon him. The spectacle of this torture made me shiver.

"Just then a police officer ordered the policemen belonging to my community, 'Spear this man. Don't just stand and stare. All this is due to this wicked man.' Those policemen immediately complied with the orders and pierced that leader of the workers with a spear. This inflamed the workers somewhat and taking that as an excuse, police opened fire, killing one or two persons. The 'leader' breathed his last. Others were injured. But no one moved from the place where they were sitting.

"Trembling at the cruelty of those white men that I had witnessed and amazed at the Himalayan firmness of the Indians, I walked away..."

Dube continued:

"But Mr. Pearson, we will be totally ruined if I ask my people to follow this path. Howsoever illiterate, ignorant, uncultured and wild the Indian workers may be, in their veins there runs the blood which is invigorated with the glory of the ancient culture of the Indians. After getting such a leader as Gandhi that culture has found a renewal. Their original divine power manifested itself again and they could display extraordinary endurance. If our Natives come in their place, nobody can control their violent nature. For their safety they would certainly retaliate. The white men of this place require only this much. If any brother of mine kills a white man after being excited, it would precipitate a great disaster upon us.

Thousands of brothers of mine would be put to death in no time and we would be totally ruined. We do not possess so much prowess also to wage a *satyagraha* struggle. Only the strength of the Indians can endure it."

While, as an Indian, I greatly appreciate the handsome tribute paid by Dube to Indian workers and to Gandhiji, I feel that he was perhaps very much influenced by the frustration following the Bambata rebellion. For, at that very time, African women in the Orange Free State were carrying on an effective non-violent resistance movement against the pass laws.

Dube was certainly right in his assumption that white public opinion at the time would have been hardly outraged by violence and savagery against Africans. The success of the Indian movement depended partly on patient efforts by Gandhiji to develop understanding and support for the cause of the Indian community - among whites in South Africa, as well as in India and Britain. The violence against Indian women and workers in 1913 so outraged opinion in India that the Indian and British Governments had to intervene and prevail on the South African regime to bend and compromise.

What was most lacking on the African side was perhaps the type of leadership which Gandhiji gave to the Indian people - a leadership by example of courage, perseverance and sacrifice. It took time for the Africans to develop such a leadership and launch the Defiance Campaign in 1952. That campaign put an end to the myth that the African people were too "uncivilised" to follow the example of the "civilised" Indians. It also helped promote a powerful international movement of solidarity with all the oppressed people of South Africa.

In the long and difficult struggle since then, in cooperation with Indians and others, the African people and their leaders won the admiration of India and the world.

GANDHIJI AND AFRICANS IN SOUTH AFRICA²⁹

"My aim is not to be consistent with my previous statements on a given question, but to be consistent with truth as it may present itself to me at a given moment... My words and deeds are dictated by prevailing conditions. There has been a gradual evolution in my environment and I react to it as a *satyagrahi*."

"I would like to say to the diligent reader of my writings and to others who are interested in them that I am not at all concerned with appearing to be consistent. In my search after Truth I have discarded many ideas and learnt many new things. Old as I am in age, I have no feeling that I have ceased to grow inwardly or that my growth will stop at the dissolution of the flesh. What I am concerned with is my readiness to obey the call of Truth, my God, from moment to moment and, therefore, when anybody finds any inconsistency between any two writings of mine, if he has still faith in my sanity, he would do well to choose the later of the two on the same subject."

Gandhiji often cautioned his readers not to look for consistency in his writings as they reflected truth as it appeared to him at a particular time. His thinking had evolved through his experience - his "experiments with truth" - while he kept his mind open to influences from varied sources. He had no hesitation to admit his errors and change his views. To quote his writings out of their context, ignoring the evolution of his thinking, would be most misleading.

The danger of drawing conclusions from isolated quotations is perhaps greatest in regard to his sojourn in South Africa as it was there that he developed his philosophy and became transformed from a barrister seeking gainful employment to a leader identifying himself with the poorest of the poor as he led the *satyagraha* which was to have a great impact on world history.

Unfortunately many critics of Gandhiji have ignored his caution.

²⁹ Revision of paper presented to a seminar of the Southern Africa Research Program at Yale University, March 31, 1993

Nowhere is this more flagrant than in the description of his attitude toward the indigenous Africans of South Africa.

The criticisms originated largely from some Marxists who described him as an agent of Gujarati capitalists and berated him for leading a movement of Indians rather than promoting a joint struggle of Africans and Indians for freedom from racist domination. They represent the preconceptions of the critics rather than the facts.

Gandhiji arrived in South Africa in 1893 as an employee of a Gujarati merchant for a year. When he agreed to stay on in South Africa to serve the Indian community, he was provided retainers by Indian merchants to enable him to live in proper style as a barrister and entertain Europeans. He helped found the Natal Indian Congress which was an "elite" organisation like the Indian National Congress.

But Gandhiji soon developed contacts with the poorer sections of the Indian community, including indentured labourers. He served them as a volunteer in a hospital and provided free legal services. He moved to Johannesburg in 1902 and had a flourishing legal practice, but devoted most of his income for the community's interests. After the launching of the *satyagraha*, he gave up his legal practice and identified himself with the "coolies" in his way of life more than most Marxists have been able to. The workers played a heroic role in the *satyagraha*, while most merchants were equivocal. That would make him a strange representative or agent of the capitalists.

As for the criticism of Gandhiji for not promoting a joint struggle with the Africans, the critics ignore the fact that Gandhiji dedicated himself to the struggle for the dignity of the Indian community - that is, a struggle of a small community of aliens or recent settlers for their civil rights - and hoped to return to India to serve his motherland. He made no pretensions to lead the Africans - the sons and daughters of the soil - to liberation; that would have been quite improper.³⁰

A modern national movement had developed earlier in India than in South Africa. The impact of that movement, together with the leadership of Gandhiji, enabled the Indian community to launch a mass struggle. Gandhiji always led in sacrifice and inspired a band of volunteers to flinch at no sacrifice. The African movement was

³⁰ After his return to India, Gandhiji declined many invitations to visit the United States and other countries, and explained that he wished to devote his energies to his task in India. He made no pretensions to spread a gospel around the world and said repeatedly that his life and work were his message.

still in its infancy and its leaders were not yet prepared to confront the racist regime. No united or joint struggle was feasible at that time. But Gandhiji supported the aspirations of the Africans and the Coloured people.

In the 1920s and 1930s, close colleagues of Gandhiji like Mrs. Sarojini Naidu, the Reverend C.F. Andrews and Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru were outspoken in advocating that the Indians should identify themselves with the African majority. While appreciating that sentiment, Gandhiji was cautious about calls from India for a joint struggle in South Africa.

He had to respond to urgent appeals from the leaders of the Indian community for help in alleviating grievances and preventing new discriminatory laws. He was disappointed that they had forsaken the spirit of *satyagraha* but could not ask them to wait for the eventual liberation of the country.

Moreover, as the architect of a mighty united front in the struggle of Indians in South Africa, and later of the masses of people in India, Gandhiji was conscious of the prerequisites for a joint struggle.

When the matter came up in the 1930s, Dr. Dadoo and others who advocated a united front with Africans did not enjoy a clear majority support in the Indian community. The African National Congress was weak and the African leaders did not seek a united front with the Indians. It was only in 1950 that the leaders of the ANC were persuaded to go beyond African nationalism and build a multi-racial alliance for liberation.

Gandhiji was also concerned that any attempts by Indians to lead the Africans would be unwise and dangerous. Dr. Dadoo and Dr. Naicker made a great contribution by espousing joint action under African leadership. In the course of the struggle, Nelson Mandela, Oliver Tambo, Walter Sisulu and other Africans emerged as great leaders. Dr. Dadoo and Dr. Naicker came to be recognised by the Africans as among the giants of the liberation struggle.

Meanwhile, Gandhiji, by his example, earned the respect of Africans and his thought has had a profound influence on the South African liberation movement. It has had an equally significant impact on the freedom movement of the African-Americans in the United States.

The Marxists, though ill-advised, deserve attention as they made a

significant contribution to African-Indian unity and a united struggle since the 1940s at considerable sacrifice. Of a different character are those who have made no contribution to the liberation struggle but ventured to write articles and books criticising Gandhiji by quoting from his earliest writings alone. Maureen Swan's *Gandhi: the South African Experience* is an example of an armchair revolutionary trying to comment on how Gandhiji should have conducted the struggle and denigrate him. She wrote:

"In choosing not to attempt to ally with the articulate politicised elements in either the Coloured or African communities, Gandhi facilitated the implementation of the divisive segregationist policies which helped ease the task of white minority rule in South Africa."

I wonder why this self-styled radical espousing the interests of the "under-class" prefers an alliance only with the "articulate politicised elements".

She then attacks Gandhiji because in response to discrimination against Indians by the Europeans, he wrote in 1903: "We believe as much in the purity of race as we think they (Europeans) do."

The fact is that the Europeans used "purity of race" - their master race - as an excuse to confine the others to miserable ghettos with hardly any services. Gandhiji, like many African leaders, held that their people too had feelings about their social life. They did not oppose segregation (which was a means) but condemned discrimination and repression.³¹

The European rulers enforced racial segregation and differential policies well before Gandhiji arrived in South Africa. They tried to incite Africans against the Indians and attempted to degrade the status of the Indians. Neither the racist authorities nor the oppressed people ever claimed that Gandhiji's efforts to avert such degradation and seek basic human rights for the Indian community helped the imposition of apartheid. That was left to Maureen Swan and other "experts".

It is unfortunate that there has been little serious study of the evolution of Gandhiji's attitudes toward the Africans and the Coloured people, or of the impact of his life and philosophy on the liberation struggle in South Africa.³² This paper is an attempt to deal

³¹ It may be recalled that it was not until 1954 that the "separate and equal" doctrine was rejected by the Supreme Court in the United States.

³² An article by Dr. James D. Hunt on "Gandhi and the Black People of South

with the subject, and I hope it will encourage further study.

EVOLUTION THROUGH EXPERIENCE

Gandhiji was influenced for several years after his arrival in South Africa by the racist prejudices prevalent in the European and Indian communities. He outgrew them only after he passed the stage of "petition politics", launched the *satyagraha* and widened his friendships.

In the early writings of Gandhiji, there are frequent references to "raw *Kaffirs*", describing them as lazy, uncivilised and even savage. He argued that Indians were civilised and should not be subjected to repressive legislation like Africans. (There was little knowledge of African history and civilisation at that time). It was only during the later years of his stay in South Africa, when an African national movement was emerging, and he came to know the Africans, that he avoided derogatory expressions and espoused African rights. His views advanced further after he returned to India. In an interview with the Reverend S. S. Tema in 1939, he said:

"They (the Indians) may not put themselves in opposition to your legitimate aspirations, or run you down as 'savages' while exalting themselves as cultured people in order to secure concessions for themselves at your expense."³³

In July 1946, when white gangsters were brutally attacking Indian passive resisters in Durban, he declared that he would not shed a single tear if all Indian *satyagrahis* were wiped out, for they would point the way to the Africans.³⁴

I would suggest that the evolution of the thinking of Gandhiji may be divided into three periods, and that the attitudes towards Africans might best be understood in that context.

From 1893 to 1906, he was engaged in "petition politics". His public service consisted mainly of drafting petitions and organising community support for them, and promoting improvement of the community by self-help. He was a lawyer and a public servant or adviser rather than the leader. The petitions were influenced by

Africa" in *Gandhi Marg*, New Delhi, April-June 1989, is perhaps the only worthwhile study of the subject. Dr. Hunt, however, does not trace the evolution of Gandhiji's thinking after he left South Africa in 1914.

³³ *Harijan*, February 13, 1939; *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Volume 68, pages 272-74

³⁴ *Harijan*, July 21, 1946; *Collected Works*, Volume 84, pages 422-23

community sentiment and a legal (rather than political) approach. His commitment to non-violence was limited to personal behaviour.

The second period begins in August 1906, when he decided to defy the Asiatic Law Amendment Ordinance of the Transvaal which he considered humiliating. The passive resistance movement was launched in 1907.³⁵ Gandhiji served his first term of imprisonment in January 1908. Soon after, he rejected "Western civilisation" and "discovered" *satyagraha* which became the guiding principle of his life. Non-violence was now extended to the resistance of people against injustice, though not to actions of the State.

The radical change in his outlook, the experience of simple living in the Phoenix Settlement in the midst of African communities, and perhaps his friendship with intellectuals like Olive Schreiner, led to a rejection of any feeling of racial superiority and to respect for the African people.

During both these periods, Gandhiji retained faith in the British Empire, and considered himself a "citizen of the Empire".

The third period began in 1920, after he returned to India, when he lost faith in Britain and became a "non-cooperator". His approach to issues was now that of a political leader, committed to ethical values, and was little influenced by his training as a lawyer. Non-violence became a creed of universal application. He developed an international outlook as his work in India attracted attention abroad and resulted in friendships with pacifists and others in several countries.

This evolution explains the inconsistencies in Gandhiji's writings and speeches. For an understanding of these, it is also necessary to take into account certain aspects of the Indian struggle in South Africa during Gandhiji's stay in that country.

It was not against apartheid nor a challenge to the legitimacy of European rule in South Africa. Nor was it to secure a special status for Indians and set up a caste system in South Africa, though that could have been the response of the authorities.³⁶ It was a struggle

³⁵ Gandhiji rejected the term "passive resistance" and coined the word "*satyagraha*". But the term "passive resistance" is often used in this paper as it is more commonly known.

³⁶ Gandhiji's own thinking was that non-Europeans would gain equality during a long process in which they advanced to European standards and European public opinion was educated.

by members of the small Indian community for the rights they had been solemnly promised by imperial Britain and enjoyed, to an extent, until the local European settlers gained self-government and began a process of degradation of the Indians. The community, under the advice of Gandhiji, soon abandoned its claim even for limited franchise rights, so that there was no question of aspiring to join Europeans in the oppression of the indigenous people.

What was at stake was not only the rights of Indians - or, rather, the mere right not to be harassed or humiliated - but the security and survival of the entire community. The danger was real as the mass deportation of Chinese labourers in 1906-7 showed.

Many of the Indians in South Africa - especially the traders and their staff - were alien settlers with families and property in India.³⁷ Their position was very different from that of the African people. The status of the Indians was not, as is assumed, higher than that of Africans in all respects.³⁸ The Indians were very vulnerable.

Any indication of an attempt by Indians to incite the Africans to confront the authorities in struggle for emancipation would have led to such a hysteria among the whites as to endanger the entire community. That is why perhaps there appears to be a deliberate omission in the writings of Gandhiji of his discussions with African leaders.

Moreover, for Gandhiji in particular, the Indian struggle was, above all, for the honour of the "Motherland", India. It was an extension of India's national movement for freedom.

Gandhiji often stressed that the *satyagraha* struggle was not to gain individual rights but to ensure "national" dignity. It was limited to demands for the repeal of legislation which constituted "national" insult.

If it was precipitated by the racist animosity of the rulers in South Africa, it was inspired and encouraged by the resurgence of the

He was opposed to "class legislation" - different provisions for different communities in law, as distinct from administrative discrimination - as that was humiliating and would inhibit this evolution.

³⁷ Gandhiji frequently referred to Indians as "settlers" even in the 1930s.

³⁸ The three pound tax was levied only on Indians who had completed indenture and their families. Restriction of inter-provincial movement applied only to Indians. Indians alone were prohibited from the Orange Free State. Indians became the targets of European hostility as they competed with European traders and skilled labour. Many of the laws and municipal regulations were designed to harass them. They alone had to face attempts to force them out of the country.

national movement in India after the partition of Bengal. The dramatic burning of the registration certificates in Johannesburg in 1908 was perhaps inspired by the burning of foreign cloth in the *Swadeshi* movement in India.

EARLY YEARS IN NATAL, 1893-1901

Gandhiji went to South Africa as a young man of 23. Though unsuccessful in India in his profession as a barrister, he was proficient in drafting memorials. He was also an admirer of the British Empire, and loyal to the British Constitution and the Crown. He believed that British rule was beneficial to India. But, though not active in politics, he was influenced by Indian nationalism and pride in Indian civilisation and culture.

Within two weeks of his arrival in South Africa, travelling from Durban to Pretoria, he was ordered to remove his turban in the Durban Magistrate's Court, thrown off a train at Pietermaritzburg, assaulted by a coachman on the way from Charleston to Standerton for refusing to sit on the footboard, and denied a room in a hotel in Johannesburg. Later in Pretoria, he was thrown off a sidewalk by a policeman and was obliged to obtain an exemption from the curfew.

He heard of the humiliations faced by the Indians, and was told by Abdul Gani, a prominent Indian in Johannesburg: "Only *we* can live in a land like this, because, for making money, we do not mind pocketing insults..." He wrote in his autobiography:

"I saw that South Africa was no country for a self-respecting Indian, and my mind became more and more occupied with the question as to how this state of things might be improved."³⁹

The small Indian community was dispersed and divided.

The majority of Indians were indentured labourers - mainly from Tamil Nadu, Andhra, Bihar and eastern Uttar Pradesh - living under semi-slave conditions, or labourers who completed their contracts and became "free Indians". Many of the latter were able to obtain small plots of land and engage in market gardening. They made great sacrifices to enable their children to obtain education and secure clerical and other jobs.

³⁹ *Autobiography*, Part II, Chapter XIII, page 131

In addition, there were Indian traders and their employees who followed the labourers. They were known as "passenger Indians" as they paid their own passage to South Africa. The traders were mainly Muslims from Gujarat and their employees were largely Hindu. The traders were isolated from the labourers and had little contact even with the Natal-born children of free Indians.

When Gandhiji arrived in South Africa, there were about 51,000 Indians in Natal. Of these, 16,000 were indentured labourers; about 30,000 were "free Indians". Five thousand belonged to the trading community. There were another 12,000 Indians in the Transvaal and a smaller number in the Cape.

Little information is available on Indian-African relations at that time.

It was reported in the 1870s that while Africans refused to work for the whites, Indian merchants and farmers had little trouble in obtaining good black labour.⁴⁰

Later, however, as Africans entered trade and skilled work, competition developed between them and the Indians.

James Stuart papers, a diary of oral evidence relating to the history and attitudes of the Zulu people at the turn of the century, contains a few stray items indicating tension between Africans and Indians. One African complained that Indians could buy land, though they were aliens, while Africans could not. Several complained that Indian farmers were industrious and ploughed up the land they bought so that the Africans could not use it to graze their cattle. Another said that Indians took up positions as domestic servants or workers in hotels and restaurants, clerks in courts etc., and prevented African advancement. But the papers reflect some admiration for the Indians, rather than serious animosity.⁴¹

Among the Europeans, however, anti-Indian feeling was rampant. Indian indentured labour had developed the economy of Natal, but with the increase in the number of "free Indians" and Indian traders, the Europeans faced competition. Moreover, they saw the very existence of the Indians, except as labourers under semi-slave conditions, as a menace to the system of white domination based on

⁴⁰ Natal, *Blue Book 1979*, "Inanda Division Report", quoted by Manning Marable in *African Nationalist: The Life of John Langalibalele Dube*, Ph. D. dissertation, page 77.

⁴¹ *The James Stuart Archive of Recorded Oral Evidence relating to the History of the Zulu and Neighbouring Peoples*, Volume I, pages 103, 147-48, 157, 222, 231. University of Natal Press, Pietermaritzburg, and Killie Campbell Africana Library, Durban, 1976.

colour. They sought to repress and humiliate the Indians in the same way as the Natives, make their life uncomfortable and force them to re-indenture or leave. They tried to incite Africans against Indians so as to divert attention from repression of both.

Natal was granted self-government in 1893, and its legislature rushed to consider laws against Indians. The Franchise Amendment Bill of 1894, to deprive Indians of their limited franchise, was a first step.⁴²

Gandhiji agreed, at the request of Indian merchants in Durban, to cancel his return to India and help in organising an effective campaign against the franchise legislation. The campaign brought together the merchants and their employees, as well as Natal-born Indians. The British Government refused its assent after the Indians sent a "monster petition" signed by ten thousand persons.⁴³

The same year, Gandhiji helped establish the Natal Indian Congress, the oldest political organisation in South Africa. He chose the name "Congress" as "the Congress [Indian National Congress] was the very life of India".⁴⁴

He stayed on in Durban for continued public service to the Indian community. An income of £300 a year was assured for him by retainers from several Indian merchants, so that he could live in style as a barrister since that was considered essential.

He rented a house in Beach Grove, opposite the house of Harry Escombe, a leading lawyer and later Attorney-General. He made some friends among the Europeans and entertained whites and Indians together at his home.⁴⁵

He developed broader contacts with the Indian community. He helped promote the advancement of the "Colonial-born" Indians - mostly educated youth, many of them Christians. He provided free legal services to indentured labourers and volunteered as a compounder at a charitable hospital for Indians, thus getting in touch with the poorer sections of the community. The knowledge and

⁴² The Indian population of Natal was then about 51,000 as against 50,000 Europeans and 400,000 Africans. There were 9,309 European voters and only 251 Indian voters. (*Collected Works*, Volume 1, page 274 and Volume 2, page 3).

⁴³ But a revised bill in 1896, omitting mention of Indians in its text, but serving the same purpose, received assent.

⁴⁴ *Autobiography*, Part II, Chap. XIX, page 149

⁴⁵ *Autobiography*, Part II, Chapter XXIII, page 162; Memoir of Vincent Lawrence, formerly confidential clerk of Gandhiji, at UNISA Documentation Centre for African Studies, Pretoria.

respect he thus gained proved crucial for the *satyagraha* in its final stage.

