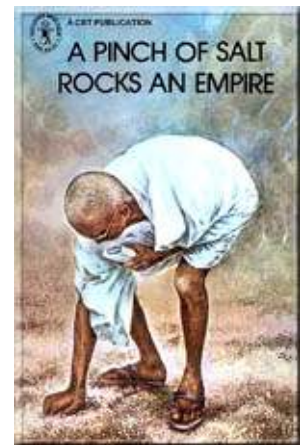


# A Pinch of Salt Rocks An Empire

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First Published : 1985



**Published by : Children's Book Trust**

**Printed at :**

**Indraprastha Press, Nehru House,  
4 Bahadur Shah Zafar Marg,  
New Delhi, India**

## A PINCH OF SALT - ROCKS AN EMPIRE

(For Children)



Map of March Route - March 12 to April 5, 1930

(I)

They had been walking for more than three weeks. Day after day, they had trudged over the flat, dry countryside turned brown and dusty by the hot summer sun. And now they stood on the sea shore, at the village of Dandi, with the waves of the Arabian Sea lapping the beach.

They were the 'law-breakers' and that was where they were to break the law, forbidding them to make salt or even pick it up for their use from the deposits left by the sea.

Their leader was Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, known all over India as Gandhiji or Mahatma Gandhi. The Dandi march was a part of the movement he called *Satyagraha* or the pursuit of truth.

Twenty-four years earlier, in South Africa, where he was then living, his *satyagraha* had forced the government to repeal the law forcing Indians in the Transvaal to register themselves and carry certificates bearing their finger prints to prove that they had the right to live in that country.

In India, he was applying the same tactics of defying the authority of the alien British Government in a peaceful, non-violent way and refusing to co-operate with it.

The British had come to India 330 years earlier, landing at the port of Surat, hardly 50 Kilometers from Dandi, where Gandhiji and his followers stood on April 5, 1930, ready to begin the struggle against them.

It was to trade that the British came, but they stayed to rule. In 1599, the East India Company was formed in London to trade with the East and in 1600 a small ship commanded by Captain Hawkins dropped anchor at Surat. A few years later the British went to the court of the Mughal Emperor, Jehangir, in Agra. The Emperor welcomed Hawkins and gave the East India Company permission to trade and to have trading depots north of Bombay.

The trade was profitable and the company prospered. When the Mughal Empire became weak in the 18th century and was on the point of breaking up, the East India Company started taking part in local politics and soon became powerful. By the early 19th century the British were ruling large portions of India. From the very beginning, there was resistance to their rule. In 1857, there was an armed uprising against the British but it was suppressed. The British

Government then abolished the East India Company and took upon itself the administration of India.

Though Indians were not reconciled to foreign rule, Gandhiji and other leaders were loyal to the British during the first World War, thinking that after the war the government would be sympathetic to their demand for freedom. Instead, when the war ended, the government tried to suppress the freedom movement. In protest Gandhiji and the Indian National Congress decided to have a countrywide *hartal* on April 6, 1919. All over India shops were closed, people did not go to work, factories were shut and classrooms empty.

On April 13, 1919, in spite of the ban on meetings, a large and peaceful crowd collected at Jallianwala Bagh in Amritsar. The army had been brought in to control the situation and General Dyer decided to teach the crowd a lesson. He ordered firing and several hundred people were killed or wounded.

The country was outraged and Gandhiji gave the call for non-cooperation and civil disobedience. He also asked the people to give up wearing foreign cloth and start using rough cotton *khadi* made of yarn spun by the *charka*, the wooden spinning wheel. This would not only undermine Britain's economic power—India was a most profitable market for English cloth—but also give employment to the poor in the countryside.

Gandhiji traveled widely, visiting villages, towns and cities. Everywhere crowds gathered to see him and hear him. His simplicity, austerity and saintly life won him love and admiration.

He told the people that, if India was to win freedom, they would have to give up using foreign cloth. At every meeting, Gandhiji would ask people to take off articles made of foreign cloth that they were wearing and make a bonfire of these. Many would obey him, taking off their shirts, trousers, ties and hats and throwing them in a heap at his feet. They would then set the pile ablaze.