But there is hardly any information on Gandhiji's contacts with the Africans in the 1890s. His attitudes towards the Africans were perhaps influenced by those of the older Indian residents - particularly the traders and their accountants and clerks, most of whom spoke his language, Gujarati.⁴⁶

Main concern to influence European opinion

The main preoccupation of Gandhiji during the period of "petition politics" - and even after *satyagraha* was launched - was to secure understanding and support among the whites who had the power, since it was the white authorities who were enacting discriminatory legislation against Indians. African opinion was of little consequence in preventing such legislation and securing the rights of Indians.

As a petitioner, lawyer and publicist, Gandhiji claimed rights for the Indians on the basis of their citizenship in the British Empire - and solemn promises made by the British Government.⁴⁷ He argued that the discriminatory laws were against "the spirit of the British

⁴⁶ Indians were particularly prominent in retail trade in the African market. Especially in the smaller communities outside Durban, the Indian traders learnt Zulu. Since the Indians spoke many different languages, Zulu was often the means of communication among Indians. The Indian traders knew Africans mainly as customers, employees and tenants,

Indian indentured labourers had a different relationship with Africans, as the plantation owners employed Zulu guards with their *assegais* to control and punish them, thereby arousing fear, contempt and hatred.

⁴⁷ Queen Victoria had said in a proclamation of 1858 to the people of India:

"We hold ourselves bound to the natives of our Indian territories by the same obligations of duty which bind us to all our other subjects..."

In 1875, Lord Salisbury, Secretary of State for India, in agreeing to the resumption of recruitment of Indian labour for Natal, had stated that the labourers after their indenture would be "free men in all respects, with privileges no whit inferior to those of any other class of Her Majesty's subjects resident in the colonies".

Lord Ripon, when Secretary of State for the Colonies, affirmed, in reply to a representation from Natal:

"The Queen's Indian subjects were entitled to the same rights in the Colonies as all her other subjects."

Constitution" and "notions of British justice".⁴⁸ He believed that the colour prejudice in South Africa was contrary to British traditions and was only local and temporary.⁴⁹ He tried to persuade the Europeans that Indians were civilised and that they could be good citizens.

The question of identification with Africa or with the Africans was hardly considered by the Indian community at that time.⁵⁰

Responding to the fears of the Europeans of being "swamped" by Indians, Gandhiji and the Indian community soon abandoned the demand for equal rights with the Europeans. They did not press for political (as distinct from municipal) franchise; agreed in principle to restriction of Indian immigration; and were prepared to accept administrative discrimination in many fields so long as there was no colour bar in legislation.

Gandhiji and the Indian community opposed classification with Africans in matters concerning residence, trade and seating in trains and tramways. They have been criticised as "racist" because of this but that is unfair.⁵¹

Africans had been deprived of all rights even before the arrival of Gandhiji. The indentured Indians were under semi-slave conditions. The rest of the Indians were being deprived of rights they were promised and enjoyed. They could not be expected to welcome degradation as supposed solidarity with the Africans. The Coloured people, too, resisted classification with the Africans.

A fear spread by anti-Asiatics was that if rights were granted to Indians, they would then need to be extended to the Natives, which was, to them, unthinkable.

Gandhiji tried initially to avoid comparison between Indians and Africans,⁵² merely stressing the promises made to Indians by Britain

⁴⁸ For instance, petition to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, August 11, 1895, in *Collected Works*, Volume 1, see pages 233 and 235, paragraphs 4 and 13.

⁴⁹ *Autobiography*, Part II, Chapter XXVI, page 172

⁵⁰ The first time that was brought up was perhaps in a speech by Miss Elizabeth Molteno at an Indian meeting in January 1914 when she called on them to recognise Africa as their Motherland and become worthy children of Africa. Andrews, C.F. *What I Owe to Christ*, page 243; Chaturvedi, Benarsidas and Marjorie Sykes, *Charles Freer Andrews*, page 11.

⁵¹ No other community - for instance the European or Jewish immigrants - has been criticised for seeking rights of which the Africans were deprived.

⁵² See petition to the Natal Legislative Council, July 6, 1894, paragraph 9 in *Collected Works*, Volume 1, page 142; and petition to Lord Ripon, Secretary of State for the Colonies, July 1894, paragraph 20, in *Ibid.*, page 152.

or suggesting rights for all non-Europeans.⁵³ But this could win him little sympathy from the Europeans, and he felt obliged to take account of their prejudices. In the process, Gandhiji imbibed and gave expression to the racist prejudices of the whites which were shared to some extent by the *Kholwa* (educated Christian Africans).

Disparaging remarks about Africans

The first eight volumes of *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, covering the period until 1908, contain frequent references to *Kaffirs*⁵⁴ and derogatory remarks about them, as well as assertions of superiority of Indians over the Natives. It was only from 1908 that he avoided use of the term *Kaffir*.

In an Open Letter to the members of the Natal Legislature in December 1894, he wrote:

"A general belief seems to prevail in the Colony that the Indians are little better, if at all, than savages or the Natives of Africa. Even the children are taught to believe in that manner, with the result that the Indian is being dragged down to the position of a raw *Kaffir*."⁵⁵

On September 26, 1896, Gandhiji delivered an address at a public meeting in Bombay on the grievances of South African Indians. He elaborated on the insults, repressive laws and humiliations faced by Indians, and was carried away by his anger to make an insensitive and thoughtless statement reflecting the prevalent prejudices about the Africans:

"Ours is a continual struggle against a degradation sought to be inflicted upon us by the Europeans, who desire to degrade us to the level of the raw *Kaffir* whose occupation is hunting, and whose sole ambition is to collect a certain number of cattle to buy a wife with and, then, pass his life in indolence and nakedness."⁵⁶

⁵³ He wrote to the editor of *Times of Natal* on October 25, 1894:

"The Indians do not regret that capable Natives can exercise the franchise. They would regret if it were otherwise." (*Collected Works*, Volume 1, pages 166-67).

⁵⁴ The term *Kaffir* was in common use in South Africa at the time, and even educated Christian Zulus - the *Kholwa* - used the term for the other Zulus.

But Gandhiji must have been conscious that the term was derogatory as it was used in India against the Hindus.

⁵⁵ *Collected Works*, Volume 1, page 177

⁵⁶ *Collected Works*, Volume 2, page 74

In a petition he drafted in 1899 concerning the designation of an Indian location, he wrote:

"Your petitioner has seen the Location intended to be used by the Indians. It would place them, who are undoubtedly infinitely superior to the Kaffirs, in close proximity to the latter."⁵⁷

In "notes on the Indian question" he prepared in India in May 1902, he wrote about Natal:

"The indigenous people, that is, the Zulus, are a fine body of men, but they are very lazy, and will with difficulty work at a stretch for six months."⁵⁸

The remarks were most derogatory against African prisoners in accounts of jail experiences. He wrote in *Indian Opinion* (March 7, 1908):

"Many of the Native prisoners are only one degree removed from the animal and often created rows and fought among themselves in their cells."

It must be noted, however, that the Indian political prisoners sentenced to hard labour were housed with hardened African criminals and faced not only discomfort but fear for their safety.

African and Indian interests

Gandhiji was well aware that European traders resented Indian competition, and perhaps of complaints by European trade unionists about competition by free Indians. But there was little publicity about competition between Indians and Africans, and Gandhiji seemed unaware at first of any conflict of interest between them or of antipathy by Africans towards Indians.

Indians believed the propaganda that Europeans obtained labour from India since the Natives were "lazy" and undependable. They did not recognise that the import of Indian labour was designed to bring down African wages.

Many of the free Indians - especially children of labourers, known as "colonial-born Indians" - became cooks, waiters, clerks,

⁵⁷ *Collected Works*, Volume 3, page 76

⁵⁸ *Collected Works*, Volume 3, page 243

teachers, interpreters, composers, photographers, compounders etc., and there must have been competition with the Africans. But there is little information on the extent of competition.

The relations between Africans and Indians were strained, and some whites were trying to fan conflict between Africans and Indians in order to intimidate the Indians. When Gandhiji returned from India in January 1897, they not only organised lynch mobs of Europeans, but instigated a demonstration by five or six hundred Africans armed with sticks.⁵⁹

Gandhiji seems to have felt that since Indians did not seek political power, they were not in conflict with the aspirations of Africans as the "sons of the soil".

But from the late 1890s, he opposed the system of indentured labour not only because it humiliated Indians, but also because the import of Indian labour was detrimental to the interests of the Africans.

He wrote in 1916, when he was leading a campaign for the abolition of indentured labour, that the effect of abolition of slavery was largely neutralised by the dissatisfied slave-owner resorting to the dodge of indentured labour.

"The yoke, if it fell from the Negro's black neck, was transferred to the brown neck of the Indian. In the process of transfer, it had to be somewhat polished, it had to be lightened in weight and even disguised. Nevertheless, in all its essentials, it retained its original quality..."⁶⁰

One of the greatest achievements of Gandhiji, arising from his South African experience, was indeed the abolition of the indentured labour system in India which had lasted more than 70 years as the successor to slavery.⁶¹

AFTER THE SOUTH AFRICAN WAR: EMERGENCE AS A POLITICAL LEADER

Gandhiji returned to India in 1901 but was called back in 1902 to

⁵⁹ *Collected Works*, Volume 2, pages 242-44

⁶⁰ *Collected Works*, Volume 13, pages 247-50

⁶¹ Recruitment of indentured labour for Natal was stopped by India in 1911; the indentured labour system was prohibited a few years later.

lead a deputation to Joseph Chamberlain after the Anglo-Boer War. During the year in India, he had attended the session of the Indian National Congress and met many of its leaders. He spent much time with Gopal Krishna Gokhale, his mentor. He became much more political.

He recognised that the position of Indians in the Transvaal had become worse under the new British administration. The British Government had given the oppression of the British Indian subjects as one of the causes of the war with the Boer Government of the South African Republic, but the British administrators retained and supplemented all the discriminatory laws and enforced them with greater efficiency and callousness.

Gandhiji decided, this time on his own initiative, to stay in South Africa and enrolled in Johannesburg as an attorney. He helped set up the Transvaal British Indian Association in 1903: a leading Indian merchant was elected President and Gandhiji acted as secretary.

He also founded the weekly *Indian Opinion* in 1903 to inform and unite the Indians all over South Africa, to secure understanding and goodwill among the Europeans, and to promote support from India and Britain. He established a settlement at Phoenix, near Durban, in 1904 and moved *Indian Opinion* there. Though he resided in Johannesburg until the beginning of 1913, he often visited Phoenix and Durban.

He also began to speak at a number of public meetings outside the Indian community. He became a public figure in the country, not merely an adviser to the Indian community, though his primary concern remained the security and dignity of the Indian community.

He established contacts and developed friendships with a large number of liberal Europeans - churchmen, journalists, lawyers, politicians etc.⁶² Some of them became his close associates in the struggle for the "Indian cause"; some became members of the Committee of European Sympathisers with the cause; and some helped in Parliament to secure approval for the settlement in 1914.

Coloured and African organisations began to be formed at this time, and Gandhiji came to know some of their leaders. Though *Indian Opinion* was devoted almost wholly to Indian affairs,

⁶² Gandhiji wrote in *Satyagraha in South Africa* that many European liberals were sympathetic to African aspirations but not to the Indians.

They had to be persuaded to support the minimum demands of the Indians.

Gandhiji occasionally contributed reports and editorials on developments concerning other groups.

In 1906 two important and seemingly contradictory developments took place in Gandhiji's life.

First, his service as head of the Stretcher-Bearer Corps with the Natal Militia fighting the Zulus in rebellion.

Second, his decision to defy an obnoxious law against Asiatics in the Transvaal and his "discovery" of *satyagraha*.

These two developments are briefly reviewed here as they represent a change in the general outlook of Gandhiji and hence his attitude to the indigenous people.

Stretcher-Bearer during the Zulu Rebellion

Gandhiji had organised an Indian Ambulance Corps during the Anglo-Boer War to show that Indians were good British citizens, though his sympathies were with the Boers.⁶³ He saw the Zulu rebellion of 1906, provoked by a poll tax, as another opportunity for Indians to show that Indians were willing and able to shoulder the responsibilities of citizenship. The Natal Indian Congress recruited and paid for a corps of twenty stretcher-bearers, with Gandhiji as Sergeant-Major, and it served for a little over a month.⁶⁴

Gandhiji was not unaware of the moral issues,⁶⁵ nor perhaps of the sentiments of the Zulus.⁶⁶ But he argued:

⁶³ He wrote:

"I felt that if I demanded rights as a British citizen, it was also my duty, as such, to participate in the defence of the British Empire." (*Autobiography*, Part III, Chapter 10, page 214).

The Indian Ambulance Corps of 1,100 men - about 300 free Indians and the rest indentured - served for six weeks.

⁶⁴ This was particularly significant when it is realised that Indians were also liable to a poll-tax - and many Indians were fined or jailed for not paying the tax in time. (Editorial in *Indian Opinion*, March 17, 1906).

⁶⁵ In *Indian Opinion* of April 14, 1906, he wrote about the killing of 12 Africans by whites and the death of some of those who shot the Africans in an ensuing battle with Bambata and his men. He said: "Such is the law of God. The executioners met their death within two days."

⁶⁶ Prabhudas Gandhi, a grandnephew of Mahatma Gandhi, wrote in his memoirs that the family was in great fear during the Zulu rebellion.

"Phoenix was in a Zulu area. Seeing the Indian residents supporting the whites against them the Zulus could have attacked the settlement and completely destroyed it. But it was Gandhiji's greatness that even when he

"What is our duty during these calamitous times in the Colony? It is not for us to say whether the revolt of the *Kaffirs* is justified or not. We are in Natal by virtue of British power. Our very existence depends upon it. It is therefore our duty to render whatever help we can."⁶⁷

Fortunately, the Corps was assigned to minister to the Zulus who had been brutally flogged or wounded, and performed a humanitarian service, as the Europeans were unwilling to treat the Zulus.

If Gandhiji undertook ambulance work, it was not because he was against raising combat soldiers. *Indian Opinion* had been calling for a permanent Volunteer Corps in which Indians would get military training and be issued weapons.

Gandhiji did not make any moral distinction between soldiers and members of an ambulance corps. He wrote in 1928, referring to his participation in ambulance work:

"I draw no distinction between those who wield the weapons of destruction and those who do Red Cross work. Both participate in war and advance its cause. Both are guilty of the crime of war."⁶⁸

The Reverend Joseph J. Doke, Gandhiji's first biographer, wrote of Gandhiji's work in the Stretcher- Bearer Corps:

"Mr. Gandhi speaks with great reserve of this experience. What he saw he will never divulge. I imagine it was not always creditable to British humanity. As a man of peace, hating the very thought of war, it was almost intolerable for him to be so closely in touch with this expedition. At times he doubted whether his position was right. No one besides his men, however, was prepared to do the work, and sheer pity for the sufferers forbade them to relinquish it. Not infrequently, the condition of the lashed men who were placed in their charge, was appalling, the wounds filthy, their lives hanging in the balance... So these Indians toiled at their irksome tasks day after day, cleansing wounds, binding up rents which the lash

helped the whites he never lost the friendship of the Zulus. In fact, he became known as a well-wisher of the Zulus who became friends of the Phoenix Settlement for ever." (Gandhi, Prabhudas, *My Childhood with Gandhiji*, page 42. Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1957.)

⁶⁷ *Collected Works*, Volume 5, page 282

⁶⁸ *Collected Works*, Volume 37, page 269

had made, carrying the helpless men behind the cavalry, up and down the hills for twenty and twenty-five miles at a stretch, or attending to the sanitation of the camp."⁶⁹

Gandhiji never quite understood the Zulu rebellion.⁷⁰ He saw the event as a refusal by one man, Chief Bambata, to pay the poll tax and a manhunt by the whites who proceeded to perpetrate "horrors" on the Zulus.⁷¹

The short period of service in the Stretcher-Bearer Corps was important in Gandhiji's life and it may well have greatly strengthened his attachment to non-violent resistance. The sense of betrayal by Britain, soon after his loyal service to the authorities in Natal, helped transform the petitioner into a challenger of oppression.

The Satyagraha

When the Transvaal Government issued the Asiatic Ordinance requiring Indians to register, with finger print impressions, and show the registrations to the police when asked, Gandhiji decided, for the first time, to defy the law. In his mind, the issue was not merely one of carrying passes. Indians were to be treated as criminals.⁷²

Leaders of the Indian community enthusiastically supported this course, and a mass meeting of Indians decided on defiance unless the Ordinance was repealed.⁷³ There were religious objections by Indian Muslims to being photographed or fingerprinted. There was also concern that any "Kaffir" constable could harass the Indians, even women.⁷⁴

Defiance began in 1907 and about one hundred and fifty persons went to prison by the end of January 1908 when General Smuts and

⁶⁹ Joseph J. Doke, *M.K. Gandhi: an Indian Patriot in South Africa*, pages 70-71. (London: London Indian Chronicle, 1909)

⁷⁰ It is only recently that scholars have described the scale of the rebellion and political groups have extolled it as the last armed liberation struggle of the Africans until it was resumed in 1961.

⁷¹ See his interview to the Reverend S.S. Tema in *Harijan*, February 18, 1939; *Collected Works*, Volume 68, pages 272-74.

⁷² He had perhaps in mind the Criminal Tribes Act in India. He felt that civil servants from India brought to the Transvaal were worse than the authorities in the South African Republic and were intent on harassing the Indians.

⁷³ After representations by Indians, the British Government withheld assent to the Ordinance. But it granted self-government to the Transvaal in 1907 and assented when the provisions of the Ordinance were enacted as the Asiatic Registration Act.

⁷⁴ There was a common feeling among the Coloured people and Indians that Zulu constables in the Transvaal showed no respect for them.

Gandhiji reached a provisional settlement.

Satyagraha was resumed later in 1908 as the Government refused to repeal the law, and continued intermittently until 1911 when it was suspended in the hope of a negotiated settlement. By then, almost 2,500 of the ten thousand Indians in the Transvaal had gone to prison.⁷⁵ Prison conditions became harsher.

Satyagraha was again resumed in September 1913 and extended to Natal as the authorities - now the Government of the Union of South Africa - reneged on their promise to repeal the £3 tax on members of families of formerly indentured Indians, and failed to provide legislative relief when the Cape Supreme Court declared most Indian marriages invalid. Gandhiji invited women and workers to join the *satyagraha*, and the response was far beyond expectations.

In this last phase of the *satyagraha*, about 60,000 Indian workers in Natal - indentured and free - went on strike, and perhaps ten thousand men and women were confined to prisons and mine compounds. Several workers were killed or wounded.

The Government was finally obliged, under pressure from India and Britain, to arrive at a settlement with Gandhiji, accepting the basic demands of the *satyagraha*.⁷⁶

The success of the small Indian community in its confrontation with the powerful Government, by employing passive resistance as the means of struggle, set an example that the indigenous majority could follow.

Gandhiji was the principal organiser of the *satyagraha* and one of the first to go to prison.⁷⁷ Through his leadership in sacrifice, as well as the respect he had gained in the community over the years, he came to be recognised as the leader of the struggle.

⁷⁵ The figure of 2,500 may not be quite correct as there is often confusion between the number of persons arrested and the number of convictions. Several *satyagrahis* went to prison more than once.

⁷⁶ The essence of the 1914 settlement was that some major grievances would be redressed and that no further disabilities would be imposed on the Indians. The fact that authorities found ways in later years to depart from the letter and spirit of the agreement does not detract from the success of the *satyagraha*.

⁷⁷ Many of the traders who were eloquent in calling for defiance had by then developed cold feet and were prepared only to support the movement with financial contributions. The majority of the passive resisters came from the poorer sections of the community - especially Tamils and Hindustanis.

The transformation of the status of Gandhiji in the Indian community and his leadership of the struggle affected his attitudes to, and relations with, the Africans and the Coloured people.

RELATIONS WITH AFRICAN AND COLOURED LEADERS AND SUPPORT TO THEIR ASPIRATIONS

Coloured and African political organisations began to emerge in South Africa at the beginning of this century, during Gandhiji's second sojourn in South Africa. Gandhiji came in contact with several of their leaders.

He knew John L. Dube who had established an industrial school in Inanda, very near Phoenix. They were both admirers of Booker T. Washington, the African-American leader and educator.

Dube launched the *Ilange lase Natal*, an African weekly in English and Zulu, in the same year when Gandhiji founded *Indian Opinion*; it was printed in the press of *Indian Opinion* until Dube acquired a press for the Ohlange Institute.

Gandhiji reported in *Indian Opinion* (September 2, 1905) on a speech made by Dube and commented that Dube was an African "of whom one should know." There was frequent social contact between the inmates of the Phoenix Settlement and the Ohlange Institute.

Gandhiji informed his readers of the achievements of African leaders.

In *Indian Opinion* (December 30, 1905, and March 17, 1906) he praised the efforts of Tengo Jabavu to establish a college for Africans. He wrote:

"... it is not to be wondered at that an awakening people, like the great Native races of South Africa, are moved by something that has been described as being very much akin to religious fervour... British Indians in South Africa have much to learn from this example of self-sacrifice."⁷⁸

In *Indian Opinion* of September 24, 1910, he congratulated Dr. W.B. Rubusana on his election to the Cape Provincial Council, and commented:

⁷⁸ *Collected Works*, Volume 8, page 235

"The election is really a challenge to the Union Parliament with reference to the colour clause. That Dr. Rubusana can sit in the Provincial Council but not in the Union Parliament is a glaring anomaly which must disappear if South Africans are to become a real nation in the near future."⁷⁹

Gandhiji had closer personal contact with the leaders of the Coloured people than with African leaders. The Coloured people and Indians had much in common. Both faced the problem of losing existing rights, while Africans had virtually no rights. In the Transvaal, the Coloured people and Indians were governed by same or similar laws. (Asiatics were included in the definition of "Coloured persons" in several laws.)

Moreover, there had been close relationship between Indians and the Cape Malays (Cape Muslims). Many Indians in the Cape had registered as Coloured and there was some intermarriage by Muslims with the Malays. There were Indians in the leadership of the Coloured political movement in the Cape.⁸⁰

Gandhiji was drawn to Dr. Abdulla Abdurahman,⁸¹ leader of the Coloured people, who was not only a professional educated in Britain but had Indian ancestry. As member of the Cape Town City Council, he helped Indian traders.⁸²

Indian Opinion carried a number of news items concerning Dr. Abdurahman and the African People's Organisation, the major political organisation of the Coloured people.⁸³

As he became acquainted with African and Coloured leaders and recognised that discrimination against any non-European group tended to affect other groups, he began to comment on developments concerning the African and Coloured peoples. His support for their demands became more pronounced after the launching of the Indian *satyagraha*, as African and Coloured organisations had become more militant. But there was always some caution to avoid allegations that he was inciting other groups against the whites. Some of Gandhiji's reports and comments in *Indian Opinion* are illustrative.

⁷⁹ *Collected Works*, Volume 10, page 325

⁸⁰ For instance, Haji Ojer Ally, a prominent member of the Indian community in the Transvaal and a close colleague of Gandhi until 1907, had been a leader of the Coloured community in Cape Town before he moved to the Transvaal.

⁸¹ His name is generally spelled "Abdur Rahman in *Collected Works*.

⁸² *Indian Opinion*, September 10, 1910

⁸³ The APO was formed in 1902 as the "African Political Organisation".

He condemned a proposal in the Johannesburg Town Council in 1905 for a bye-law that African cyclists within the Johannesburg municipal area should wear a numbered badge and a permit in a conspicuous position. He wrote:

"We are, as a rule, very reluctant about expressing opinions on matters not specially coming within the purview of this journal, but the proceedings of the Town Council are, in our opinion, scandalous, that we should be failing in our duty if we did not, in the interests of the community of South Africa, raise our humble protest against them."⁸⁴

Reporting on a petition by the Coloured people in 1906, demanding the same rights in the Transvaal and the Orange Free State as in the Cape, he wrote:

"The petition is non-Indian in character, although British Indians, being Coloured people, are very largely affected by it... Whilst, therefore, the Indian and non-Indian sections of the Coloured communities should, and do, remain apart, and have their separate organisations, there is no doubt that each can give strength to other in urging their common rights. Hence we have no hesitation in welcoming the document before us."⁸⁵

On January 2, 1909, *Indian Opinion* published the text of a letter by Olive Schreiner to the *Transvaal Leader* on "Closer Union" and commented:

"We agree entirely with Mrs. Cronwright-Schreiner, that a people kept in a state of political helotage are a source of danger to the State, sooner or later. The Indian community in South Africa has never demanded or fought for the political franchise, but we certainly believe that to prevent any section of the community from exercising political rights for reasons of race or colour alone, is the height of political unwisdom."

Personal relations with Africans

Gandhiji's own personal relations with Africans were always warm and friendly. Africans from Inanda frequently visited the Phoenix Settlement and were treated with respect.

In an article on the Phoenix settlement, soon after his visit to it in

⁸⁴ *Indian Opinion*, February 4, 1905; *Collected Works*, Volume 4, page 347

⁸⁵ *Indian Opinion*, March 14, 1906; *Collected Works*, Volume 5, page 242

1914, the Rev. C.F. Andrews wrote:

"For here (Phoenix *ashram*) distinctions of creed and race and colour had been resolved in a higher synthesis which was wonderful to witness. It was not only that the Indian coolie in distress found here a home and a welcome, and the poor, sickly Indian children from the town of whatever rank were here nursed back to health, but here also the Zulu and the *Kaffir* were received with love and tenderness."⁸⁶

Support by Africans and Coloured people to Indian satyagraha

Gandhiji and his colleagues made great efforts, with considerable success, to secure support for the Indian cause and struggle by Europeans in South Africa and by public opinion in Britain and India. They seem to have made no special effort to obtain support from Africans. When the *satyagraha* began, there was apparently some antipathy among Africans, but that was soon overcome by sympathy and admiration.

Ilanga lase Natal (as quoted by *Indian Opinion* of January 18, 1908), expressed admiration for the courageous action of the Indians in the Transvaal. The *Basutoland Star* said that the Indian struggle in the Transvaal was "worthy of emulation" by the Natives of South Africa.⁸⁷ John Dube, in an interview in 1914, after the end of the *satyagraha*, expressed great admiration for the Indian struggle.⁸⁸

Raojibhai M. Patel, one of the first batch of passive resisters in 1913, wrote of the admiration of some Zulu prison warders to the *satyagraha*. One warder brought him a newspaper to the toilet, at considerable risk to himself, so that the prisoners could learn of the progress of the *satyagraha*. Another warder told him when they were alone: "You are real men, real heroes! You have put these

⁸⁶ C. F. Andrews, "Mr. Gandhi at Phoenix" in *The Modern Review*, Calcutta, May 1914, pages 563-66.

In his book, *What I Owe to Christ*, Mr. Andrews described the first evening he spent at Phoenix Ashram in January 1914:

"He(Gandhi) was there, with the little children round him whom he loved... One baby girl, belonging to an 'untouchable' family in India, nestled in his arms, sharing her place there with a weak little invalid Muslim boy who sought eagerly to gain his special notice. A Zulu Christian woman had stayed for a while to take food with us on her way to the Zulu Mission on the hill." (pages 247-48).

⁸⁷ Odendaal, *op. cit.*, page 213

⁸⁸ *Indian Opinion*, February 1, 1908

arrogant whites in their right places!"⁸⁹

Coloured leaders recognised that they had a common interest with the Indians and expressed full sympathy. The Kimberley Branch of the APO held a public meeting in 1907 to express the "full sympathy (of the Coloured inhabitants of Kimberley) with the Transvaal Indians in their unequal struggle against, and passive resistance to, the Asiatic Registration Act..."⁹⁰

In January 1908, the Conference of the APO passed a resolution expressing sympathy for the Indians. Dr. Abdurahman sent a telegram to that effect to the Transvaal British Indian Association.⁹¹

At a big Diwali meeting of Hindus in Johannesburg in 1913, held in support of the passive resistance, one of the speakers was the Chairman of the APO. He drew attention to the fact that many Coloured women were then in jail in Bloemfontein for passively resisting the pass laws.⁹²

Gandhiji's Vision of the Future

Gandhiji welcomed such mutual support, and felt that the example of the Indian *satyagraha* was itself an effective help to the Africans and Coloured people.

The relations that developed during the *satyagraha* were reflected in his vision of a future South Africa. Two of his statements in 1908 are illustrative.

In reply to attacks by European politicians that Indian passive resistance placed a new weapon in the hands of the Natives, he said, as quoted by the Reverend Joseph Doke, his first biographer:⁹³

"Men who see far believe that the problems which are connected with the Natives will be the problems of the future, and that, doubtless, the white man will have a stern struggle to maintain his ascendancy in South Africa. When the moment of collision comes, if, instead of the old ways of massacre, *assegai*, and fire, the Natives adopt the policy of Passive

⁸⁹ Patel, Raojibhai M. *The Making of the Mahatma* (adaptation by Abid Shamsi of *Gandhiji ni Sadhana*. Ahmedabad, 1990), pages 216-17.

See "Mahatma Gandhi and John Dube" earlier in this volume.

⁹⁰ Patel, *op. cit.*, pages 200, 201

⁹¹ Report in the *Diamond Fields Advertiser*, reproduced in *Indian Opinion*, November 9, 1907

⁹² *Indian Opinion*, November 12, 1913

⁹³ Gandhi read the biography before publication and approved it.

Resistance, it will be a grand change for the Colony...

"When the Native peoples have risen sufficiently high in the scale of civilisation to give up savage warfare and use the Christian method of settling a dispute, they will be fit to exercise the right to vote in political affairs...

"If, then, the Natives accept the doctrines which are now so prevalent amongst the Indian community, South Africa need not fear the horrors of a racial uprising. It need not look forward to the necessity of maintaining an army to keep the Natives in awe. The future will be much brighter than its past has been."⁹⁴

In a speech at the YMCA in Johannesburg, on May 18, 1908, he said:

"... in studying the Indian question, I have endeavoured to study the question as it affects the Africans and the Chinese. It seems to me that both the Africans and the Asiatics have advanced the Empire as a whole; we can hardly think of South Africa without the African races. And who can think of the British Empire without India? South Africa would probably be a howling wilderness without the Africans...

"They [the African races] are still in the history of the world's learners. Able-bodied and intelligent men as they are, they cannot but be an asset to the Empire...

"If we look into the future, is it not a heritage we have to leave to posterity, that all the different races commingle and produce a civilisation that perhaps the world has not yet seen?"⁹⁵

THE QUESTION OF JOINT ACTION

Gandhiji has often been criticised, especially by radicals from among Indian South Africans, for not engaging in joint action with other oppressed people of South Africa.

The matter deserves to be seen in its proper context, rather than in

⁹⁴ Joseph J. Doke, *M.K. Gandhi: an Indian Patriot in South Africa*, pages 86-87. London: London Indian Chronicle, 1909.

⁹⁵ *Collected Works*, Volume 8, pages 242-46

the perspective of the 1940s when Indian leaders like Dr. Dadoo and Dr. Naicker sought to build a united front of Indians with Africans, Coloured people and liberal whites.

At the beginning of the century, when political movements were emerging in South Africa, each racial group pressed its demands separately. There was no unity between the Coloured people and the Africans. The African People's Organisation, while espousing the unity of the oppressed people, remained a Coloured organisation. The African organisations were weak and ineffective.

The question of joint action with other groups did not arise until the Indian *satyagraha* was launched in 1907, and until the African and Coloured organisations had become effective. Even then there was no approach by the latter to the Indian Passive Resistance Council for any joint action. A few Europeans joined the Indian struggle and went to prison, but no African or Coloured person did.⁹⁶

There was close cooperation between the Indian and Chinese communities in Johannesburg in the campaign against the Asiatic Registration Act which affected both. Gandhiji advised the Chinese community and the Chinese went to prison with the Indians. But the struggles were kept separate and parallel. As a result, the Indian *satyagraha* was not affected by problems which came up within the Chinese community.

Gandhiji, perhaps more than any other public leader, gave serious thought to the question of cooperation among the oppressed people and he was convinced that the different communities should fight their battles separately while expressing sympathy and support to the others. His reasoning deserves attention.

Writing on the Coloured petition of 1906, he said:

"This Association of Coloured People does not include Indians who have always kept aloof from that body. We believe that the Indian community has been wise in doing so. For, though the hardships suffered by those people and the Indians are almost of the same kind, the remedies are not identical. It is therefore proper that the two should fight out

⁹⁶ Gandhiji said in reply to a question from the African-American delegation in 1936 as to whether the Africans took part in his movement in South Africa: "No, I purposely did not invite them. It would have endangered their cause. They would not have understood the technique of our struggle nor could they have seen the purpose or utility of non-violence." *Collected Works*, Volume 62, page 199.

their cases, each in their own appropriate way. We can cite the Proclamation of 1858 [by Queen Victoria to India] in our favour, which the Coloured people cannot. They can use the powerful argument that they are the children of the soil. They can also argue that their way of life is entirely European. We can petition the Secretary of State for India, whereas they cannot. They belong largely in the Christian community and can therefore avail themselves of the help of their priests. Such help is not available to us."⁹⁷

In 1909, Gandhiji led a deputation to London on behalf of the Indian community. Delegations of Africans and Coloured people were in London at the same time to make representations concerning the draft South Africa Act to establish a Union of South Africa dominated by the white minority. The Transvaal Native Congress instructed its delegates to work in cooperation with the others, including Gandhiji.⁹⁸ There is, however, no evidence that the African delegates suggested cooperation to Gandhiji.

Gandhiji was in close contact with Dr. Abdurahman and met Mr. W. P. Schreiner, who assisted the Coloured delegation, but his writings contain no information on contact with the other delegates.

He referred, however, to suggestions by Indians that his deputation should take up the question of the Union. He wrote during his voyage to London:

"Many Indian friends have urged the deputation not to forget the question of the Union. I must say that this request proceeds from ignorance as to the implications of a Union... The Union Bill makes no reference to us at all. The Act will unite all the Colonies. But the respective laws of the Colonies will remain intact. What can we say against this? We can do or say nothing against a Union of the Colonies of South Africa. If, after the Union is formed, they attempt any legislation against us, we can fight out the question then. Our rights will not be liquidated by the mere formation of the Union. No doubt, that will be one of the consequences of the Union. But we cannot oppose the Union merely on the ground that we

⁹⁷ *Collected Works*, Volume 5, page 243

⁹⁸ Odendaal, Andre, *Vukani Bantu*, page 205.

The delegations consisted of : Dr. Abdulla Abdurahman, Matt J. Fredericks, D.J. Lenders, Dr. W.B. Rubusana, Thomas Mtobi Mapikela, Daniel Dwanya, John Tengo Jabavu, J. Gerrans (*Ibid.*, page 216).

They were all in the gallery in the House of Lords, as was Gandhiji, on July 27, 1909, when the draft Act was debated. (*Ibid.*)

might be ruined under it...

"Dr. Abdurahman is going to England entirely in connection with the question of the Union, and that is justified. For, under the Union Act, some of the rights of the black races will be abrogated right now... It is not the same with us."⁹⁹

The approach of Gandhiji in this instance, as in the case of the Coloured petition, may perhaps be criticised as legalistic, and appropriate to "petition politics". But the African and Coloured organisations had not yet outgrown that stage.

Gandhiji, however, went on to say:

"However, no one should suppose that the deputation will not raise the subject [of the Union] at all. It cannot but do so. It is because negotiations for a Union are in progress that the deputation is going. It will, moreover, urge in no uncertain terms that the Union should not be permitted if the Transvaal grievances are not redressed. And I say further that, if the Indians act with all their strength, the deputation cannot but gain its point. It will also raise the subject of the laws that have been enacted in the whole of South Africa. This does not mean that these laws will be repealed. Their repeal can be achieved only through *satyagraha*."¹⁰⁰

He pointed out that Indians could not prevent the enemies (white population in the different Colonies) from uniting. The solution was for the Indians to unite. The whites were the strong and favoured sons, and Indians would get no hearing by merely petitioning or begging. Petitions must be backed by some sanction - physical force or soul force (*satyagraha*). He was hinting on the one hand that Indians were not united¹⁰¹ and on the other that the Africans and the Coloured people were merely petitioning.

A united front was inappropriate and meaningless unless the constituent bodies were all engaged in struggle with common objectives and tactics, and could pool their strength. Such a situation did not exist during Gandhiji's stay in South Africa.¹⁰²

⁹⁹ *Collected Works*, Volume 9, pages 272-73

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ The *satyagraha* was then confined to the Transvaal and the Natal Indians had sent a separate delegation to London.

¹⁰² Gandhi refrained from any effort to cooperate with the European strike in 1913-14 and in fact, suspended the *satyagraha* as a gesture of goodwill towards the Government.

Gandhiji, however, welcomed expressions of support by other organisations to the Indian cause and, in turn, supported their demands. *Indian Opinion* (February 11, 1909) denounced the draft South Africa Act as amounting to a declaration of war against the black population.

Gandhiji continued to maintain an interest in the Indian struggle in South Africa until his death. His statements since his departure from South Africa in 1914 may be noted for a clearer understanding of his views.

As a leader in India, he was more outspoken in his recognition of a community of interests between the Indians and the Africans. He wrote in *Harijan* (July 22, 1926) that since the whites were more hostile to the Indian "settlers" than to Africans, "justice to them is not to be expected if injustice is done to the Natives".¹⁰³ He strongly condemned the Mines and Works Amendment Act, 1926, though the Indians were not immediately affected by it.¹⁰⁴

He wrote in April 1928:

"Indians have too much in common with the Africans to think of isolating themselves from them. They cannot exist in South Africa for any length of time without the active sympathy and friendship of the Africans."¹⁰⁵

In his interview with the Reverend S. S. Tema on January 1, 1939, he was asked: "Of late there has been some talk of forming an Indo-African united non-white front in South Africa. What do you think about it?" He replied:

"It will be a mistake. You will be pooling together not strength but weakness. You will best help one another by each standing on his own legs. The two cases are different. The Indians are a microscopic minority. They can never be a menace to the white population. You, on the other hand, are the sons of the soil who are being robbed of your inheritance. You are bound to resist that. Yours is a far bigger issue."¹⁰⁶

In June that year, Gandhiji drafted a resolution for the All India Congress Committee denouncing new discriminatory legislation against Indians in South Africa as a breach of agreements between

¹⁰³ *Collected Works*, Volume 31, page 182

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, page 332

¹⁰⁵ *Young India*, April 5, 1928; *Collected Works*, Volume 36, page 190

¹⁰⁶ *Harijan*, February 18, 1939; *Collected Works*, Volume 68, pages 272-73

India and South Africa. Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia, a Socialist, probably inspired by the formation of the Non-European United Front in South Africa, moved an amendment supporting a united front. The amendment was withdrawn after Gandhiji indicated that it was out of place in that resolution.

Gandhiji explained his position in *Harijan* (July 1, 1939):

"... I yield to no one in my regard for the Zulus, the Bantus and the other races of South Africa. I used to enjoy intimate relations with many of them. I had the privilege of often advising them. It used to be my constant advice to our countrymen in South Africa never to exploit or deceive these simple folk. But it was not possible to amalgamate the two causes. The rights and privileges (if any could be so called) of the indigenous inhabitants are different from those of the Indians. So are their disabilities and their causes. But if I discovered that our rights conflicted with their vital interests, I would advise the foregoing of those rights. They are the inhabitants of South Africa as we are of India. The Europeans are undoubtedly usurpers, exploiters or conquerors or all of these rolled into one. And so the Africans have a whole code of laws specially governing them. The Indian segregation policy of the Union Government has nothing in common with the policy governing the African races... ours is a tiny problem compared to the vast problem that faces the African races and that affects their progress. Hence it is not possible to speak of the two in the same breath."¹⁰⁷

Later, in reply to criticisms of his position, he wrote in the *Harijan* (July 15, 1939):

"However much one may sympathise with the Bantus, Indians cannot make common cause with them. I doubt if the Bantus themselves will as a class countenance any such move. They can only damage and complicate their cause by mixing it up with the Indian, as Indians would damage theirs by such mixture. But neither the AICC resolution nor my advice need deter the Indians from forming a non-European front if they are sure thereby of winning their freedom. Indeed, had they thought it beneficial or possible, they would have formed it long ago."¹⁰⁸

These statements perhaps reflect the position when Gandhiji was

¹⁰⁷ *Collected Works*, Volume 69, pages 376-79

¹⁰⁸ *Collected Works*, Volume 69, page 408

in South Africa rather than the realities of 1939. By then most Indians in South Africa were South Africa-born and had developed roots in that country. Many of them had joined radical movements and espoused unity of the oppressed people. They had cooperated across colour lines in the trade unions, the Communist Party, the Young Liberal Club, etc., and were active in the Non-European United Front.

Gandhiji seems to have been unaware of these developments as his main sources of information were *Indian Opinion* and letters from his son, Manilal Gandhi.¹⁰⁹ He received anxious enquiries from Indians in South Africa and learned that his former colleague, Ebrahim Aswat, was the Chairman of the NEUF in the Transvaal. He discussed the question of united front with Moulvi I.A. Cachalia and other Indian South Africans. He was soon in correspondence with Dr. Yusuf M. Dadoo, radical leader of the Transvaal Indians, who was to become an architect of Indian-African unity.

He never opposed joint action since then, but constantly stressed that there should be no abandonment of non-violence in the process.

IMPACT OF GANDHIJI AND THE INDIAN SATYAGRAHA ON THE LIBERATION STRUGGLE

"Passive resistance" has been in the consciousness of South Africa ever since the Indian *satyagraha* led by Gandhiji early in the century. It has had a profound influence on the struggle for national liberation.

In 1909, when the Coloured deputation to London failed in its efforts to get the draft South Africa Act amended, Gandhiji and Dr. Abdurahman discussed the possibility of passive resistance by the Coloured community.¹¹⁰

At a meeting of the Coloured people in Johannesburg on December 16, 1909, several speakers declared that if the authorities proved unreasonable, they would take up passive resistance.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ See Gandhiji's letter of June 25, 1939, to Manilal Gandhi. *Collected Works*, Volume 69, page 373.

¹¹⁰ *Collected Works*, Volume 9, pages 365-66, 388.

¹¹¹ *Indian Opinion*, February 16 and 20, 1910; *Collected Works*, Volume 10, page 165.

Gandhiji wrote in *Indian Opinion* (March 5, 1910):

Though the Coloured people did not launch passive resistance, their discussions are likely to have influenced the women's anti-pass movement in 1913 in which the APO and Coloured women were active, and the men's anti-pass movement in the Transvaal in 1919.

The anti-pass movements of 1913 and 1919

The women's anti-pass movement in the Orange Free State in 1913 arose from the tightening of pass laws - against both Africans and Coloured people - by the OFS Legislative Assembly in 1906. After failure of appeals to the Governor and in 1912 to the Union Government, the Bloemfontein women launched a passive resistance campaign in June 1913.¹¹² It soon spread to the rest of the province.