Those were stirring times. All over India piles of foreign cloth were burnt and people swore to wear *khadi*. Thousands of people were arrested and meetings and processions broken up by force. But not all the *satyagrahis* had learnt the

rules of peaceful civil disobedience and non-cooperation. Violence broke out. To Gandhiji, non-violence was all important and he called off the agitation. Soon afterwards, he was arrested and sentenced to six years' simple imprisonment. But, because of ill health, he was released before the end of the term. While in jail, Gandhiji had time to work out his future programme. He realized that for freedom to be worthwhile it was necessary to abolish poverty and social evils. He outlined a programme to reconstruct the village economy, giving employment to all. For this, he thought it necessary to restore hand spinning and hand weaving in the villages. He wanted the abolition of the caste system and untouchability, removal of the disabilities of women, ending of social evils like child marriage and elimination of insanitary conditions.

He also realized that the British were trying to divide the people on communal lines and decided to work for Hindu-Muslim unity. While Gandhiji was busy with these reforms, younger leaders like Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru found the pace of progress towards independence too slow. Gandhiji agreed with them and said, "Unless India has Dominion Status by December 31, 1929, I must declare myself an Independence-wallah."

Dominion Status meant that India would have self-government like Australia and Canada without severing her links with Britain.

Though Gandhiji held no office in the Indian National Congress, the party fighting for India's freedom, its leaders followed his advice and guidance. On December 31, 1929, the Congress declared that Dominion Status was not enough. Nothing less than '*Purna Swaraj*' complete independence, would do. They decided that January 26 would be celebrated as *Purna Swaraj* Day.

On January 26, 1930, public meetings were held all over the country. A resolution drafted by Gandhiji was read. It said:

"We believe that it is the right of the Indian people, as of any other people, to have freedom and to enjoy the fruits of their toil and have the necessities of life...We recognize, however, that the most effective way of gaining our freedom is not through violence. We will, therefore, prepare ourselves by withdrawing as far as we can all voluntary association from the British

Government and will prepare for civil disobedience, including non-payment of taxes. We are convinced that, if we can but withdraw our voluntary help and stop payment of taxes without doing violence even under provocation, the end of this inhuman rule is assured."

Gandhiji retired to his *ashram* by the Sabarmati river near Ahmedabad to plan a campaign that would make India free. He knew, and everyone else knew, that he would be directing the coming civil disobedience movement. He wanted the people to rise against the government but, at the same time, remain non-violent.

That was not easy. The people were tired of British rule and there was violence in the air. A terrorist exploded a bomb under the train in which the Viceroy, Lord Irwin, was returning to Delhi. The Viceroy was not hurt, but it showed the mood of the people. Gandhiji condemned the attack and requested the people to be non-violent and follow his constructive programme.

Rabindranath Tagore, the poet, visited Gandhiji at the Sabarmati *ashram* and asked him what he was planning for the country. Gandhiji could only say, "I am thinking night and day, but I do not see any light coming out of the surrounding darkness." He had to find an issue which would rouse everyone, one which would make the evil and injustice of the government clear to everyone.

For six long weeks he thought over it and then he heard his 'inner voice' telling him to defy the salt law.

This was a stroke of genius. Gandhiji himself had no use for salt—he had given it up a few years earlier. But, by basing the campaign for independence on this issue, he made it easy for the people of not only this country but of all countries of the world to understand the justness of his cause and the injustice of British rule.

But the Viceroy scoffed at "Mr. Gandhi's crazy scheme of upsetting the government with a pinch of salt."

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## (II)

The salt law affected every Indian, rich or poor, old or young, educated or illiterate.

In 1835, a commission had recommended that Indian-made salt could be sold in India. The Salt Act gave the government the sole right to manufacture salt. No one else could make it. If anyone made salt, the salt could be confiscated and the offender sentenced to six months' imprisonment. A tax of 2400 per cent of the price of salt was also levied.

Writing in his weekly journal *Young India*, Gandhiji pointed out the injustice of it: "There is no article like salt, outside water, by taxing which the State can reach even the starving millions, the sick, the maimed and the utterly helpless... The necessary consequence of salt monopoly is the destruction, that is closing down, of salt works in thousands of places where the poor people manufactured their own salt. The illegality is in a government that steals the people's salt and makes them pay heavily for it. The people will have every right to take possession of what belongs to them."

Many fair-minded Englishmen in Britain and India knew that the salt law was unjust. Before coming to power the British Prime Minister, Ramsay Macdonald, had denounced the salt law. By choosing to flout the law, Gandhiji brought India's desire for freedom to the notice of the world and soon everyone was talking about it.

Gandhiji had got the Working Committee of the Indian National Congress to agree that the Salt *Satyagraha* would be launched, controlled and guided only by those who believed in non-violence. He said, "For me there is no hope save through truth and non-violence. I know that they will triumph when everything else has failed."

The plan was for Gandhiji to go to some place and pick up salt, thus breaking the law. He was to take with him only a chosen group of people from the

Sabarmati *ashram*. Everyone else was to wait until he had broken the law. After that, he expected the movement to spread.

He said, "We must conquer or be wiped out. If we are wiped out, that very act would shake the Empire.... If people ask what would happen if the government should shower bombs, the answer is, "If innocent men, women and children should be thus reduced to ashes, from out of those very ashes would rise a fire hich would react on the Empire."

On his return from South Africa in 1915, Gandhiji had established *Satyagraha Ashram* on the banks of the Sabarmati. In the beginning the *ashram* had only 25 members and they lived like one family. Gandhiji made it a laboratory for his social experiments and a place where he could train workers for the service of the country.

Right from the start he admitted untouchables, or Harijans, as he called them, to the *ashram* and he made it clear that he would not tolerate the social evil of untouchability. Food was made in a common kitchen and cleaning of latrines was everyone's task, not that of Harijans alone. Spinning on the *charka* was essential for all inmates of the *ashram*.

Gandhiji named the *ashram Satyagraha Ashram* because he wanted to practice in India the methods of *Satyagraha* he had found so successful in South Africa. Since Gandhiji lived among them, the inmates were fully aware of his views on non-violence and *Satyagraha*.

For this reason he decided that only they should accompany him when he set out to break the salt law.

Before starting the Salt *Satyagraha*, Gandhiji sent a letter to the Viceroy, Lord Irwin. Addressing him as "Dear Friend," he wrote:

"Before embarking on Civil Disobedience and taking the risk I have dreaded to take all these years, I would fain approach you and find a way out. My personal faith is absolutely clear. I cannot intentionally hurt anything that lives, much less human beings, even though they may do the greatest wrong to me and mine. Whilst, therefore, I hold British rule in India to be a curse, I do not



intend to harm a single Englishman.... And why do I regard British rule to be a curse? It has impoverished the dumb millions by a system of progressive exploitation and by a ruinously expensive military and civil administration which the country can never afford.



Sevagram Ashram

"It has reduced us politically to serfdom. It has sapped the foundations of our culture.... I fear there..... never has been any intention of granting Dominion Status to India in the immediate future....

"Let me put before you some of the salient points.... The whole revenue system has to be revised as to make the peasant's good its primary concern. But the British system seems to be designed to crush the very life out of him. Even the salt he must use to live is so taxed as to make the burden fall heaviest on him.... The tax shows itself still more burdensome on the poor man when it is remembered that salt is the one thing he must eat more than the rich man. The drink and drug revenue too is derived from the poor....

"The iniquities sampled above are maintained in order to carry on a foreign administration, demonstrably the most expensive in the world. Take your own salary. It is over 21,000 rupees per month. The British Prime Minister gets £5,000 per year, that is over 5400 rupees per month. You are getting over seven hundred rupees per day against India's average income of less than two annas per day. The British Prime Minister gets only 180 rupees per day against Britain's average income of nearly two rupees per day. Thus, you are getting much over five thousand times India's average income. The British Prime Minister is getting only ninety times Britain's average income. On bended knees I ask you to ponder over this phenomenon....