Coloured women and the African Peoples' Organisation (APO) played a significant role in the leadership, together with African women. The newly-formed South African Native National Congress (later renamed the African National Congress) actively supported the resistance.¹¹³

On June 6, 1913, six hundred women in Bloemfontein marched to the Town Hall and handed over sacks of passes to the authorities. Hundreds of women were arrested during the movement. They refused to pay fines and went to prison.

The movement could claim success: the Government asked the police in 1917 to hold its hand in the OFS so far as Native women were concerned, pending enactment of a new pass law.

The men's anti-pass movement on the Rand in 1919 was initiated by the South African Native National Congress after appeals for the abolition of passes were rejected. African women joined the resistance, though women were not required to carry passes in the

"Our struggle is producing a profound effect on the Coloured people. Dr. Abdurahman has commented on it in his journal at great length and has held up the example of the Indian community to every Coloured person. Some of them have also passed a resolution in Johannesburg to defy the laws of the Government and take to *satyagraha*."

¹¹² This was shortly before the last phase of the Indian *satyagraha*. Although Gandhiji had decided on resuming the *satyagraha* and invited the women in the Phoenix Settlement to join, that was not generally known, and the defiance of laws did not begin until September 1913.

¹¹³ It has been suggested that the endorsement of "passive action" in the first constitution of the ANC (then SANNAC), Chapter IV, Clause 13, was a reflection of the influence of Gandhiji's Indian passive resistance campaigns upon African opinion. (Karis, Thomas and Gwendolen M. Carter (eds.) *From Protest to Challenge*, Volume I, pages 62 and 78.

Transvaal. Passes were collected from workers in bags and handed over to the authorities. About seven hundred Africans were arrested and went to jail, refusing to pay fines.

There was brutal violence against the Africans, both by the police and white civilians, and the movement was suppressed.¹¹⁴

The two anti-pass movements have many parallels with the Indian satyagraha led by Gandhiji.

The resistance was preceded by many appeals for redress of grievances. It was led in connection with very serious grievances. The resisters defied the law and were prepared to suffer the consequences. They refused to pay fines and went to prison.

There was also a burning of passes, reminiscent of the burning by Indians of the registration certificates in August 1908.

But there were also notable differences.

1. The Indian *satyagraha* was led by Gandhiji and his colleagues who were prepared for any sacrifice, and who refused to surrender when brutality by the authorities increased. Such leadership had not yet emerged among the Africans.

2. Gandhiji had patiently built up a "solidarity movement" among the Europeans in South Africa, and in India and Britain. As a result, there were protests against violence by the authorities and pressure on them to negotiate.

No such solidarity movement had yet been built by the African leaders. The killings of Africans aroused little attention or protest in South Africa or Britain.

In subsequent years, peaceful resistance by Africans was met by massive violence on many occasions. Passive resistance could not spread until a new leadership emerged among the Africans and succeeded in securing sympathy and support in South Africa and abroad.

¹¹⁴ For an account of the two anti-pass campaigns of 1914 and 1919, see Wells, Julia, "Passes and Bypasses: Freedom of Movement for African Women under the Urban Areas Act of South Africa" in Hay, Margaret and Marcia Wright (eds.) *African Women and the Law: Historical Perspectives*, Boston University Papers on Africa - VII; Ginwala, Frene, "Women: Forever Marching Forward" in *Sechaba*, August 1986; Meli, Francis, *A History of the ANC: South Africa Belongs to Us*; Benson, Mary, *The Struggle for a Birthright*; Roux, Edward, *Time Longer than Rope: A History of the Black Man's Struggle for Freedom in South Africa*.

The Indian passive resistance of 1946-48

The Indian passive resistance movement of 1946-48 - in which about 2,000 Indians courted imprisonment - was conducted under the personal guidance of Gandhiji.

Young radicals, led by Dr. Yusuf Dadoo, a Communist, opposed the compromising leadership of the Transvaal Indian Congress in the 1930s and pressed for militant resistance against racist laws and for cooperation with the Africans in the struggle against racist tyranny. They gained strength when they were able to work with Gandhians, both in the Nationalist Bloc of the TIC and in the Non-European United Front.

A similar radical movement developed in the Natal among the Indians who were active in the trade union movement, the Young Liberal Club and the Anti-Segregation Council. Again, Communists and Gandhians cooperated and Dr. G.M. Naicker, a Gandhian, became their leader.

In 1946, when the Asiatic Land Tenure and Indian Representation Act was adopted, a passive resistance movement was launched by the Indian community - under the leadership of Dr. Dadoo and Dr. G.M. Naicker - with the full and active support of Gandhiji.

The cooperation of Communists and Gandhians had a great influence on the nature of the struggle. Gandhiji lent his support knowing well that Dr. Dadoo and several other leaders were Communists, since he saw Dr. Dadoo as one who was dedicated to the cause and willing to sacrifice.

There was some continuity with the *satyagraha* led by Gandhiji. One of the resisters - Mrs. P.K. Naidu - had courted imprisonment in the *satyagraha* and many others were children of *satyagrahis*. Some had participated in the struggles led by Gandhiji in India.

A significant feature of this campaign - largely due to several years of effort by the Indian radicals to establish cooperation with other movements - was the support it received from the African National Congress and other organisations. Several Europeans, Coloured people and Africans joined the passive resistance and went to prison.

The Indian Government provided effective diplomatic and political support to the movement and helped it to secure

international solidarity.

This movement was perhaps much more significant in the history of the freedom struggle in South Africa than is generally recognised.

It was the first well-organised mass struggle in South Africa. It led to a strengthening of the Indian Congresses.¹¹⁵ The race problem in South Africa was internationalised and solidarity committees began to be set up abroad. The issue of sanctions against South Africa was raised for the first time, following an embargo by India.

During the course of the struggle, cooperation was built across colour lines. The pact of cooperation between the African and Indian Congresses, signed in March 1947, was to be the precursor of the Congress Alliance of the 1950s. Above all, the Indian passive resistance eventually led to the Defiance Campaign of 1952.

M. B. Yengwa, a leader of the ANC and a close colleague of Chief Lutuli, said at the Treason Trial that African nationalism was exclusive until the Xuma-Naicker-Dadoo pact of March 1947, and changed since then.

"Previously it [the African National Congress] was exclusive in the sense that it regarded its struggle as that of the African people only, but after that there was a definite change in the sense that other groups, non-African groups, were taken in - and actually our nationalism included all non-European groups as well as European groups who worked with us."¹¹⁶

Campaign of Defiance against Unjust Laws

In their discussions in 1950-51, on plans for the Defiance Campaign, leaders of the African National Congress and the South African Indian Congress took note of the experience of Indian passive resistance and adapted the strategy to the requirements of a multi-racial, and predominantly African, resistance. The Defiance

¹¹⁵ The Natal Indian Congress claimed an increase in membership to 35,000. At that time, the ANC had a membership of only about 3,000 and the ANC Youth League perhaps 500.

¹¹⁶ Treason Trial transcript, page 17. The change in outlook was, however, effective only after May 1950 when several of the younger leaders of the ANC from the ANC Youth League, who had been hostile to cooperation with the Indians - Walter Sisulu, Nelson Mandela and Oliver Tambo - became convinced of the desirability of joint action and began to espouse a broader nationalism.

Campaign was greatly influenced by Gandhiji,¹¹⁷ but was not purely Gandhian.

In a paper on the Defiance Campaign, M.P. Naicker wrote:

"In the detailed discussions that were held by the National Planning Council and the leaderships of the African National Congress and the South African Indian Congress prior to the formulation of the plan of action, the efficacy of the Gandhian philosophy of *satyagraha* (i.e., changing the hearts of the rulers by passively suffering imprisonment) in the face of an avowedly fascist regime was discussed at length. Undoubtedly there was a very small minority among the leadership who supported the Gandhian creed absolutely. But the vast majority agreed that the campaign itself could not defeat white supremacy. The major aim therefore was to build the liberation movements so as to embarrass the Government and to lead the people to mass industrial action."¹¹⁸

Mr. M.B. Yengwa said, during the Treason Trial, in reply to questioning by Mr. Kentridge:

"Would you say that the African National Congress as such has taken over the whole philosophy of Gandhiji? - No, my Lord, it has not done so.

"Do you think Gandhiji's ideas have had any influence on African National Congress policy? - It has had a very strong influence on the African National Congress.

"In what direction? - In the direction of non-violence, my Lord; the African National Congress has seen non-violence in practice in India and it has seen India becoming independent, and the ANC has been inspired by that philosophy."¹¹⁹

¹¹⁷ The very name "defiance" indicates that the leaders understood the spirit of Gandhiji. For the *satyagraha* launched in 1907 was "defiance" of an unjust law; there was little discussion of violence and non-violence as violent resistance by the Indians in the Transvaal was unthinkable.

¹¹⁸ Naicker, M.P. "The Defiance Campaign Recalled", paper published by the United Nations Unit on Apartheid in June 1972. Reprinted in Reddy, E.S. (ed.) *The Struggle for Liberation in South Africa and International Solidarity: A Selection of Papers Published by the United Nations Centre against Apartheid*. New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Private Limited, 1992.

¹¹⁹ Treason Trial transcript, pages 504-06.

It must be noted that many Indians in the "Congress alliance" did not fully accept the philosophy of Gandhi.

"Why do you think the African National Congress adheres to the policy of non-violence, apart from the reason you've given, of the influence of Gandhiji and so on; is there any other reason? - Yes, my Lord; one of the reasons is the Christian influence in the Congress. I think people who hold strong Christian views do not approve of violence in any sense, but much more than that, my Lord, the African National Congress is committed to a multi-racial society in South Africa, and it is the belief of the African National Congress that the multi-racial society in this country must be attained by methods of non-violence, because violence is inconsistent with a multi-racial form of State in this country. We think that hatred would then be bred and in unending animosity between the races."

Molvi I. A. Cachalia, in his testimony at the same trial, elaborated on the difference between non-violence as a creed (as for Gandhiji) and as a tactic (as for the leaders of the Defiance Campaign).¹²⁰

The mass defiance of the 1980s

Though the Defiance Campaign greatly strengthened the ANC and built an effective solidarity movement abroad, it was suspended when the Government enacted draconian laws prescribing harsh punishments, including whipping, for defiance of laws.

One might wonder what the course of struggle might have been if the leaders followed the Gandhian precept and refused to surrender, inviting the Government to implement its law. But the movement and its leaders were not yet ready for such a course.

However, the experience of the Defiance Campaign greatly influenced the political outlook of the leaders of the ANC as they planned and organised many new campaigns. Non-violence became a part of their philosophy. It affected the nature of the "armed struggle" decided on in 1961 by the ANC, with emphasis on the avoidance of killing of innocent persons.

Non-violent struggle continued even in the period when armed struggle was being extolled. Nana Sita, the Gandhian, held up the banner of resistance in the darkest days of repression. The mass student struggles before and after the Soweto massacre of 1976, and actions by resurgent African trade unions were essentially non-

¹²⁰ See E.S. Reddy, ed., *Indian South Africans in the Struggle for National Liberation: Evidence of Molvi Ismail Ahmad Cachalia in the South African Treason Trial, June 21-28, 1960*. New Delhi: Sanchar Publishing House, 1993.

violent. These struggles encouraged Bishop Desmond Tutu and other churchmen to undertake defiance.

In the 1980s - after a long process in which many people lost the fear of batons and bullets, and of torture in prisons - mass defiance could be undertaken.

The intention was to make unjust laws inoperative and the country ungovernable. Though there was little mention of Gandhiji at this stage, the new strategy was in harmony with Gandhian thought.

The mass defiance campaign of 1989 led to fissures in the camp of the adversary and a great strengthening of the international solidarity movement. The Government could no longer obtain external economic and other support. It was obliged to release the political prisoners, abrogate obnoxious laws and negotiate with the leaders of the oppressed people for the establishment of a non-racial democratic society.

The South African liberation movement faced great odds and had to carry on a protracted struggle. It drew inspiration from the Gandhian philosophy and the experience of the Indian *satyagraha*, as well as from other sources. In the process, it enriched the heritage of *satyagraha*. Two of its leaders - Chief Albert J. Lutuli, who emerged as the leader during the Defiance Campaign of 1952, and Archbishop Desmond Tutu, who led the mass defiance in the 1980s - were honoured with the award of the Nobel Peace Prize.

I have been fortunate to have enjoyed the friendship of many South African leaders - above all, Oliver Tambo, President of the ANC during the most difficult and decisive stage of the struggle - and to know how greatly they respected Gandhiji and drew inspiration from him.

SOME REMARKABLE EUROPEAN WOMEN WHO HELPED GANDHIJI IN SOUTH AFRICA¹²¹

Gandhiji led a seven-year long struggle in South Africa from 1907 to 1914 for the security and dignity of the Indian settlers in that country who were subjected to humiliations by the white rulers. In his account of that struggle, *Satyagraha in South Africa*, he makes special mention of three European women who "never missed an opportunity of doing a good turn to the Indians" - Emily Hobhouse, Olive Schreiner and Elizabeth Molteno.

Gandhiji wrote this book in prison, entirely from memory, not as a definitive history of the satyagraha, but as a guide to his followers in India. It contains a few errors and many omissions. Little is said, for instance, on how these women helped the Indian cause. Not a single letter from these women to Gandhiji in the crucial period of 1913-14 - and they wrote many - is available in the Indian or South African archives. There is little information on their assistance in books on Gandhiji, except for some references, partly erroneous, in the memoirs of Prabhudas Gandhi and Raojibhai Patel.

But in my research on Gandhiji and South Africa, I was able to find some unpublished letters by Gandhiji, through the kind courtesy of the University of Cape Town Libraries, the South African Library and the University of Witwatersrand Library. These letters and further information I obtained from various sources indicate that the intervention and assistance of these remarkable women was crucial in enabling Gandhiji to secure a settlement with General Smuts and return triumphant to his motherland.

The three women - Emily Hobhouse was British and the other two South African - belonged to influential families. They were pacifists, feminists and, indeed, socialists in their outlook. They had courageously opposed the barbarous war launched by British imperialism against the Boers in 1899, and had become intimate friends. They were distressed when peace led to an alliance of Britons and Boers against the Africans, Coloured people and Indians, and responded to appeals by Gandhiji for justice to the Indians.

Two other women associated with them also deserve recognition: Alice Greene and Ruth Alexander.

Gandhiji's acquaintance with the women

Gandhiji came to know Olive Schreiner, Miss Molteno and Miss Greene during his tireless efforts to secure understanding and sympathy among the Europeans.

¹²¹ Written for the anniversary of the death of Gandhiji on January 30, 1993.

(He was specially interested in friends of the Boers who could use their influence on the regime in the Transvaal and later of the Union of South Africa.) He met Emily Hobhouse and Ruth Alexander only in 1914. He admired these courageous women of principle, not only for their unqualified and unhesitating support of the rights of the Indians, but also for their convictions and sincerity. They too understood and admired him as few Europeans did, and became his intimate friends.

Emily Hobhouse (1860-1926)

Emily Hobhouse, daughter of a churchman in Britain, dedicated herself to the movement in Britain against the Anglo-Boer War. Her visits to the concentration camps in South Africa where Boer women and children were confined - and thousands perished - and her campaign in Britain to help the victims of this dirty war had much to do with the ending of the war. She earned the reverence of the Boer people and the great respect of Boer leaders like General Louis Botha and General Jan Christiaan Smuts.

She had a great regard for India. She had met many Indians at the home of her uncle, Lord (Arthur) Hobhouse, who was a Law Member of the Council of the Government of India and later of the Privy Council. She was, therefore, distressed that the Boers, who had heroically fought for their freedom, joined with the British South Africans after the war to oppress the Indians.

She arrived in South Africa in December 1913 to attend the unveiling of a memorial to Boer women in Bloemfontein, but was forced to remain in Cape Town because of illness. That was the time when Gandhiji most needed help and she provided it without hesitation.

Olive Schreiner

Olive Schreiner was not only the most prominent South African writer of the time but a woman of advanced views. Her writings on the future of South Africa read even today as the most perceptive and prophetic and can well be an inspiration for all those who seek to build a non-racial democratic South Africa.

During her stay in Britain in the 1880s, she developed friendship with Havelock Ellis, Eleanor Aveling, the daughter of Karl Marx, Edward Carpenter, the socialist whom Gandhiji admired, and many other intellectuals.

She vehemently opposed the Anglo-Boer War of 1899-1902 and was virtually interned by the British authorities.

I do not know when Gandhiji first met Olive Schreiner - it may have been in 1907 when she moved to De Aar - but he was proud of the friendship. *Indian Opinion*, in an editorial note on January 2, 1909, probably written by Gandhiji,

had highly commended her for a letter she wrote on the race problem, commenting that she was of "greater permanent value to the world than a continent of Napoleons."

Gandhiji said in his speech on South Africa at the Kanpur Congress in 1925:

"I claim the privilege of having been a close friend of that great poetess and philanthropist and that most self-effacing woman - Olive Schreiner. She was a friend of the Indians equally with the Natives of South Africa. She knew no distinctions between white and black races. She loved the Indian, the Zulu and the Bantu as her own children... Such precious men and women have also been born and bred in South Africa."

In 1909, when Gandhiji was leaving on a deputation to Britain, Olive Schreiner went to the ship in Cape Town with her sister and, in defiance of the racist authorities, shook hands with Gandhiji and expressed sympathy for the Indian cause. Gandhiji was thrilled. He wrote: "She performed this ceremony most heartily in the presence of a huge crowd and both the sisters were quite for a few minutes with us. Fancy the author of *Dreams* paying a tribute to passive resistance."¹²²

She was instrumental in persuading her brother, W.P. Schreiner, a prominent liberal parliamentarian, to support the Indian cause.

The admiration of Gandhiji to Olive Schreiner was reciprocated. She told Mrs. Sarojini Naidu in London in 1914: "Tell your young Indians that Mr. Gandhi is the greatest spirit that has ever come to South Africa; he is the Mazzini of the Movement."¹²³

Elizabeth M. (Betty) Molteno (1852-1927)

Betty Molteno came from a very prominent South African family. Her father, Sir John, was the first Prime Minister of the Cape Colony, and her brother was the first Speaker of the South African Parliament.

Tired of riches and leisure, she took to teaching and became principal of a girls' school in Port Elizabeth. She was forced to leave her job because of her opposition to the Anglo-Boer War. She supported Emily Hobhouse and developed a close friendship with her.

She was not happy at the developments after the War and went to England. She met Gandhiji in London in 1909.

Returning to South Africa in 1912 she visited the Phoenix Settlement: "Your

¹²² *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Volume 9, page 287

¹²³ *Indian Opinion*, September 30, 1914

sweet Phoenix is a poem - a dream of loveliness," she wrote to Gandhiji.

She bought a cottage at Ohlange, a mile or two from Phoenix, and was there during the crucial phase of the *satyagraha*, lending invaluable moral support which no European of her standing could conceive of.

Visiting the Phoenix Settlement in November 1913, when Gandhiji was in prison, she saw Soorzai, an invalid Indian worker, brought there by his family and colleagues after he was brutally flogged by his estate manager on suspicion of leading a strike. Soorzai was subsequently jailed and died in prison on December 10th. Miss Molteno went to see the dead body in the hospital, joined the funeral procession organised by the Natal Indian Association in Durban, and later testified at the inquest.¹²⁴

She spoke at an Indian meeting in Durban on January 4th to welcome the Reverend C.F. Andrews - Gandhiji was among the other speakers - and called on Indians to identify with Africa: "Only as you learn to call Africa your Motherland can you become worthy children of her sacred soil."¹²⁵

Indian Opinion (January 7, 1914) quoted her speech as follows:

"... After the Boer War I saw that Boer and Briton would have to unite, but would they try to do it at the cost of their dark brothers? Broken-hearted I went to England. For eight long years I remained away from Africa - in body - never in soul and spirit. And England and Europe have sent me back with this message to white South Africa: 'Open your hearts - your souls - to your brethren of colour'. We are in the 20th century. Rise to the heights of this glorious century. Try to comprehend the words of DuBois - that grand and sympathetic soul: 'The 20th century will be the century of colour.'¹²⁶ And I say it is also the century of the woman. She, too, is divine and supreme. She, too, must play her God-appointed part - and in this 20th century her part will be a great one."

On January 12, 1914, she spoke at a meeting to welcome Mrs. Sheikh Mehtab and Hanifa Bibi, the two Muslim women passive resisters, on their release from prison. On January 20, she spoke at another meeting to welcome a group of women passive resisters from the Transvaal, and expressed the hope that in the future multi-racial South Africa, women would take a prominent part.

Alice M. Greene (died 1920)

¹²⁴ *Indian Opinion*, January 28, 1914

¹²⁵ Benarsidas Chaturvedi and Marjorie Sykes, *Charles Freer Andrews*, pages 111-12. (New Delhi: Publications Division, 1982).

¹²⁶ Dr. W.E.B. DuBois said - and this was included in the declaration of the Pan African Conference held in London in 1900: "The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the colour line..."

Alice Greene, friend and companion of Miss Molteno, came from another distinguished family. One of her uncles was head of the Admiralty in Britain. Her brother, principal of a public school in Britain, was father of Graham Greene, the famous novelist.

She was Vice-Principal of the school in Port Elizabeth of which Miss Molteno was Principal. She too opposed the Boer war and was an advocate of women's rights.

Ruth Alexander

Ruth Alexander deserves mention in this group though she arrived in South Africa after the Anglo-Boer War and was not involved in the anti-war campaign.