"What is true of the Viceregal salary is true generally of the whole administration. A radical cutting down of the revenue, therefore, depends on an equally radical reduction in the expenses of administration.

"If India is to live as a nation, if the slow death by starvation of her people is to stop, some remedy must be found for immediate relief.

"The conviction is growing deeper and deeper in me that nothing but non-violence can check the organized violence of the British Government....This non-violence will be expressed through Civil Disobedience, for the moment confined to the inmates of the Sabarmati *ashram*, but ultimately designed to cover all those who choose to join the movement.

"My ambition is no less than to convert the British people through non-violence and then make them see the wrong that is done to India.... If my letter makes no appeal to your heart, on the 11th of this month, I shall proceed with such co-workers of the *ashram* as I can take to disregard the provisions, of the salt law. I regard this tax to be the most unjust of all from the poor man's standpoint. As the independence movement is for the poorest in the land, the beginning will be made with this evil. The wonder is that we have submitted to this cruel monopoly for so long. It is, I know, open to you to frustrate my design by arresting me. I hope that there will be tens of thousands ready, in a disciplined manner, to take up the work after me....

"This letter is not in any way intended as a threat, but is a simple and sacred duty peremptory on a civil resister. Therefore, I am having it specially delivered by a young English friend who believes in the Indian cause and is a full believer in non-violence.... I remain, your sincere friend, M. K. Gandhi." The young English friend who carried the letter was Reginald Reynolds, who was living in the Sabarmati *ashram*. Dressed in *khadi* and with his head covered by a sun helmet (being an Englishman, he felt the heat of the sun greatly) he entered Viceroy's House to deliver the letter.

The Viceroy had just returned from Meerut. He did not reply to the letter. Instead, his secretary wrote: "His Excellency.... regrets to learn that you

contemplate a course of action which is clearly bound to involve violation of the law and danger to the public peace."

Gandhiji was sad to get this reply. He wrote, "On bended knees, I asked for bread and received a stone instead. The English nation responds only to force and I am not surprised by the Viceregal reply. The only public peace the nation knows is the peace of the public prison house. I repudiate this law and regard it as my sacred duty to break the...compulsory peace that is choking the heart of the nation."

Lord Irwin refused to see Gandhiji, but he did not order his arrest. Gandhiji remarked, "The Government is puzzled and perplexed."

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### (III)

Gandhiji started making preparations for the civil disobedience campaign. And as March 11 drew nearer, India bubbled with excitement.

Gandhiji explained what he meant by *satyagraha* and what a *satyagrahi* was expected to do. A *satyagrahi* looked upon all men as brothers. He believed that the practice of love and self-suffering would bring about a change of heart in his opponent. He had faith that the power of love was great enough to melt the stoniest heart. *Satyagraha* was a peaceful way and did not create bitterness as violence did.



Gandhiji declared that cowardice and love "do not go together any more than water and fire". A *satyagrahi* must have courage and love to be able to face violence and still love his opponent and try to change his heart. A *satyagrahi's* lack of fear and his faith in truth gave him the courage to challenge evil, no matter how great the odds against him. A *satyagrahi* appealed to the commonsense and morality of his adversary through words, purity, humility, honesty and self-suffering.

Gandhiji believed that ends and means should be equally pure. Based on this thinking, Gandhiji published in *Young India* the rules for *satyagrahis*. Some of these were as follows:-

1. A *satyagrahi*, that is, a civil resister, will harbour no anger.
2. He will suffer the anger of the opponent.
3. He will put up with assaults from the opponent but will not retaliate.
4. When a person in authority seeks to arrest him, he will submit to the arrest.
5. A civil resister will not insult his opponent.
6. A civil resister will not salute the Union Jack, nor will he insult it.
7. In the course of the struggle if anyone insults or assaults a government official, a civil resister will protect him.

Gandhiji also laid down rules of conduct for *satyagrahis* who were arrested and sent to prison. As a prisoner, a *satyagrahi* was to behave courteously to prison officials and follow the prison discipline. A *satyagrahi* was not to behave in a superior manner to ordinary prisoners, nor was he to ask for special treatment. He was to eat prison food if it was cleanly cooked and served and refuse to eat food served insultingly or in unclean vessels.

On going to prison or losing his life a *satyagrahi* was not to expect maintenance for his family and dependents. Last, but not least, a *satyagrahi* was not to take part in communal quarrels. In case of such a quarrel he was not to take sides, but was to help whoever was in the right.

In *Young India* was also published the punishment for breaking the salt law so that the *satyagrahis* might know what to expect.

Mahatma Gandhi set a high standard of conduct for himself and expected the same from his followers. He wanted political power for India so that the life of the masses could be improved, but he was sure in his mind that if power could only be got by wrong means, he would rather do without it. So, a *satyagrahi* had to follow the highest standards of conduct and to believe in truth and non-violence.

*Satyagraha* could take various forms like fasting, non-violent picketing, non-

cooperation, civil disobedience and willingness to suffer legal penalties. But no matter how the *satyagrahi* was treated, he should not be violent or have hatred for his opponent.

Gandhiji insisted that all *satyagrahis* should wear *khadi*.

It was Mahatma Gandhi's intention to march to the sea and pick up the salt lying there. It lay in great white sheets along the seashore, a gift from the sea that the people were forbidden to pick up and use.

It took several days to select the place where the Salt *Satyagraha* would start. A three-member selection committee was formed and it visited several places on the Gujarat coast. Various places in Surat district were considered before Dandi, near Navsari, was chosen. One drawback was that this remote village did not have enough drinking water. But the citizens of Navsari promised to send drinking water to Dandi in tankers. The three-member team recommended the village to Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, one of his earliest associates in the freedom struggle, who got it approved by Gandhiji. Meanwhile, the All India Congress Committee too was preparing for the campaign. Volunteers were being enrolled and given training, especially in controlling large crowds. They drilled regularly, but without arms.

Though Gandhiji was yet to set the date for the march, people flocked to Ahmedabad as they knew that it could not be long delayed. News of the *Satyagraha* had spread all over the world and Indian and foreign newspaper correspondents crowded into Ahmedabad and the Sabarmati *ashram*. On January 1, 1930, a foreign newspaper had written, "In England and India the crisis is not yet a topic of general conversation..... and in India itself millions of people know nothing about it."

But by March almost everyone in England, India and much of the rest of the world knew what was happening.

Letters and telegrams kept pouring into the Ahmedabad post office. From New York, the Reverend Dr. John Haynes Holmes sent a message to Gandhiji, "God

guard you". From Germany a doctor wrote, "A humble fellow pilgrim is praying for you and your work every morning and evening."

The days were tense. Sardar Patel had gone to Borsad to prepare the villagers to give Mahatma Gandhi and his band of *satyagrahis* a fitting welcome. He made stirring speeches, telling the people, "Give up your wedding festivities; a people at war with a mighty government cannot afford to indulge in these pastimes... I know some of you are afraid of your lands being confiscated. What is confiscation? Will they take away your land to England?..... I want to inoculate you with fearlessness."

For making such spirited speeches, Sardar Patel was arrested at Ras. Hearing of it, a crowd of 75,000 people gathered on the sands of the Sabarmati and passed a resolution:

"We the citizens of Ahmedabad determine hereby that we shall go the same path as Vallabhbhai Patel and we shall attain full independence while attempting to do so. Without achieving freedom for our country we shall not rest in peace, nor will we give the government peace."

While everyone else was tense and excited, Gandhiji carried on with his usual routine of spinning, answering letters, writing in his diary, meeting visitors, playing with the *ashram* children and holding prayer meetings.

At the prayer meetings there would be recitations from the Gita, the Koran and the Bible. Gandhiji believed in one God, no matter by what name people called Him and how they worshipped Him. And the hymn that he asked the crowd to sing, "*Raghupati Raghav Raja Ram*", laid emphasis on this. After prayers, Gandhiji would address the crowd.

On March 10, Gandhiji spoke at his prayer meeting about the coming march and the non-violent nature of the struggle. He told the people:

"Though the battle is to begin in a couple of days how is it that you can come here quite fearlessly? I do not think any of you would be here if you had to face rifle shots or bombs. But you have no fear of rifle shots or bombs. Why?