Daughter of an American Jewish scholar, Ruth married Morris Alexander in 1907 at the age of 19 and went to South Africa. Advocate Alexander - a relative of Herman Kallenbach, associate of Gandhiji - was a Jewish leader and liberal Parliamentarian who had been helpful to the Indians. Ruth soon became an admirer, disciple and friend of Olive Schreiner.

Gandhiji first met her in Cape Town in February 1914. He and Kasturba stayed at the Alexander home on their last night in South Africa in July 1914.

The course of the Satyagraha and the situation in December 1913

Gandhiji launched the *satyagraha* in the Transvaal against the Asiatic Registration Act in 1907. Five hundred Indians courted imprisonment, from among the small Indian population of less than ten thousand in the province. Through the intervention of Albert Cartwright - a journalist respected by the Boers for his opposition to the Anglo-Boer War - a provisional agreement was reached with General Smuts and the prisoners were released at the end of January 1908.

But there were misunderstandings on the agreement and the *satyagraha* was resumed later that year. Two thousand and five hundred persons defied the law by 1909, but the movement seemed to be petering out with no success. Gandhiji went on a deputation to London that year but found the British Government unwilling to intervene. He moved to the Tolstoy Farm in 1911 and seemed to be whiling away his time. He alone perhaps held firm to the faith that true *satyagraha*, even by one individual, cannot but succeed.

Jail-going was suspended to give time for talks with the Government of the Union of South Africa which was formed in 1910. Gopal Krishna Gokhale visited the country in October 1912 and obtained assurances from General Botha, the Prime Minister, and senior cabinet members (General Smuts and Patrick Duncan) that action would soon be taken to meet the main Indian demands.

Gandhiji closed the Tolstoy Farm and moved to the Phoenix Settlement in Durban.

But again, the agreement broke down and *satyagraha* was resumed in September 1913. This time women were allowed to join the satyagraha, especially since the Courts had refused to recognise Indian marriages and the government refused to validate them. Work stoppage by mine workers was also envisaged, but only on the issue of the three pound tax on Indian labourers who completed indenture and became free.

Gandhiji's wife, Kasturba, insisted on joining the satyagraha, despite her poor health, and was in the first batch from Natal which crossed the Transvaal border in defiance of the law. Two of his sons, Manilal and Ramdas, also went to prison.

Gandhiji expected less than a hundred *satyagrahis*, but the participation of women electrified the atmosphere. Thousands of workers in the coal mines came out on strike in response to appeals by the women, and Gandhiji led a "great march" of 4,000 workers from Newcastle, Natal, towards the Transvaal border. He was arrested and sentenced on November 11th to nine months' hard labour.

Gandhiji had not intended to extend the strike, but in his absence, it spread spontaneously to the municipalities and plantations. It soon involved some sixty thousand Indians in the largest general strike that South Africa had seen.

The Government mobilised police and the army and together with mineowners and plantation managers, attempted brutal suppression of the strike. Several workers were killed; some were stabbed by Zulu guards, on orders from the managers; thousands were brutally assaulted in mine compounds turned into prisons - but the poor, illiterate workers stood firm in their resolve: "When Gandhi Maharaj is in jail for us, when the the queen and the princes are in prison for us, we will not go to work."

The brutality against the women and the workers aroused opinion in India, and led to protests all over the nation. Contributions for the satyagraha poured in, not only from professionals and students, but even from princes, including the Nizam of Hyderabad. Ratan Tata, the industrialist, made a munificent donation. The Reverend C.F. Andrews and several British residents (missionaries and civil servants) contributed to the fund.

The Indian and British Governments were obliged to act. Under pressure from them, the South African regime appointed a Commission to investigate the Indian grievances and charges of violence, and released Gandhiji and his two European colleagues (Hermann Kallenbach and H.S.L. Polak) on December 18th. With its usual duplicity, however, it appointed to the Commission one judge and two notorious anti-Indian agitators.

On Gandhiji's advice the Indian community pledged to boycott the Commission unless the community was consulted and one or two members acceptable to the community were appointed to the Commission - failing which the struggle would be resumed with a march on New Year's Day.

Leaders in India and Britain who had pressed for an investigation could not understand the seeming intransigence of Gandhiji. Frantic appeals came to him from Gokhale, his mentor; on behalf of Lord Hardinge, the Viceroy, who had publicly expressed sympathy with the *satyagraha*; and Lord Amthill, who headed a committee of supporters in Britain. But Gandhiji would not budge from his vow. He was set to go into wilderness.

Intervention of Betty Molteno and Emily Hobhouse

Kasturba was released from prison on December 22nd. She had been on a fruit diet before arrest but the prison authorities deliberately refused her fruit. She came out in shattered health. A huge welcome procession planned in Durban had to be cancelled and she was taken to Phoenix to recuperate.

Miss Molteno went to see her and was shocked to hear of the prison treatment. She could not understand why the government had to be so cruel to the frail woman. She wrote about Kasturba and the Indian struggle to Alice Greene in Cape Town and requested her to speak to Miss Hobhouse.

On December 27th, Gandhiji received a telegram from Miss Hobhouse, whom he and the Boers admired so greatly, appealing to him as a "humble woman" to postpone the march for fifteen days. Gandhiji consulted his colleagues and agreed because of his esteem for her.

This is how Alice Greene described the origin of the telegram:

"She (Miss Hobhouse) was sitting up on her couch... and round her shoulders... was your little Indian shawl from Durban, which I gave her yesterday and which she has worn since. It suited her beautifully. Directly I told her I had sent off a telegram to Gandhi and that you had suggested her sending one too. She instantly took pencil and paper and wrote down a long telegram which I sent off... She sent it to Maritzburg to catch him at the mass meeting this afternoon. It was to the effect that her personal sympathy was intense but that she would venture to advise patience. It would not do to alienate sympathy and even endanger the very cause itself. Could he not wait until the meeting of Parliament before having recourse to further resistance? Even yet English women had not achieved full freedom. She used much gentler language than this, but that was the gist of it. She told him also that everything was being followed with much sympathy and feeling."

She then wrote a long letter to General Smuts recalling her special connection with India through her uncle. She said that as a woman without a vote, she sympathised with other voteless folk as the Indians. She then pressed him to meet and talk to Gandhiji:

"You see January 15 is the date now proposed for another march. Before then some way should be found of giving private assurance to the leaders that satisfaction is coming to them. Their grievance is really moral... never will governmental physical force prevail against a great moral and spiritual upheaval. Wasted time and wasted energy, dear Oom Jannie..."

General Smuts could not possibly ignore an appeal from her. Gandhiji was invited to Pretoria and negotiations began on January 13th. The Reverend C.F. Andrews, who accompanied Gandhiji to Pretoria, wrote:

"There can be no doubt that during the days that followed the influence of Miss Hobhouse with the Boer leaders did much to pave the way to a reconciliation. While we were in Pretoria she wrote again and again both to Mr. Gandhi and myself. She thus kept herself in touch with the whole negotiations and took part in them."¹²⁷

Gandhiji was surprised to see a great change in the attitude of General Smuts and that was undoubtedly due to Miss Hobhouse. A provisional agreement was reached on January 22, 1914.

Gandhiji in Cape Town

Gandhiji and Kasturba went to Cape Town in mid-February to bid farewell to the Reverend C.F. Andrews and to follow the developments on the Indian question. Kasturba's condition deteriorated and gave cause for grave concern.

Miss Molteno, Miss Greene and Mrs. Alexander frequently visited the Gandhis at the home of Dr. A.H. Gool where they stayed and enquired about her health. The aristocracy of South Africa was thus visiting and paying respects to a simple woman from India and her husband!

Miss Molteno was busy introducing Gandhiji to influential personalities. Gandhiji wrote to Kallenbach on February 25, 1914:

"What is happening just now is that I am becoming a society man and Miss Molteno is the instrument... She is undoubtedly a tactful peacemaker."¹²⁸

¹²⁷ C.F. Andrews, "Mr. Gandhi at Phoenix" in *Modern Review*, Calcutta, May 1914

¹²⁸ Kallenbach papers, National Archives of India

Miss Molteno not only took the Gandhis to the palatial Molteno estate, but arranged for them to meet Miss Hobhouse who was now staying at Groote Schuur, the residence of the Prime Minister, as the guest of General and Mrs. Botha. There they met Mrs. Botha - as well as Mrs. Gladstone, the wife of the Governor-General - who were both friendly and considerate.

Gandhiji had written many times to General Botha for an interview but without success. But a few days after meeting the Gandhis, Miss Hobhouse invited Gandhiji again for a discussion at Groote Schuur - and General and Mrs. Botha joined them.

When Miss Hobhouse died, Gandhiji wrote in an obituary in *Young India* on July 15, 1926:

"She played no mean part at the settlement of 1914...

"Let the women of India treasure the memory of this great Englishwoman."

Continuing friendship

Gandhiji cherished the friendship of these women and tried to maintain continuing contact.

When he went to London in August 1914 - and he soon fell ill - Olive Schreiner was already there and rather ill. They kept in contact through Hermann Kallenbach.

Olive Schreiner, as a pacifist, was very upset when Gandhiji decided to raise an Indian Volunteer Corps during the First World War. But she continued her friendship and spoke at a farewell meeting on the eve of his departure for India.

Also in London, Gandhiji visited Miss Hobhouse who was equally opposed to the war.

Mrs. Schreiner died soon after the end of the War and I am aware of no letters by her to Gandhiji after 1914. But Gandhiji and Miss Hobhouse continued correspondence until her death.

Mrs. Ruth Alexander sent a letter to Gandhiji on April 4, 1926, through the Reverend C.F. Andrews. She wrote:

"Dear Mr. Gandhi, I am touched more than I can tell you when I look back at the time when you did me the great honour to stay with me and to talk with me, and remembered how patient you always were with me, how uncondemning even of things you must have disapproved. It was wonderful

of you.

"Let me tell you, for the pleasure it gives me, that you have always been, since I knew you, and always will be, until I die, one of the three great souls with whom I live from day to day, beyond those who speak to me from the printed pages. My father and Olive Schreiner are the other two...

"Please remember me to Mrs. Gandhi, whose gentle courage I have never forgotten..."

Pacifist, Feminist, Socialist

I have stressed that these women were pacifists, feminists and socialists: the common ideology not only brought them together, but explains the affinity of Gandhiji to them.

Gandhiji believed in non-violence and was a pacifist though he supported recruitment to the army until the end of the First World War because of his faith in the Empire and his feeling that Indians must learn to fight before they can embrace true non-violence.

He had great interest in feminism and his success in encouraging the participation of women in the political struggle was no accident. When he went to London in 1909, he went to see Miss E. Pankhurst, the leader of the suffragettes, and attended many of their meetings. He wrote often in *Indian Opinion* about equality of women and the role of women in the struggle for justice.

Gandhiji also believed in socialism. He came in contact with socialist thought during his student days in London. Socialism had not then become rigid or doctrinaire. His thinking was similar to that of Edward Carpenter and others who were concerned not with mechanisation and rising production and consumption, but with equality, quality of life, and protection of the environment. They believed that man should not be enslaved by machine and alienated, and should not shun physical labour.

Gandhiji knew socialists in South Africa and spoke at least twice at the Socialist Club in Johannesburg.

In 1912, when Gokhale was visiting South Africa, J.T. Bain, a socialist, met them and the question came up as to their attitude to socialism. Gokhale said he was a socialist "to some extent", but Gandhiji declared himself an "out and out socialist".¹²⁹

¹²⁹ Wilfrid H. Harrison, *Memoirs of a Socialist in South Africa, 1903-1947*.
Published by the author.

The satyagraha of 1913-14, with the heroism of the poor working men and women, strengthened the conviction of Gandhiji that they were the "salt of the earth" who would free India. He identified himself in dress and living habits with them.

The convictions of Gandhiji explain the bond which linked him to the European women who helped him and his cause. They understood him, as did the Indian labourers in South Africa and later the people of India. But those critics who tried to place him in their pre-determined categories - moderate and extremist, for instance; those who assumed that he must be a reactionary if he wore peasant clothes or professed religion; and those who called him an agent of Gujarati capitalists because he did not advocate class struggle and tried to unite the Indian community in the struggle for its dignity and honour - could not understand Gandhiji nor the admiration he evoked among the greatest men and women of this century. I hope that the new information which is becoming available will persuade scholars in India and South Africa to reconsider their assumptions and understand the real Gandhi.

APPENDIX

SOME UNPUBLISHED LETTERS OF GANDHIJI¹³⁰

*Letter of January 5, 1914, to Miss Emily Hobhouse*¹³¹

5th January, 1914

Dear Miss Hobhouse,

It was a perfect pleasure to have received your very kind and generous letter. Had I known how to approach you before, I would undoubtedly have endeavoured to enlist your large heart in our behalf. It was during the Boer war that I came to admire your selfless devotion to Truth, and I have often felt how nice it would be if the Indian cause could plead before you for admission; and it is evident to me that your first telegram uttering a note of warning was an answer to that yearning. I am loath to write to you on this question, as Miss Molteno has told me how feeble you are now in health. She was good enough to read to me a part of Miss Greene's letter, telling her in most pathetic tones how it was the duty of those who loved you to refrain from imposing fresh burdens on you. I am, therefore, torn by conflicting emotions. But, as Miss Molteno, who knows you better assures me that to expect you now not to interest yourself in our cause is to misjudge you and to aggravate your illness, because you would, she says, fret about us without being enabled by us to render your assistance effective.

If your health permits and if the climate on the North Coast of Natal would not be too trying for you, I would esteem it a privilege if you could take rest on the little settlement at Phoenix where "Indian Opinion" is published. Miss Molteno knows the settlement well. It is situated about eighty feet above sea-level and is exposed to certain winds which sweep across the hills that overlook the settlement and purify the atmosphere. The scenery around is certainly very charming, the site is beautifully isolated, there is no bustle or noise, it is two miles from the nearest station and I venture to think that you will find loving hands to administer to your wants, and nothing would give me personally greater pleasure than, if I were free, to be able to wait upon you and nurse you. You will, I hope, consider

¹³⁰ I obtained copies of these letters from the Molteno-Murray family papers through the courtesy of the University Cape Town Libraries

¹³¹ The typed copy of this letter which I obtained is unsigned, but is certainly from Gandhiji.

this offer as coming from the heart without the slightest hesitation accept it if you can.

I will not weary you with copies of correspondence and details about the question. I enclose the telegrams exchanged between General Smuts and myself, which speak for themselves. We have always accepted what we could get in matters of detail, but, in this matter of the Commission, we are solemnly bound to sacrifice ourselves for the principle of consultation. In striving to secure this recognition of an elementary right, if we must, for the time being, forfeit public sympathy, we must be prepared to do so. Knowing that the truth is on our side, past experience will enable us to have patience, and, as days go on, the mists of ignorance will be removed, the cloud will lift and I have no doubt that Truth will conquer. What we have asked for is the smallest measure and, if the Government obstinately refuses to grant that measure of justice, surely it will be an indication of their dis-inclination to recognise the status of British Indians throughout the Union. Indeed, through my twenty years' experience, I have been able to gather many an indication of the same spirit and it is really against that that we are fighting. In those matters to which Passive Resistance is directed, I hold there can be no compromise. Could Daniel have compromised by bowing to one of the laws of the Medes and Persians and not to others, or would the whole body of those laws have represented the influence of Satan and, therefore, been unacceptable in toto?

The last paragraph of your letter seems to assume that we are following the tactics of the high-souled militants of England. May I say that we have not only not copied them, but, wherever it has been necessary, I have drawn a sharp distinction between their methods and ours. Indeed, I used to have long discussions with the followers of the great Mrs. Pankhurst on this very question. At no stage, do we believe in the use of physical force, but I am free to confess that we have certainly been encouraged, in the hour of our weakness, by the noble example of devotion to duty and self-sacrifice that the militants have set, though we condemn their methods and tactics as suicidal and beneath the dignity of woman.

I hope that God will restore you to health and spare you for many a long year to continue your noble and unassuming work in the cause of Humanity.

I am,
Yours truly,

Miss Hobhouse,
The Cottage,
Kenilworth,
Capetown

Letters to Miss Elizabeth M. Molteno

Capetown

7 Buitencingle
23rd Feb 1914

Dear Miss Molteno,

My impression is that I said we would call on you tomorrow (Tuesday), but Dr Gool does not remember. Not to make any mistake we shall be coming there between 3 and 4 tomorrow and take our chance.

The visit to Miss Hobhouse was entirely successful. It was a perfect pilgrimage for me. Mrs Botha was all you described her. She was most kind to both of us and most loving towards Mrs Gandhi. Thank you for all this. Incidentally we met Lady Gladstone too... Are you not pleased?

With our regards to you and Miss Greene

I remain
Yours sincerely
M.K. Gandhi

7 Buitencingle
24th Feb 1914

Dear Miss Molteno,

I am sorry to have to inform you that Mrs Gandhi has had a relapse and she is at the time of writing lying in bed. She wants me therefore to say that whilst she would try her best to keep the appointment for tomorrow, she might not be able to go out at all. I thought that I should let you know this. In any case I shall expect you tomorrow afternoon and we shall be able to discuss. If she is very ill, I would also have to remain in to be by her side. It is a great pity events have turned out so. But man proposes?

I am
Yours sincerely
M.K. Gandhi

Capetown

7 Buitencingle
27th Feb 1914

Dear Miss Molteno,

How nice of both of you to have come yesterday! I was out seeing Miss Hobhouse at her request. She wished to discuss the marriage question with me. I am deeply grateful to you for having brought me in contact with that noble soul. To be with her is a spiritual uplifting for me.

We meet on Monday.

With regards from us both to you both

I am
Yours sincerely
M.K. Gandhi

Capetown

7 Buitencingle
8th March 1914

Dear Miss Molteno,

I am sorry both of you had to rush away yesterday. I was in the act of shaving when you were announced. You had hardly gone when I came out of the bath room.

You will be glad to learn that Mrs Gandhi is decidedly better today. I had a most anxious week but if today's condition continues the danger is over for the time being.

I enclose for your acceptance and Miss Greene's a copy of Mr. Andrews' lecture. If you want more copies or if you want me to send copies elsewhere please let me know.¹³²

With regards to you both from us both

I am
Yours sincerely
M.K. Gandhi

Phoenix

¹³² The Reverend C.F. Andrews gave a lecture in Cape Town City Hall in mid-February 1914 on Poet Rabindranath Tagore -- who had recently received the Nobel prize for literature. Gandhiji had the lecture printed and sent complimentary copies to a number of people. (*Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Volume 12, page 385).

19th May¹³³

Dear Miss Molteno,

I know that I owe you a letter. But since leaving Cape Town I have passed through so many trials that I have not had the time or the inclination to write really to anybody. Mrs. Gandhi had a very serious relapse and she absorbed all my time. Then followed a disciplinary fast of 14 days - the severest trial of my life. The fast was broken on Saturday last and I am feeling much better today. Mrs. Gandhi too has responded to the careful nursing and today for the first time after my return to Phoenix I am at the Press working at the desk having just left Mrs Gandhi to her household work.

Now I know you will excuse me why I should not have written a line to you after that very serious conversation we had. Do please let me hear from you.

I had a very sweet letter from Miss Hobhouse this week. I am not replying just yet but may do so next week.

Mrs. Gandhi often recalls your love to her and thinks of the kind friends in Cape Town.

Manilal is still in Johannesburg with Mr Kallenbach.

With our united regards to both of you

I am
Yours sincerely
M.K. Gandhi

20: 7: 14¹³⁴

Dear Miss Molteno,

I had your two letters. I am sorry we were not able to meet to say goodbye to one another. Mrs. Gandhi and I cannot forget the affection you and Miss Greene showed us during our stay in Capetown. May God reward you for it.

Do please write to me occasionally. My address will be Rajkot via Bombay.

With our united regards to you both

¹³³ This must be 1914. Gandhiji was in Cape Town in February-March 1914 and returned to Phoenix Settlement, near Durban, at the end of March 1914.

¹³⁴ Gandhiji was then on way to London. The letter was written from the boat.

Yours sincerely
M.K. Gandhi

LETTER OF OLIVE SCHREINER TO GANDHIJI, AUGUST 15, 1914¹³⁵

Kensington
Telephone 3350 Western

30 St. Mary Abbotts Terrace
London W.
Saturday

My dear Mr. Gandhi

I have at last got your address from the Steamship's Company. I want much to see you. Could you and Mr. Kallenbach perhaps come and see me here, or could I meet you anywhere. I was struck to the heart this morning with sorrow to see that you, and that beautiful and beloved Indian poetess whom I met in London some months ago¹³⁶ and other Indian friends had offered to serve the English Government in this evil war in any way they might demand of you. Surely you, who would not take up arms even in the cause of your own oppressed people cannot be willing to shed blood in this wicked cause. I had longed to meet you and Mr. Kallenbach as friends who would understand my hatred of it. I don't believe the statement in the paper can be true.

¹³⁵ Obtained through the courtesy of the South African Library, Cape Town

¹³⁶ Mrs. Sarojini Naidu

GANDHIJI AND THE STRUGGLE FOR LIBERATION IN SOUTH AFRICA¹³⁷

As important as the fortieth anniversary of the assassination of Gandhiji which is observed on January 30, 1988, is the eightieth anniversary of his first imprisonment in South Africa in January 1908, which was a turning point in his life.

Gandhiji always considered himself an Indian and a South African. Not only had he spent twenty-one years of his adult life in South Africa, but he had served four of his ten terms of imprisonment in that country - in the prisons of Johannesburg, Volksrust and Dundee. It was in South Africa that he developed his philosophy of *satyagraha*.

In a sense, his last *satyagraha* was also in South Africa. Though he could not be physically present, he guided and inspired the great Indian passive resistance movement of 1946-48 and lent it enormous support.

Birth of Satyagraha

The small Indian community in the Transvaal had launched, in July 1907, a passive resistance campaign against the Asiatic Registration Act (the Black Act) designed to humiliate, harass and eventually expel them from the territory. Volunteers picketed registration offices and most of the Indians refused to take out permits under the Black Act.

Gandhiji found that "passive resistance" was seen even by European friends as a "weapon of the weak." He sought a term which could be understood by Indians and make it clear that the resistance was out of moral strength rather than any weakness. He invited suggestions and, in November 1907, invented the term "*satyagraha*" (firmness in truth). The choice of the term itself appears to have helped crystallise his thinking.

On December 28, 1907, Gandhiji and several of his colleagues were taken to court for refusing to register and were ordered to leave the Transvaal within two weeks. They defied the order and were sentenced on January 10, 1908, to two to

¹³⁷ Written in connection with the 80th anniversary of the imprisonment of Gandhiji in South Africa. Published in *Asian Times*, London, January 29, 1988, and in several papers in India.

three months` imprisonment.

General Smuts, however, was obliged soon to negotiate a settlement with Gandhiji and the prisoners were released on January 30th - the very day that Gandhiji was to be assassinated forty years later.

The brief imprisonment was not only the "baptism of fire" for Gandhiji but transformed him from a public servant and adviser to the Indian community into the leader of resistance.

In the many years that the struggle lasted with its ups and downs - jailings, beatings, torture and deportations of resisters, as well as the intervals when they were obliged to while away their time on the Tolstoy Farm - Gandhiji developed the concept of *satyagraha* which was later to inspire the national movement in India.

There was little discussion at the time of non-violence, for no one had contemplated an armed struggle which was, in any case, unthinkable for an unarmed and vulnerable community of a mere 12,000 Indians in the Transvaal. Gandhiji had not yet become an uncompromising devotee of non-violence: he had in fact favoured the enlistment of Indians in the armed forces. The emphasis was on the duty to defy an unjust law and to defend the honour of India.

Satyagraha - the common heritage of India and South Africa

The *satyagraha* in South Africa was not only a struggle for the rights of the Indians or the redress of their grievances, but a part of the struggle of India for freedom and dignity. It was influenced by the upsurge in India in protest against the partition of Bengal and the mass boycott of British goods in the *swadeshi* movement.

The experience of Gandhiji in the struggle in South Africa had, in its turn, a great influence on the Indian national movement.

Out of his close association with the Muslims in South Africa, and their great contribution to the passive resistance campaign, came his stress on Hindu-Muslim unity as a tenet of the Indian national movement.

Out of his outrage at the treatment of Indians in South Africa by the Europeans as virtual untouchables came his determination to eliminate untouchability in India.

Out of his experience in trying to unify the Indian people in South Africa, speaking many languages, came his advocacy of a *lingua franca* for India. It was in *Indian Opinion* in Durban on August 18, 1906, that he first called for the adoption of Hindustani as the common language for India.

As the national movement developed in India under Gandhiji's leadership - from non-cooperation to civil disobedience and then to the "do or die" struggle in 1942 - it became radicalised. It stopped seeking a compromise settlement with the oppressors and became committed to the complete independence of India. It also became strongly internationalist under the influence of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, and by 1946 Gandhiji began advocating the unity of all the oppressed peoples of the world for the elimination of colonialism.

Gandhiji, meanwhile, kept in contact with developments in South Africa. He encouraged the Indian passive resistance movement of 1946, under the leadership of Dr. Yusuf M. Dadoo and Dr. G.M. Naicker, and lent it great support. While he had confined the first *satyagraha* in South Africa to the Indian and Chinese settlers whose security was threatened, he gave his blessings to the efforts of the Dadoo-Naicker leadership to build a united democratic front.

He was, in a sense, a patron of the movements both in India and among Indians in South Africa. In the last year of his life, when he felt anguish at the eruption of violence between Hindus and Muslims in India, he seemed to find some solace in the *satyagraha* in South Africa.

One of his last speeches - at the prayer meeting in Delhi on January 28, 1948 - was devoted to the struggle in South Africa. He said:

"Today we are also a free country as South Africa and are members of the same Commonwealth, which implies that we should all live like brothers and equals... Why should they look down on the Coloured people? Is it because they are industrious and thrifty? I shall tell the Government of South Africa through this meeting that it should mend its ways."

The Indian people in South Africa benefitted from the lessons of their own *satyagraha* of 1907-14, as well as the experience of the Indian national movement. The concept of *satyagraha* was enriched by their passive resistance of 1946-48 which was joined by several Africans, Coloured people and whites out of solidarity.

The Indian *satyagraha* was the precursor of the great non-violent resistance under African leadership in 1952, aptly named the "Campaign of Defiance against Unjust Laws" and, indeed, the beginning of mass resistance in South Africa.

The heritage of Gandhiji and of *satyagraha* is thus a common heritage South Africa and India.

Continuing inspiration of Gandhiji

One does not need to be a Gandhian to recognise that the philosophy and example of Gandhiji remain a powerful force in the world, spreading wider and adapting to the traditions and circumstances in different countries.

The leaders of the freedom movements in many colonial countries acknowledge the inspiration of Gandhiji. The civil rights movement in the United States, led by the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., was inspired by his example, as was much of the movement against the Vietnam war.

The mass movement for disarmament and against nuclear war, and the environmentalist movement, have been influenced, among others, by Gandhiji.

Non-violent resisters in the Philippines played a significant role in the struggle to overthrow the Marcos dictatorship. The mobilisation of hundreds of thousands of unarmed people to surround and protect the armed forces which turned against Marcos was a crucial event in the struggle and added a new dimension to the history of non-violent resistance.

Liberation theology, which has spread in Latin America, Africa and Asia, draws some of its inspiration from Gandhiji.

A dramatic affirmation of the vitality of the heritage of Gandhiji was the Delhi Declaration of Mikhail Gorbachev and Rajiv Gandhi in November 1986 - calling for a non-nuclear and non-violent world - the reference to non-violence reportedly included at the suggestion of Gorbachev.

None of the recent non-violent movements perhaps strictly follows the tenets of Gandhiji, as understood by his disciples in India, but he has been an inspiration as people tried to choose the most peaceful and effective means of struggle against injustice and oppression in the light of the relevant conditions. The philosophy of Gandhiji cannot be codified into immutable rules, but must always be creative. It evolved with his experience in forty years of struggle. He kept his windows open to receive inspiration from all sources. He learnt from the humblest in the resistance campaigns. He welcomed discussion and debate. He changed his views many times and never hesitated to admit errors.

It is a pity that Indian thinkers and public leaders have not followed the spread and development of Gandhian ideology and have made little contribution to the movements inspired by it.

Is non-violent resistance relevant to South Africa?

Has *satyagraha* lost all relevance in South Africa as a means of resistance, especially after the Sharpeville massacre?

The answer is not simple.

I believe that patient suffering with love has hardly ever melted the hearts of oppressive rulers. *Satyagraha* has succeeded to the extent that it aroused public opinion in the camp of the adversaries and beyond so as to restrain and exert pressure on the oppressors. That is why Gandhiji always devoted great attention to publicity.

Given the possibility to reach and arouse public conscience, non-violent resistance makes it difficult for the oppressors to resort to extreme savagery and thereby saves lives. It helps the oppressed people to overcome fear of prison and torture and steels them in the struggle. It makes it possible to reach settlements without bitterness.

In South Africa, however, the movement faced not only an enemy which became ever more brutal, refusing to recognise the humanity of the black people, but powerful international forces of greed and prejudice hindered effective pressure against the racist regime.

Regrettably, many people in the Western world are not outraged by violence against people with a black skin and such violence gets little press and public attention. As powerful vested interests from abroad became involved in South Africa, they tended to exert their influence to protect the racist structures which ensure them exorbitant profit. Perhaps even more important, mass resistance in South Africa began at a time when the world was divided by the "cold war" and cold war calculations began to influence the policies of powerful nations much more than justice. The ANC was branded by Western intelligence services as pro-Communist, because like most national movements it tried to encompass all the people and had not excluded Communists or followers of other ideologies. This has largely determined the actions of Western Governments, particularly that of the United States, whatever the public pronouncements of their leaders.

As a result, even on occasions when some of the white rulers in South Africa contemplated a change of course, powerful influences from abroad reinforced those who advocated reliance on ever greater violence to perpetuate racist domination.

It is, therefore, understandable, to say the least, that the leaders of the liberation movement felt that they had to undertake violent resistance. But that does not necessarily mean that non-violent resistance has become totally irrelevant nor that the spirit of *satyagraha* had disappeared.

In many countries, non-violent resistance took place at the same time as violent resistance, or threat of such resistance. There was, for instance, violent resistance in India on many occasions and a threat of violence by others in the

United States when Dr. King was leading the civil rights movement. The oppressors are often obliged to choose between compromise with the mainstream of the movement pursuing non-violent resistance and confrontation with the growing trend toward violent resistance.

In South Africa, the movement has used peaceful means whenever possible and hardly any other country has seen such persistent non-violent resistance, even alongside armed struggle, as South Africa.

There are also situations in which effective non-violent resistance by the oppressed people is not practicable, but non-violent action can be carried on by those abroad outraged by the injustice. For instance, the Vietnamese peasants could not non-violently resist unseen persons throwing bombs from high up in the sky, but the American people could carry on such resistance against involvement in the Vietnam war. In the case of South Africa, too, there have been times when *satyagraha* abroad in solidarity with the oppressed people was more feasible and effective than non-violent resistance inside the country.

Mass *satyagraha* against apartheid and all its protectors and accomplices all over the world may well be the most effective means to put an end to the continuing tragedy in South Africa.

The answer to the question of relevance is then that even though the oppressed people and their leaders are convinced that clandestine activity, sabotage and armed struggle have become essential or indispensable, the spirit of Gandhiji has not lost all its relevance.

I would like briefly to trace the course of the liberation struggle, in the context of violence and non-violence, to underline this conclusion.

Unconcern for African lives

One of the first mass actions of the ANC was the 1919 campaign against the pass laws, reminiscent of the Indian *satyagraha* in South Africa a few years earlier. Thousands of men and women threw away their passes and were sentenced to imprisonment with hard labour; those who were sentenced to fines refused to pay fines and chose to go to prison.

The regime reacted with savagery. Many Africans, including even children, were trampled under horses' hoofs as mounted policemen charged on a peaceful demonstration outside a Johannesburg court and shot at by white vigilantes. Several were killed. But there was hardly a murmur of protest in the world - though that was the time when leaders of Allied Powers were waxing eloquent about human rights - as the victims were Africans.

When the Indian people launched passive resistance on June 13, 1946, the police in Durban stood by without arresting the resisters and let white ruffians attack them with bicycle chains. At least two resisters fell unconscious, and one bystander died.

Fortunately, a white priest, the Reverend Michael Scott, felt compelled to join the resisters. Gandhiji expressed his outrage and sent a personal appeal to General Smuts so that the violence was curbed.

The great Campaign of Defiance against Unjust Laws in 1952 attracted attention and sympathy around the world as 8,000 people of all racial origins courted imprisonment. The regime responded with inhuman laws for whipping passive resisters. There was hardly a protest from the governments of the great Western democracies.

The ANC, however, managed to carry on non-violent resistance - bus boycotts, school boycott, potato boycott and resistance against the removal of African communities - over the next few years. Its leaders were subjected to arbitrary restrictions and even a four-year trial for "High Treason". But there was not even verbal condemnation of apartheid violence by the major Western Powers until the Sharpeville massacre of 1960.

Instead, they called for sympathy and understanding for white fears for the future rather than for the suffering of the black majority. They invited the Pretoria regime to discussions of Western military strategy and alliances in Africa and the Middle East. Britain signed the Simonstown military alliance with the Pretoria regime in 1955.

When some National Party leaders advocated a change of course in the wake of the flight of capital after the Sharpeville massacre, Western financial interests bailed out the regime and thereby strengthened the position of Prime Minister Hendrik Verwoerd and other advocates of greater repression.

Combination of armed struggle and non-violent resistance

As a result, the ANC leaders felt obliged, in 1961, to abandon strict adherence to non-violence and prepare for armed resistance. As Nelson Mandela explained in his statement to the court in April 1964, members of the ANC had begun to lose confidence in the ANC policy, as fifty years of non-violence seemed to have achieved nothing, and were developing ideas of terrorism. Scattered incidents of violence had broken out in the country and there was a danger of uncontrolled violence. The ANC leaders felt that a properly controlled violent resistance, under the guidance of the ANC, was essential to avert the danger of terrorism and make any progress.

The *Umkhonto we Sizwe*, the military wing of the ANC, said in its first manifesto on December 16, 1961:

"We of *Umkhonto we Sizwe* have always sought to achieve liberation without bloodshed and civil clash. We hope, even at this late hour, that our first actions will awaken everyone to a realisation of the dangerous situation to which the Nationalist policy is leading. We hope we will bring the government and its supporters to their senses before it is too late, so that both the government and its policies can be changed before matters reach the desperate stage of civil war."

The *Umkhonto* carried on some three hundred acts of sabotage between 1961 and 1963 against symbols of apartheid and some economic installations in order to warn the regime and its supporters, give hope to the people and promote international action. Every care was taken to avoid loss of human life. Only one person - a police informer in the eastern Cape - was killed by the ANC underground while the regime tortured several leaders of the people to death. Vuyisile Mini, the respected composer of freedom songs, and his colleagues were executed.

Until today, the total number of persons killed in numerous ANC armed actions is perhaps less than two hundred. Several of the casualties were possibly unintended and resulted from malfunction of the timing mechanisms of explosives.

Even after gruesome killings of refugees in Maputo and Maseru by South African raiders, and a series of tortures of detainees to death, the ANC was able to prevent retaliation in kind.

It was not beyond the capacity of ANC, or of the black people in spontaneous eruptions of anger, to kill thousands of whites. The absence of such terrorism was due to the enormous restraint of the ANC and its influence among the people, an influence which it would not have had if it had opposed all violence.

During all these years since 1961, the freedom movement has also utilised every opportunity for non-violent defiance of unjust laws at great sacrifice.

The student upsurge in the 1970s was essentially non-violent. The funeral processions defying laws prohibiting the display of the ANC flag and symbols - thereby making the laws virtually inoperative - were non-violent resistance, as are the rent boycotts, the consumer boycotts and the "end conscription" campaign.

The United Democratic Front and allied organisations have contributed an impressive chapter to the history of non-violent resistance.

The growth of non-violent resistance in South Africa, and the development of

international solidarity, encouraged and enabled Archbishop Desmond Tutu, the Reverend Alan Boesak and other churchmen to defy the laws on many occasions and force the regime to retreat.

Since 1985, the violence of the apartheid regime under its State of Emergency - the indiscriminate shootings and the mass torture of detainees - as well as the series of ghastly murders by vigilante groups, provoked counter-violence. Enraged youth groups resorted to killing suspected informers by "necklacing," and that was used by the regime and its friends to malign the liberation movement.

The ANC could perhaps have said - as even Mahatma Gandhi wrote from jail in 1942 - that it could not condemn, without full information, people who were provoked to violence by the "leonine" violence of the regime when their leaders were confined and exiled.

But Oliver Tambo, the President of the ANC, declared last year that the ANC opposed "necklacing". He was reported to have advised African youth last September to try to win over informers and vigilante groups. I can think of none but a Mahatma Gandhi who could show such courage and humanism in the midst of a difficult battle and popular emotions.

Spirit of Gandhiji lives on in South Africa

The spirit of Gandhiji lives on in South Africa eighty years after he went to prison in the Transvaal defying unjust racist laws, forty years after his ashes were immersed in the ocean off the mouth of the Umgeni river in South Africa - not least in the hearts of the leaders of the liberation struggle.

They have stood firm on truth, despite constant provocation and bestiality by a racist regime, resisting all forms of racism and constantly upholding the objective of a non-racial democratic society. They have resisted unjust laws with exceptional courage and sacrifice. They have recognised that ends and means are inseparable, and have avoided the temptation to reply to the massive terrorism of the white racist regime with terrorism against white civilians. Even in the course of armed resistance, they have avoided the loss of innocent lives.

Gandhiji did not condemn Sant Bhagat Singh or those who resorted to sabotage when he was jailed along with other leaders of the national movement in 1942 - but placed the blame squarely on the violence of the British Raj. Martin Luther King, Jr., did not condemn John Brown or Malcolm X, but only slavery and racism.

Chief Albert Lutuli did not condemn Nelson Mandela for founding and leading the military wing of the African National Congress, but declared when Mandela

and his colleagues were sentenced in June 1964:

"... in the face of the uncompromising white refusal to abandon a policy which denies the African and other oppressed South Africans their rightful heritage - freedom - no one can blame brave just men for seeking justice by the use of violent methods nor could they be blamed if they tried to create an organised force in order to ultimately establish peace and racial harmony...

"They represent the highest in morality and ethics in the South African political struggle..."

The ANC is attacked by the Botha regime, which relies on violence and terrorism, as violent; and that charge is echoed by the friends of that regime who instigate and support violence and terrorism in many countries of the third world. But it has earned the understanding, sympathy and even active support of the greatest pacifists of our time, many of whom acknowledge the inspiration of Gandhiji.

DR. YUSUF DADOO, MAHATMA GANDHI AND THE SOUTH AFRICAN STRUGGLE¹³⁸

Speaking to a group of South African Indian students in February 1939, Gandhiji said that if the Indian community in South Africa had guts in them, they would launch a *satyagraha*.

"I am hoping that some day from among the youths born in South Africa a person will rise who will stand up for the rights of his countrymen domiciled there, and make the vindication of those rights his life's mission."¹³⁹

He had been distressed for a long time with the situation in South Africa where he had discovered and dedicated his life to *satyagraha*, with a conviction that defiance of evil and willingness to sacrifice would prevail over brute force of the oppressors. Ever since he had left the shores of that country in 1914, more and more humiliating restrictions had been imposed on the Indians - undermining all that had been achieved by the great *satyagraha* of 1906-14 - but there had been little resistance. Leaders of Indian organisations had become docile and selfish, and engaged in petty squabbles and shameful compromises of the dignity and honour of the Indian people.

Gandhiji did not know, when he met the students, that a dedicated leadership was emerging from a new generation of South Africans - one that would recapture the spirit of defiance he had inculcated and take it forward to a new level, one of which India could be proud.

At a mass public meeting called by the Transvaal Indian Congress on March 1, 1939, Dr. Yusuf Mohamed Dadoo and his supporters secured the adoption of a proposal, against the opposition of the leadership, to launch passive resistance if a pending segregation bill was enacted. At a subsequent meeting chaired by E. I. Asvat, a veteran who had been imprisoned many times in Gandhiji's *satyagraha*, Dr. Dadoo was elected leader of the campaign and head of the Council for Action. That marked the dedication of his life to public service.

Dr. Dadoo sought the "advice, guidance and inspiration" of Gandhiji who readily endorsed the emerging leadership. Advising a postponement of passive resistance - while he contacted General Smuts and the Indian Government to

¹³⁸ Written for the 80th anniversary of the birth of Dr. Dadoo on September 5, 1989, and 120th anniversary of Gandhiji, October 2, 1989. Published in *Mainstream*, New Delhi, September 16, 1989, and *Sechaba*, November 1989.

¹³⁹ *Harijan*, February 18, 1939; *Collected Works*, Volume 68, page 385.

secure an abandonment of the obnoxious bill - he assured Dr. Dadoo that if his efforts failed, the whole of India would back the resisters.

"It has stirred me to find you heading the *satyagraha* band," he wrote to Dr. Dadoo on August 19, 1939, recalling that Dr. Dadoo's father had been his client. "You are engaged in a very hard struggle. And if as a result of the present effort a handful of you make it the mission of your life to serve the cause there you will gradually build up a prestige that will stand you in good stead."

The confidence and hope of Gandhiji were not misplaced. Dr. Dadoo not only led the Indian people in mass defiance but proceeded to do what Gandhiji could not envisage in his time. He became an architect of the unity of all the oppressed people in the struggle to end racist tyranny.

The African National Congress honoured him in 1955 with the award of the decoration *Isitlawandle Seaparankoe*. Nelson Mandela described him, in evidence during the Treason Trial in 1960, as "one of the most outstanding leaders in our movement, revered throughout the country." The ANC elected him Vice-Chairman of its Revolutionary Committee in 1969. Oliver Tambo said at his funeral in London in September 1983, on behalf of the National Executive Committee of the African National Congress: "He was one of the foremost national leaders of our country, of the stature of Chief Lutuli, Moses Kotane, J. B. Marks, Bram Fischer, Nelson Mandela and others."

Education of a revolutionary

Yusuf Dadoo was born on September 5, 1909, in Krugersdorp, the son of a prosperous Indian trader. Even as a child, he experienced racism and was involved in fights with white boys who insulted and attacked him. He learnt about the struggle led by Gandhiji and participated in *hartals* (strikes) in protest against anti-Indian measures such as the Class Areas Bill of 1923.

While a student at Aligarh Muslim College in India from 1925 to 1927 he took great interest in the Indian national movement, rejecting communalism. Proceeding to London in 1929 at the age of 19, he joined the London branch of the Indian National Congress and was arrested in a demonstration for Indian freedom and against the Simon Commission. While studying medicine in Edinburgh, he took an active part in politics - as a member of the Independent Labour Party and of the League against Imperialism which advocated unity of the oppressed people of the world. He joined hunger marches in Britain, addressed meetings in Hyde Park and worked for the India League. He came under the influence of Pandit Nehru and of Marxists who advocated a "united front" against fascism. All the time, he kept close contact with South Africa, trying to encourage resistance against the racist onslaughts.

Returning to South Africa in 1936, he became a popular doctor and his professional work only strengthened his political commitment. He recalled:

"I came across the poverty, the misery, the malnutrition, the sickness of the black people every day... And that made one's blood boil. What can one do to help these people? Medicine is one thing - you give a few tablets or a mixture - but it doesn't go to the basis of the problem. That had a great deal to do with my thinking and I got into political struggle."¹⁴⁰

He proceeded to rally the Indian people against the compromising leadership of the Transvaal Indian Congress, for militant resistance against anti-Indian measures and for a united front with the African majority against racist-fascist oppression. He was soon able to secure the support of the great majority of the Indian people, including many former colleagues of Gandhiji and their children. He organised the Non-European United Front in the Transvaal and became its Secretary-General. And in 1939, the year he contacted Gandhiji, he joined the Communist Party of South Africa.

Passive Resistance of 1946-48

The postponement of passive resistance in 1939, on the advice of Gandhiji, was utilised by Dr. Dadoo to strengthen the organisation of the Indians and to develop unity with the Africans. He spent much time addressing meetings in African locations and was twice sentenced to prison on the charge of inciting Africans against the war.

He became a leader - together with Dr. A.B. Xuma, President of the African National Congress - of the Anti-Pass Council set up in 1943 to campaign against the humiliating restrictions on the movement of Africans. It collected 800,000 signatures to a petition against the pass laws and Dr. Dadoo was again arrested for leading a procession to present the petition to the government.

He earned the respect of the Africans by identifying himself with their concerns - a square in Orlando township was named after him - and developed intimate friendship with African leaders like J.B. Marks and Moses Kotane.

The Indian passive resistance movement of 1946-48 - led by Dr. Dadoo, a Marxist, and Dr. G. M. Naicker, a Gandhian - in which two thousand people went to jail, made South African racism a world issue. It also laid the basis for a national mass movement for freedom in South Africa. The African National Congress backed the Indian resistance. A number of non-Indian volunteers - Africans, Europeans and Coloured people - courted imprisonment in solidarity with the Indian people. International solidarity with the Indian and African people was promoted by the Indian Government and, in Britain and the United States,

¹⁴⁰ Interview to United Nations Radio in 1979.

through the efforts of V.K. Krishna Menon, Fenner Brockway and Paul Robeson with whom Dr. Dadoo had come in contact as a student activist.

A few weeks after the launching of the resistance, when African mineworkers went on strike under the leadership of J. B. Marks, and many were massacred, the Indian community rushed to provide assistance. Dr. Dadoo was brought from prison to be tried on the charge of inciting the strike.

Later that year, when the Indian complaint against South Africa was discussed in the United Nations, a multi-racial delegation led by Dr. Xuma visited New York to assist the Indian delegation. And in March 1947, Dr. Xuma, Dr. Dadoo and Dr. Naicker signed the pact of cooperation between the African and Indian Congresses.

Mantle of Gandhiji

It may seem strange that the mantle of Gandhiji in South Africa had thus fallen on a Marxist. But Gandhiji, who followed and guided the movement, fully supported Dr. Dadoo, brushing aside complaints of Communist influence. For him, the objectives of the struggle and the means employed were the essentials, rather than the ideological and other labels of participants. And Dr. Dadoo demonstrated integrity, courage and willingness to sacrifice that Gandhiji valued in a public servant.

Speaking of early influences on his thinking, Dr. Dadoo said in an interview with the United Nations Radio in 1979:

"I hold Gandhiji in very high respect and affection. He, as a matter of fact, had a great deal in moulding my thinking and subsequently my political activities. I believed in Gandhiji to the extent that there must be resistance, there must be struggle for justice and righteousness. But after Gandhiji went back to India there arose another great revolutionary fighter, Pandit Nehru whose broad views on politics attracted young people at the time. I believed in the policy of Nehru who also did not believe completely, implicitly, in absolute non-violence."

In his mind, the influence of Pandit Nehru, and one might add Karl Marx, did in no way erase the spirit of defiance he had imbibed from Gandhiji. He became noted for constant refusal to submit to racist intimidation and repression which led to numerous arrests. He risked even his life for the cause. And though he did not believe in non-violence as a creed, he took every care to see that the passive resistance movement was totally non-violent - even when white ruffians began brutally to assault passive resisters, including women.

The interaction of Gandhism and Marxism perhaps enhanced the significance

of the Indian *satyagraha* of 1946-48 and made it the rehearsal for mass resistance by all the oppressed people of South Africa.

For Gandhiji who was deeply anguished by the Hindu-Muslim carnage that spread in the Indian sub-continent on the eve of independence, as if his life's work had been in vain, the resistance in South Africa was a solace, demonstrating that *satyagraha* was alive and well in the land of its birth.

Unity of Indians and Africans

Much has been written about Gandhiji's opposition to a united front of Indians with Africans, but his attitude is often misunderstood and requires explanation.

During his sojourn in South Africa, the Indian community was composed largely of people born in India who were essentially alien settlers, though some Indians had arrived in that country long before the first shipload of indentured labourers were brought in 1860. Many of the Indian traders maintained their contacts and property interests in India.

The struggle led by Gandhiji was for the security of the settlers and to enable them to live with self-respect. It was, for him, even more for the honour of India which was affronted by the racial legislation. It was thus a contribution to the Indian national movement rather than an attempt to change the social order in South Africa.

The victory of the *satyagraha* - when the determination and sacrifices of resisters and the savage repression by the regime aroused opinion in India and persuaded the Imperial Government in London to intervene - was of great historic significance for India and the world. But its immediate effect in countering racism in South Africa was very limited. Gandhiji secured satisfaction of the minimum demands, leaving the rest for the future. Further Indian immigration to South Africa was virtually stopped and Gandhiji assured the authorities that Indians did not seek political rights.

The Indian demands - ending of the three pound tax on former indentured workers and members of their families, validation of Hindu and Muslim marriages, and protection of vested rights as regards ownership of property or trading licences - had little to do with the legitimate aspirations of the African people for self-determination in their country. There was, moreover, little possibility of a united struggle since the African political movements were then at a nascent stage.

Gandhiji, however, foresaw the inevitability of confrontation between the Africans and the white rulers. Replying to fears that his passive resistance would place a new weapon in the hands of Africans, he said, soon after the Bambata

uprising, as reported by the Reverend Doke:

"Men who see far believe that the problems which are connected with the Natives will be the problems of the future, and that, doubtless, the white man will have a stern struggle to maintain his ascendancy in South Africa. When the moment of collision comes, if, instead of the old ways of massacre, *assegai* and fire, the Natives adopt the policy of Passive Resistance, it will be a grand change for the Colony...

"If, then, the Natives accept the doctrines which are now so prevalent amongst the Indian community, South Africa need not fear the horrors of a racial uprising. It need not look forward to the necessity of maintaining an army to keep the Natives in awe. Its future will be much brighter than its past has been."¹⁴¹

While this early experience conditioned the thinking of Gandhiji, the situation in South Africa had changed by the 1930s when Dr. Dadoo came on the political scene. Most of the Indians had been born in South Africa, and saw the rise of the African political consciousness. African-Indian dialogue and cooperation began to develop in the trade unions and among intellectuals. As the regime continued with its plans to force out or segregate the Indians, more and more Indians began to feel that new means of struggle had become necessary. The small Indian community could not by itself stop the racist onslaught nor could it depend on the agents of the colonial government in India. Unity with the Africans, they felt, was the only hope for a secure future.

The issue of Indian-African unity provoked a public debate in India in 1939 when the Non-European United Front was set up in South Africa. Gandhiji strongly opposed a proposal by Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia that the Indian National Congress welcome the efforts towards united struggle.

The reasoning behind Gandhiji's opposition to united struggle may be found in an interview he had given to the Reverend S.S. Tema somewhat earlier, when asked for his views on the "talk" of a united front of Africans and Indians. He said:

"It will be a mistake. You will be pooling together not strength but weakness. You will best help one another by each standing on his own legs. The two cases are different. The Indians are a microscopic minority. They can never be a menace to the white population. You, on the other hand, are the sons of the soil who are being robbed of your inheritance. You are bound to resist that.

Yours is a far bigger issue. It ought not to be mixed up with that of the Indian. This does not preclude the establishment of the friendliest relations

¹⁴¹ Joseph J. Doke, *M. K. Gandhi: an Indian Patriot in South Africa*, 1909.

between the two races." ¹⁴²

He added that the Indians should never put themselves in opposition to the legitimate aspirations of the Africans, and encouraged the development of an African mass movement.

Gandhiji still thought of Africans as the only rightful owners of South Africa, the Indians as alien settlers and the Europeans as "undoubtedly usurpers, exploiters or conquerors or all of them rolled into one."¹⁴³ He was not persuaded that the new trends of thinking had taken hold among Indians or that the Africans sought a united front. Neither seemed well organised to be able to combine strength.

When his position at the Congress came under criticism in India, he conceded that his view "need not deter the Indians from forming a non-European front if they are sure thereby of winning their freedom."¹⁴⁴ He was to change his views in the light of further developments in South Africa and the sentiment in India.

Indian nationalist opinion was essentially in favour of identification of Indian settlers abroad with the indigenous people in the cause of freedom and human dignity. Mrs. Sarojini Naidu forcefully expressed this view on her visit to South Africa in 1924. Pandit Nehru spoke out for a united front of the oppressed people and advanced sections of the whites, in South Africa and elsewhere, since the Brussels Congress against Imperialism in 1927.

The urge for unity in struggle grew stronger during the Second World War. This was reflected by Indira Nehru who visited South Africa in April 1941 on the way home from studies in England. Together with a party of fellow students, she issued a statement welcoming "the new awakening of the exploited and oppressed nationalities in South Africa". She added:

"We wholeheartedly support the Non-European United Front in its historic task of mobilising the progressive forces against all manifestations of political and racial tyranny of your existing government.

"At a time when we are fighting our battles in India, this growing movement in your land provides the basis for united action by the enslaved peoples of our two countries."¹⁴⁵

By the end of the War, Gandhiji too began to espouse the unity of the exploited races of the earth. Never again did he oppose a united front in South Africa, but merely kept warning against any abandonment of non-violence. In the message he

¹⁴² *Harijan*, February 18, 1939; *Collected Works*, Volume 68, pages 272-73.

¹⁴³ *Harijan*, July 1, 1939; *Collected Works*, Volume 69, pages 376-79.

¹⁴⁴ *Harijan*, July 15, 1939; *Collected Works*, Volume 69, page 408.

¹⁴⁵ *The Guardian*, Cape Town, April 10, 1941.

gave to Dr. Dadoo and Dr. Naicker on their visit to India, soon after the pact of cooperation between the African and Indian Congresses, he said:

"Political cooperation among all the exploited races in South Africa can only result in mutual goodwill, if it is wisely directed and based on truth and non-violence."¹⁴⁶

He constantly stressed the primacy of African interests. He even told the All India Congress Committee on July 7, 1946, on learning of the murder of an Indian near the site of passive resistance, that he would not shed a single tear if all the Indian *satyagrahis* were wiped out, for they would thereby point the way to the Africans and vindicate the honour of India.¹⁴⁷

Defiance Campaign and After

Gandhiji was no more when the National Party came to power in May 1948 and began to erect the structure of apartheid for perpetual white domination and the dispossession of all the black people.

Dr. Dadoo and Dr. Naicker came out of prison in July calling for a united front against racism - Dr. Naicker used the term "united democratic front" - and they immersed themselves in efforts to build a truly firm alliance. This led to the "Campaign of Defiance of Unjust Laws" - organised jointly by the African National Congress and the South African Indian Congress - in which over 8,000 people of all racial origins went to prison: Dr. Dadoo was among the first to defy.

The African movement had come of age: it contributed most of the resisters and from their ranks emerged inspiring national leaders such as Nelson Mandela, the Volunteer-in-Chief, Walter Sisulu and Oliver Tambo.

The non-violent Defiance Campaign was not only a great landmark in the long struggle of the South African people, but had a much wider significance. For it was that campaign in South Africa, and the Civil Rights Movement in the United States which followed, which showed that the concept of *satyagraha* was not for the Indians alone. These campaigns, as much as Gandhiji's *satyagrahas*, were to inspire numerous upsurges of aroused peoples around the world to topple mighty dictators, stop wars and save the human environment.

With the launching of the Defiance Campaign, the perspective was no more of petitions or actions to alleviate grievances, but a long and hard struggle to end racist rule. Victory would be the culmination of a series of ever more difficult battles, each perhaps ending in defeat but ultimately leading to triumph. That required a band of determined men and women willing to dedicate their lives to

¹⁴⁶ *Harijan*, May 25, 1947; *Collected Works*, Volume 87, page 492.

¹⁴⁷ *Harijan*, July 14 and 21, 1946; *Collected Works*, Volume 84, pages 422-23.

the cause and make the supreme sacrifice if need be.

The Defiance Campaign, which began as a joint African-Indian effort, transformed the freedom movement into one under African leadership and buried for ever the myth that the Africans were not advanced enough to undertake and lead a well-organised and humane resistance. The mantle of Gandhiji passed from Dr. Dadoo and Dr. Naicker to Chief Albert Lutuli who was to carry it with honour and dignity.

Dr. Dadoo continued to make a crucial contribution - for eight years under severe restrictions and three decades in exile - as an elder statesman as well as a militant, under the leadership of the African National Congress. The tremendous contribution he made, under conditions of illegality, will not be known for some years. But he fought on till the end, with unbounded faith, exhorting his colleagues even on his death bed on September 19, 1983: "You must never give up, you must fight to the end."

The Legacy of Dr. Dadoo

Dr. Dadoo began his political life in the small Indian community in South Africa, with a conviction that its destiny was with the African majority and that its future should be built by its willingness to sacrifice in the struggle for a free, democratic South Africa. That conviction was in harmony with the views of Gandhiji who warned in *Young India* on April 5, 1928, that Indians "cannot exist in South Africa for any length of time without the active sympathy and friendship of the Africans."¹⁴⁸

Dr. Dadoo carried forward the tradition of Gandhiji by building an alliance of Indians and Africans as the basis for widest unity of the people against racism.

He became the prototype of the new men and women of the future - as against the caricature of a human being which apartheid sought to mould. Ezekiel Mphahlele, the African writer, said, perhaps half in jest, as early as 1956:

"One might even say Yusuf Dadoo has a Marxist head, a Hindu heart, Mohammedan nails, and an African blood-system."

Under his leadership, and with the legacy of Gandhiji, the Indian community, consisting of hardly three percent of the South African population, has been privileged to make a very significant contribution at a crucial stage of the freedom struggle. Let us hope that it will make a worthy contribution in the coming final effort to transform the country from a prison of the black people to a land that can inspire the world with people of African, Asian and European ancestry living in freedom and harmony.

¹⁴⁸ *Collected Works*, Volume 36, page 190

NANA SITA: GANDHIAN RESISTER IN SOUTH AFRICA¹⁴⁹

Among those who kept the spirit of Mahatma Gandhi alive in South Africa, long after he left the shores of that country in 1914, Nana Sita holds a special place.

Nanabhai, as he was affectionately known, came into prominence during the Indian passive resistance movement of 1946-48 and helped build the alliance with the African majority. He continued non-violent defiance of apartheid until his death in 1969, long after most militants of the liberation movement had become convinced that underground and armed resistance to apartheid had become imperative. Though they disagreed with him, members of the African National Congress and the Indian Congress respected his views and actions - for he continued to defy apartheid, without fear and flinching at no sacrifice.

The regime had been able to suppress organized resistance in 1963-64, with the imprisonment and torture of thousands of leaders and activists, and a series of repressive laws. But the adamant defiance of Nanabhai - now old and sick - against forcible racial segregation, was an inspiration to the people. He helped keep alive the flame of peaceful resistance which was to grow in subsequent years.

When he passed away on December 23, 1969, shortly after the centenary of Gandhiji, at the age of 71, the Johannesburg *Star* wrote that he had enjoyed "universal respect of South Africans, white and non-white."¹⁵⁰ *Sechaba*, the organ of the African National Congress, paid tribute to his heroic life, full of sacrifice and devotion to the struggle in which he went to prison seven times. It said:

"... in paying our tribute to a fallen freedom fighter, the African National Congress works for the day when we can remember publicly in South Africa the man who was our comrade and friend."¹⁵¹

The life of Nana Sita deserves to be recalled now when the people of South Africa look back at their struggle - armed and non-violent - and acknowledge the contribution made to it by people of varied backgrounds and ideologies, united in uncompromising resistance against racist domination.

Nana Sita was born in Matwadi, a village in Gujarat, India, in 1898, in a family which was active in the Indian freedom movement. He went to South Africa in 1913 and lived for some time with J.P. Vyas in Pretoria, to study book-keeping.

¹⁴⁹ Published in *Sechaba*, August 1986.

¹⁵⁰ *The Star*, weekly edition, December 27, 1969.

¹⁵¹ *Sechaba*, March 1970.

Soon after his arrival, Gandhiji, then leading a *Satyagraha*, went to Pretoria for negotiations with General Smuts and stayed almost two months in the same house.

Identifying himself with the indentured Indian labourers, Gandhiji ate only once a day, wore only a shirt and loincloth, slept on the floor and walked barefoot several miles to the government offices to meet General Smuts. The contact with Gandhiji had a great influence on Nanabhai's life. He followed the simplicity of Gandhiji, and became a vegetarian, teetotaler and non-smoker. More important, he was always ready to resist injustice and gladly suffer the consequences.

He worked for some years in his uncle's fruit and vegetable business and then started his own business as a retail grocer. He was active in the religious and social welfare work in the small Indian community in Pretoria. He joined the Transvaal Indian Congress and became secretary of its Pretoria branch.

During the Second World War, when the Government imposed new measures to segregate the Indians and restrict their right to ownership of land - culminating in the Asiatic Land Tenure and Indian Representation Act of 1946 (the "Ghetto Act") - militants in the Transvaal and Natal Indian Congresses, led by Dr. Yusuf M. Dadoo and Dr. G.M. Naicker, advocated mass resistance. They were able to defeat the compromising leaderships of the Congresses and launch a passive resistance campaign in June 1946 with the blessings of Gandhiji. The campaign was directed by the Transvaal and Natal Passive Resistance Councils and over 2,000 people went to jail.

Nana Sita joined the militants as any compromise with evil was against his principles. He became a member of the executives of the Transvaal Indian Congress and the Transvaal Passive Resistance Council. He acted as Chairman when Dr. Dadoo was in prison or on missions abroad.

He led a large batch of "United Nations Day volunteers" - Indians, Africans and Coloured people - from the Transvaal in October 1946 and was sentenced to 30 days' hard labour. After release, he went to prison a second time. Almost every member of his family - he had seven children - went to jail in the campaign. His daughter - Maniben Sita courted imprisonment twice.

Nanabhai - always wearing the Gandhi cap - became a familiar figure in the Indian movement. His courageous spirit was reflected in his presidential address to the Transvaal Indian Congress in 1948. He said:

"Do we all of us realise the significance, the importance, the heavy responsibility that has been cast upon each and every one of us when we decided to challenge the might of the Union Government with that Grey Steel, General Smuts, at its head? Are we today acting in a manner which can bring credit not only to the quarter million Indians in South Africa but to those four hundred million people now enjoying Dominion Status as the first

fruits of their unequal struggle against the greatest Empire of our times?

"It is for each and every one of us in his or her own way to answer that question with a clear conscience. But let me say that I have nothing but praise for those brave men and women fellow resisters of mine. History has ordained that they should be in the forefront in the great struggle for freedom in this colour-ridden country of eleven million people...

"Over two thousand men and women have stood by the ideal of Gandhi and have suffered the rigours of South African prison life and they are continuing to make further sacrifices in the cause of our freedom. We at the head of the struggle cannot promise you a bed of roses. The path that lies ahead of us is a dark and difficult one but as far as I am personally concerned I am prepared to lay down my very life for the cause which I believe to be just."¹⁵²

The Indian passive resistance was suspended after the National Party regime came to power in June 1948, but only to be replaced by the united resistance of all the oppressed people.

In June 1952, the African National Congress and the South African Indian Congress jointly launched the "Campaign of Defiance against Unjust Laws" in which over 8,000 people of all racial origins were to court imprisonment.

Nanabhai was one of the first volunteers in that campaign. He led a batch of resisters which included Walter Sisulu, Secretary-General of the African National Congress. He came out of jail in shattered health.

The next year, when Dr. Dadoo was served with banning orders, Nanabhai was elected President of the Transvaal Indian Congress but he was also soon served with banning orders preventing him from active leadership of the community.

Yet, in 1960, during the State of Emergency after the Sharpeville massacre, he was detained for three months without any charges.

With the banning of the African National Congress and the escalation of repression, leaders of the ANC decided to undertake an armed struggle, taking care even then to avoid injury to innocent people. Those who believed in non-violence as a creed or could not join the military wing of the movement faced a serious challenge as even peaceful protests were met with ruthless repression. Nana Sita - with his Gandhian conviction that resistance to evil is a sacred duty and that there is no defeat for a true *satyagrahi* - was undeterred. Like Chief Albert Lutuli, the revered President-General of the ANC, he continued to defy apartheid - especially the "Group Areas Act", described as a pillar of apartheid,

¹⁵² *Passive Resister*, Johannesburg, April 30, 1948.

which enforced racial segregation at enormous cost to the Indian and other oppressed people.

In 1962, Hercules, the section of Pretoria in which Nanabhai lived, was declared a "white area" under the "Group Areas Act". He was ordered to vacate and move from his home - which he had occupied since 1923 - to Laudium, a segregated Indian location eleven miles away. He defied the order and was taken to court on December 10th, the United Nations Human Rights Day.

Denouncing the Group Areas Act as designed to enforce inferiority on the non-white people and cause economic ruination of the Indian community, he told the court overflowing with spectators:

"Sir, from what I have said, I have no hesitation in describing the Group Areas Act as racially discriminatory, cruel, degrading, and inhuman. Being a follower of Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy of *Satyagraha*, I dare not bow my head to the provisions of the unjust Act. It is my duty to resist injustice and oppression. I have therefore decided to defy the order and am prepared to bear the full brunt of the law.

"It is very significant that I appear before you on this the tenth day of December, to be condemned and sentenced for my stand on conscience. Today is Human Rights Day - the day on which the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was accepted by the world at the United Nations. It is a day on which the people of the world rededicate themselves to the principles of truth, justice and humanity. If my suffering in the cause of these noble principles could arouse the conscience of white South Africa, then I shall not have strived in vain.

"Sir my age is 64. I am suffering with chronic ailments of gout and arthritis but I do not plead in mitigation. On the contrary I plead for a severe or the highest penalty that you are allowed under the Act to impose on me."

He was sentenced to a fine of 100 Rand or three months in prison, and warned that if he failed to comply he would be given twice that sentence. He refused to pay the fine and spent three months in prison.

The next year, as he and his wife, Pemi, continued to occupy their home, he was again taken to court and sentenced to six months in prison.

The authorities charged him and his wife again in 1965. He appealed to the Supreme Court challenging the validity of the Group Areas Act. The matter dragged on for a year before his appeal was dismissed.

When the trial resumed in 1967, Nanabhai read a 19- page statement on the background of the Group Areas Act which he described as a "crime against

humanity", and said:

"The Act is cruel, callous, grotesque, abominable, unjust, vicious and humiliating.

"It brands us as an inferior people in perpetuity, condemns us as uncivilized barbarians... "One day the framers of this Act will stand before a much higher authority for the misery and the humiliation they are causing....

"If you find me guilty of the offence for which I am standing before you I shall willingly and joyfully suffer whatever sentence you may deem to pass on me as my suffering will be nothing compared to the suffering of my people under the Act. If my suffering in the cause of noble principles of truth, justice and humanity could arouse the conscience of white South Africa then I shall not have strived in vain... I ask for no leniency. I am ready for the sentence."

Many Indians attended the trial and wept when he concluded his statement.

He was sentenced again to six months` imprisonment and served the term, declining the alternative of a fine of 200 rand. His wife was given a suspended sentence.

On his release from prison, he said:

"It is immaterial how many other people accept or submit to a law - or if all people accept it. If to my conscience it is unjust, I must oppose it.

"The mind is fixed that any injustice must be resisted. So it does not require a special decision each time one is faced with injustice - it is a continuation of one commitment."¹⁵³

Soon after, on April 8, 1968, Nanabhai and Pemi were forcibly ejected from home and government officials dumped their belongings on the sidewalk. But they returned to the home and Nanabhai never complied with the order until he died in December 1969.

Few others followed Nanabhai`s example of determined non-violent resistance in the 1960`s. The militants among the Indians, espousing armed struggle, had been captured, or went into exile, or tried to rebuild underground structures which had been smashed by the regime in 1963-64. The traders, who were severely affected by the Group Areas Act, had given up resistance after all their petitions, demonstrations and legal battles had failed. A silence of the graveyard seemed to have descended over the country.

¹⁵³ Jill Chisholm in *Rand Daily Mail*, April 6, 1968.

But the resistance of Nanabhai was not in vain. It showed that non-violent defiance need not be abandoned even at a time of massive repression or armed confrontation. It inspired people in efforts to overcome frustration and apathy. The Indian Congresses, which had become dormant, were resuscitated in later years and helped build the powerful United Democratic Front.

Nana Sita's children - Maniben Sita and Ramlal Bhoolia, both veterans of the 1946 passive resistance - played leading roles in the resurgent movement, defying further imprisonment.

As the freedom movement recovered, the Soweto massacre of African schoolchildren on June 16, 1976, failed to intimidate the people. Thousands of young people joined the freedom fighters. And many more began to demonstrate their support of the struggle and defy the regime, making several laws inoperative. The struggle entered a new stage.

The mass non-violent defiance campaign, which swelled in recent years like a torrent encompassing hundreds of thousands of people, has made a great contribution, together with the armed struggle and international solidarity action, in forcing the racist regime to seek a peaceful settlement. South Africa, the land where Gandhiji discovered *satyagraha*, has enriched his philosophy by adapting it under the most difficult conditions.

Nana Sita - who held up the torch when the movement was at an ebb - was in a sense the last of the Gandhians. The mass democratic movement now derives inspiration from many sources, including the experience of the long struggle of the African people and the Gandhian tradition cherished by the Indian community.

Nana Sita is remembered with respect as his colleagues in struggle - Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu, Ahmed Kathrada and others now out of jail - lead the nation in its continuing efforts to eliminate apartheid and build a non-racial democratic society.

ARE GANDHIJ'S IDEAS RELEVANT IN A NEW SOUTH AFRICA?¹⁵⁴

I must confess that I was surprised when I heard that a meeting at this festival would be devoted to the topic: "Are Gandhi`s ideas relevant in a New South Africa?"

Gandhiji never wanted to leave a cult and he disliked any talk of "Gandhism" as an ideology. He practised truth as he saw it from time to time, and evolved with the times, and his whole life, with all its inconsistencies, is what he left behind. He represents an approach and that approach - the concept of non-violent defiance of injustice, for instance - has had a great impact on the thinking and events in the world. Gandhiji does not represent mere non-violence. Non-violence without a determination to defy injustice, whatever the sacrifice, is an empty shell. It can be mere cowardice.

Gandhiji could have become a hermit if he believed only in non-violence or vegetarianism. Instead, he recognised the duty to become a "political *sannyasi*" so long as colonial and racist oppression continued.

Gandhiji`s concept and technique of non-violent defiance originated in South Africa, on a hill in Johannesburg where he decided in 1906 to defy the Asiatic Ordinance, whatever the consequences. They have been developed and enriched - not only by him in the freedom movement in India - but by others in the struggles in many lands, particularly in the United States in the civil rights movement and the resistance to the Vietnam War, and, of course, in South Africa since the 1940s.

Non-violent defiance has been a major world phenomenon in recent years and it is no more possible for oppressive regimes to resort to massacres of the people when they rise up in non-violent revolt.

The regime of the Shah of Iran, which had armed itself to the teeth, was defeated by an essentially non-violent resistance. The regime of General Marcos in the Philippines was overthrown by non-violent rebellion.

When people in the West were able to see police violence in South Africa on their TV screens in 1984-85, there was rapid progress in non-violent international action against apartheid so that the Pretoria regime had to change its course.

¹⁵⁴ Based on a lecture at the Alumni Spring Festival of the University of Witwatersrand on September 15, 1991.

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The regimes in Eastern Europe, especially in Czechoslovakia and East Germany, were overthrown by non-violent defiance. And lately, even the coup in the Soviet Union was defeated by non-violent resistance.

There has, therefore, been a revival of interest in Gandhiji's ideas around the world, not only among people interested in political affairs, but also among those concerned with environment, liberation theology, etc.

Why, then, should there be any question of relevance, here in South Africa, the land where *satyagraha* was born?

I have heard it said by South Africans that Gandhiji and non-violence had become irrelevant in South Africa after the Sharpeville massacre and that armed struggle was the ONLY possible means for liberation.

I do not question the role of armed struggle in South Africa but I believe it was never the ONLY way, perhaps not even the predominant means of struggle. The struggle has to be seen in its totality - taking into account the resistance within the country by all possible means, utilising every possibility for legal and peaceful action; the steadfastness of those tortured in detention or sentenced to long terms in prison; the political action by the leadership obliged to go into exile; the armed actions by liberation forces; and the powerful international solidarity movement which was developed and sustained over several decades.

The leaders of the ANC have never said that armed struggle was the ONLY way. Nelson Mandela, in his speech from the dock in April 1964, pointed out that he and his colleagues had decided to undertake organised underground and armed resistance in order to avert uncontrolled violence. The ANC abandoned its strict adherence to non-violence, or its commitment to peaceful struggle alone, but it did not give up means of struggle other than armed struggle, for armed struggle cannot develop without political struggle. It took great care to avoid loss of innocent lives. The international campaign for sanctions was also intended to avoid undue violence and suffering in the process of the liberation struggle.

That is why all the leading pacifists of the world have continued to support the South African struggle, even after ANC resorted to sabotage and armed actions in 1961.

In South Africa, you have had an extraordinary situation of an armed struggle for over a quarter of a century in which only a few hundred people were killed by the guerrillas - even many of those perhaps because of accidents or errors - and a few thousand were killed by the police and security forces.¹⁵⁵

Compare that with Algeria, where there were only a million white settlers, and

¹⁵⁵ Regrettably many more were killed in acts of aggression and destabilisation by the South African regime in frontline States - especially Mozambique and Angola.

the casualties amounted to nearly two million dead.

Even in the small Central American countries like Guatemala and El Salvador, many more people have been killed than in South Africa. Some 75,000 people have been killed so far in El Salvador and more in Guatemala.

The casualties in combat - I am not referring to the casualties from racial discrimination - were relatively so low in South Africa because of the humanism of the liberation movement and the international support it gained.

I have, in mind, for instance, that Nelson Mandela expressed concern even from inside prison about deaths of innocent people, and that Oliver Tambo showed courage in calling for an end to necklacing, even in the face of brutal murders by security forces in Matola and Maseru, and the killings in prisons and in townships.

The sacrifices made by the frontline States, India and other countries in non-violent action in support of the South African struggle - in the form of international sanctions against apartheid - also saved numerous lives.

Let us not forget the thousands of people who went to prison in Britain, Australia, New Zealand and the United States, who were assaulted by police or who risked their careers because of their solidarity with the South African struggle.

I may ask: Were the students in Soweto and the other African townships, whose defiance was essentially non-violent, irrelevant? Was Nana Sita, who defied unjust laws until the end of his life, irrelevant? Were the bishops and archbishops who marched in defiance of the law irrelevant? And was the mass defiance campaign of the Mass Democratic Movement launched in August 1989, which was followed within a few months by the virtual scrapping of many laws and even the unbanning of the ANC, irrelevant?

I will leave the question of armed struggle because I doubt if any sane person wants violence and conflict in a new South Africa.

The question of relevance of Gandhiji's ideas perhaps also comes up because of the books and articles critical of Gandhiji which have appeared in recent years.

There is certainly a need for an objective and critical study of Gandhiji, instead of mere adulation. He himself welcomed criticism and changed his views many times.

But I am afraid that some of the criticism in "scholarly" studies results from preconceived notions based on ideologies, or looking back at 1906 or 1907 by hindsight or not studying all that Gandhiji has said or written or done.

There are "Marxist" studies which dismiss Gandhiji as a representative of the Gujarati merchant class. Communists in India and the Soviet Union changed their attitudes towards Gandhiji in the 1950s but their colleagues in South Africa seem to be taking a longer time to reassess Gandhiji.

The fact is that when Gandhiji moved from "petition politics" to defiance in 1907, the merchant class - except for a few heroes like A.M. Cachalia, Ebrahim Asvat and Parsee Rustomjee - could not follow him. Some gave sympathy and funds; others opposed him. The *satyagrahis* in the Transvaal from 1907 and the 60,000 people in the Natal who went on strike in 1913 were mostly working people from South India and Hindustanis.

In his first speech in London after leaving South Africa in 1914, Gandhiji said:

"These men and women are the salt of India; on them will be built the Indian nation that is to be. We are poor mortals before these heroes and heroines."¹⁵⁶

The greatest achievement of Gandhiji, after his return to India, is that he mobilised the poor and illiterate masses of India in the struggle for independence.

There are also critical studies by "armchair revolutionaries" who have not participated in the liberation struggle. They too sound radical, though not Marxist, speaking of the "underclass" rather than the "working class".

Maureen (Tayal) Swan is an excellent researcher and writer. I have read her writings with great interest and have learned from them.

Without in any way criticising her scholarship, I must confess that after I read her book, *Gandhi: the South African Experience*, more than once, I asked myself: Did Gandhiji ever go to jail in South Africa or lead the people in resistance? Who were the tens of thousands of people who joined him in the struggle? Were most of them not from the "underclass"? Were they totally ignorant of their own interests that scholars had to tell them generations later that they were misled?

She writes extensively about the many groups among the Indian South Africans who were always critical of him, their speeches and their articles - but there is little on what mass resistance they organised or what sacrifices they made.

The most serious criticism of Gandhiji is that he was opposed to the unity of Indians with Africans.

I saw an article recently on "Gandhi in South Africa: the Ambiguities of

¹⁵⁶ *Indian Opinion*, September 30, 1914; *Collected Works*, Volume 12, pages 523-26.

Satyagraha" by Les Switzer of the University of Houston in a recent issue of the *Journal of Ethnic Studies*.¹⁵⁷

It is apparently based on very little study of Gandhiji and has many errors of fact.

He claims that Gandhiji had no contact with Black leaders in South Africa like John Dube, John Tengo Jabavu, Walter Rubusana and Abdul(sic!) Abdurahman, and that, unlike them, he had little influence on the history of resistance in South Africa during the early part of this century. And he comes to this conclusion:

"The history of resistance to apartheid continues to demonstrate the ambiguity of the relationship between South Africa's Indian and African communities."

He is wrong on facts. John Dube had his "Zulu Christian Industrial School" at Ohlange, very near the Phoenix Settlement of Gandhiji. They were good friends and Gandhiji, like Dube, admired Booker T. Washington.

Gandhiji wrote an article in *Indian Opinion* congratulating Walter Rubusana when he was elected to the Cape Provincial Council. He had close contact with Dr. Abdulla Abdurahman and they respected each other.

Gandhiji had met many African leaders and had many discussions with them: they had mutual friends in the white community. But these facts apart, I would like to deal with the main criticism about Gandhiji's attitude to the African people of South Africa.

Attitude toward unity with the African people

Gandhiji's political activity in South Africa was in connection with specific grievances of the small Indian community - about breaches of undertakings or violations of acquired rights.

The Africans were little concerned with them. Even some white liberals who were sympathetic to Africans were hostile to Indians.

African political organisations were at a nascent stage and there was little to unite.

Dr. Abdurahman certainly talked about unity of the oppressed people, but did little. The APO remained a Coloured organisation.

More important, we need to take two factors into account.

¹⁵⁷ *Journal of Ethnic Studies*, Volume 14, No.1.

The series of discriminatory measures against Indians came soon after thousands of Chinese workers were summarily deported from the Transvaal. There was reason to believe that the intention of the authorities was to make the life of the Indians so miserable as to force all Indians, except the indentured labourers, to leave. The Indians were vulnerable.

If they tried to join with the Africans, and seemed to incite Africans, there was every danger of a hysteria among the whites and summary deportations of Indians.

Secondly, Gandhiji was not only concerned with the grievances of the Indians but with the honour of India. The spirit of nationalism, which was rising in India had an impact in South Africa. The *satyagraha* was a part of the struggle of India for its dignity, and a moral crusade, though waged on the South African soil. Many young Indians who were not directly affected by the discriminatory laws, went to jail in the *satyagraha*.

Indians and Chinese could cooperate in the struggle against the Asiatic Ordinance in the Transvaal. But that was not of direct concern to the Africans and the Coloured people.

But already Gandhiji foresaw, according to his first biographer, the Reverend J. J. Doke, the coming confrontation between the African people and the whites, and said:

"When the moment of collision comes, if, instead of the old ways of massacre, *assegai* and fire, the Natives adopt the policy of Passive Resistance, it will be a grand change for the Colony ..." ¹⁵⁸

After his return to India in 1914, Gandhiji devoted much of his time to mobilise Indian public opinion in support of the Indians in South Africa. But he repeatedly stressed that the Indians should maintain friendly relations with the Africans and that if Indian rights conflicted with the interests of the African majority, they should not be pressed.

Mrs. Sarojini Naidu, a close colleague of Gandhiji, stressed during her visit to South Africa in 1924, that the struggles of the Indian and African people were for a common objective. She was applauded by Dr. Abdulla Abdurahman and Clemens Kadalie, the trade union leader.

The same message was carried by the Reverend C. F. Andrews, who made several visits to South Africa at the request of Gandhiji and Poet Rabindranath Tagore.

In 1928, after the Cape Town agreement between South Africa and India, Mr.

¹⁵⁸ Joseph J. Doke, *M.K. Gandhi: An Indian Patriot in South Africa*, pages 86-87.

Habib Motan, the honorary secretary of the Government Indian School Committee in the Transvaal, protested against arrangements to send Indian students to the Fort Hare Native College as humiliating and a degradation. He was supported by P. S. Aiyar, the publicist who always tried to be more "radical" than Gandhiji.

The Reverend C. F. Andrews replied in *The Modern Review* of Calcutta in March 1928:

"The poet, Rabindranath Tagore, gave me a definite message to the Indians in South Africa. He stated that if the Indian community could not win the respect and affection of the Africans (who had the true right to be in South Africa, as the children of the soil) then they had no place there. They were imperialist intruders. Mr. Habib Motan's statement ... must shock every Indian nationalist who reads it."

Gandhiji, writing in *Young India* on April 5, 1928, fully supported Tagore. He said:

"Indians have too much in common with the Africans to think of isolating themselves from them. They cannot exist in South Africa for any length of time without the active sympathy and friendship of the Africans. I am not aware of the general body of the Indians having ever adopted an air of superiority towards their African brethren, and it would be a tragedy if any such movement were to gain ground among the Indian settlers of South Africa."¹⁵⁹

In 1939, when the Non-European United Front was formed in South Africa and was supported by several Indian leaders, Gandhiji did not receive adequate information from his correspondents in South Africa and came under criticism for expressing reservations about an Indo-African united front. His reasoning deserves attention.

He told the Reverend S. S. Tema, in an interview on January 1, 1938:

"The Indians are a microscopic minority. They can never be a menace to the white population. You, on the other hand, are the sons of the soil who are being robbed of your inheritance. You are bound to resist that. Yours is a far bigger issue. It ought not to be mixed up with that of the Indian. This does not preclude the establishment of the friendliest relations between the two races."¹⁶⁰

He added, in an article in *The Harijan*, July 1, 1939, that the Europeans were

¹⁵⁹ *Collected Works*, Volume 36, page 190.

¹⁶⁰ *Harijan*, February 18, 1939; *Collected Works*, Volume 68, pages 272-73.

"undoubtedly usurpers, exploiters or conquerors or all of them rolled into one."¹⁶¹

We may or may not agree with these views which were shared by the Africanists of 1944 in South Africa, but do they suggest unconcern for the Africans?

As sentiment for unity grew among the Africans and the Indians, Gandhiji revised his views.

He wrote in *The Harijan* of May 19, 1946:

"The slogan today is no longer merely 'Asia for the Asiatics' or 'Africa for the Africans' but the unity of all the oppressed races of the earth."¹⁶²

In May 1947, when Dr. Yusuf Dadoo and Dr. G. M. Naicker visited him in India, he gave them a message in which he said:

"Political cooperation among all exploited races in South Africa can only result in mutual good if wisely directed."¹⁶³

I might also recall that in 1946 when white gangsters were brutally attacking Indian passive resisters in Durban, Gandhiji told the All India Congress Committee that he would not shed a single tear if all the Indian *satyagrahis* were wiped out, for they would thereby point the way to the Africans and vindicate the honour of India.¹⁶⁴

The forthcoming centenary

As we approach the centenary of Gandhiji's arrival in South Africa in 1893, I hope that the people here will honour the true Gandhiji and not the caricature drawn in some supposedly scholarly studies.

Gandhiji repeatedly emphasised until the end of his life that he was an Indian and a South African. He does not belong to Indian South Africans alone but to all South Africans.

The spirit of Gandhiji lives not only in the hearts of Indians struggling against racism and for a non-violent democratic society, but in those of Nelson Mandela, Oliver Tambo, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, the Reverend Beyers Naude and many, many others.

¹⁶¹ *Collected Works*, Volume 69, pages 376-79.

¹⁶² *Harijan*, May 19, 1946; *Collected Works*, Volume 83, pages 352-54.

¹⁶³ *Harijan*, May 25, 1947; *Collected Works*, Volume 87, page 492.

¹⁶⁴ *Harijan*, July 21, 1946.

I hope there will be a study of the South African roots of the ideas of Gandhiji. For, as early as 1862, Indian indentured labourers resorted to passive resistance on the estate of Henry Shire at Umhlanga.¹⁶⁵ Oliver Tambo referred to it as the first recorded strike in South Africa.

Professor R.E. van der Ross points out, in *The Rise and Decline of Apartheid*, that Peter John Daniels organised a passive resistance movement by the Coloured people when they were denied licences to dig for gold and that he discussed passive resistance with Gandhiji before the latter launched the Indian *satyagraha*.

And in 1913, African women began a passive resistance movement against pass laws in Orange Free State, a few months before Gandhiji encouraged Indian women to join the *satyagraha*.

More important, I hope that South African scholars will study the freedom movement in this country to see how it has adapted, developed and enriched the ideas of Gandhiji under extremely difficult conditions.

¹⁶⁵ L.M. Thompson in *Indian Immigration into Natal, 1860-1872*.