"Supposing I had announced that I was going to launch a violent campaign, do you think the government would have left me free until now? Can you show me an example in history where the state has tolerated open defiance of authority for a single day? But here you know the government is puzzled. And you have come here because you have been familiarized by now with the idea of seeking voluntary imprisonment."

The people listened attentively as Gandhiji continued: "I would ask you to go a step further. Suppose ten men in each of the seven lakhs of villages in India come forward to manufacture salt and to disobey the Salt Act, what do you think this government can do? Even the worst autocrat would not dare to blow regiments of peaceful resisters out of a cannon's mouth. If only you bestir yourself just a little, I assure you we should be able to tire this government out in a very short time.

"I don't want any money from you.... I want you to take your courage in both your hands and contribute in men towards the struggle....May God give you the strength to rise to the occasion."

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#### (IV)

On March 11, 1930 the evening prayer meeting was attended by 10,000 people. Gandhiji felt that it was the "opportunity of a lifetime" to launch the struggle. He said, "I have faith in the righteousness of our cause and the purity of our weapons. And when the means are clean, God is present with His blessings..... God bless you all and keep off all obstacles from the path in the struggle that begins tomorrow. Let this be our prayer."

He concluded: "In all probability this will be my last speech to you. Even if the government allows me to march tomorrow morning, this will be my last speech on the sacred banks of the Sabarmati. Possibly, these may be the last words of my life here."

The city of Ahmedabad was nearly deserted that night as word spread that Gandhiji was to begin his march the next morning. Almost the whole population



and thousands from all over India and even outside the country who had come to the city were at the Sabarmati *ashram* to see the beginning of the march. Hundreds of thousands of people lined both sides of the route the marchers were to take.

As Gandhiji appeared, a frail figure slightly bent and carrying a long bamboo stick tipped with iron for support, a shiver of excitement ran through the crowd. His head appeared big for his tiny body. His upper lip was covered with a moustache turning white and many of his teeth were missing. But there was a certain beauty about his gentle face, inner nobility and strength of character stamped on it.

He was dressed in his usual coarse *khadi dhoti*. He wore spectacles with a steel frame and a cheap watch dangled from a string round his waist. He had long ago decided not to waste a minute, knowing that time was important to him. The seventy-eight *satyagrahis* included people from all the provinces of India and even from Nepal, though, of course, Gujarat had the largest representation. There were two Muslims and a Christian. Some of the marchers were rich, some poor. Some were educated, some illiterate. But all were fired by the common ideal of seeing a free India. Among the marchers were three generations of the Gandhi family— Gandhiji, his son, Manilal, and grandson, Kantilal.

Gandhiji at 61 was the oldest of the marchers. The youngest was 18.



**Gandhiji and Abbas Tyabji at a meeting in Navsari**

On the list was Abbas. Abbas Tyabji, a retired judge of the Baroda High Court, now more than 75 years old, recalls how overjoyed he was because he thought



that he had been selected. He rushed to meet Gandhiji, but the Mahatma laughed and said, "It is not you, my friend, but young Abbas of the *ashram* who is to go with me."

Hearing this, Abbas Tyabji was downcast, but Gandhiji said, "Don't be disappointed that you are not included in the first batch of *satyagrahis*. There is another honour in store for you. If I am arrested, you shall lead the march to Dandi." Abbas Tyabji was happy to hear this. Later he led the march on the Dharasana Salt Works and was arrested.

Ratnaji, who still lives at the Sabarmati *ashram*, has this tale to tell. Gandhiji knew that all the inmates of the *ashram* were eager to accompany him to Dandi, but when selecting the band of *satyagrahis* he kept in mind their family and domestic circumstances. Ratnaji, a weaver, his father-in-law, Ramjibhai, and a brother-in-law, Harakhji, were among those selected. But when his other brother-in-law also wanted to be included, Gandhiji said, "No, I cannot include you. It is not proper for every man in the family to leave. You must stay back to take care of the women, the children and the aged."

After prayers, Gandhiji and his band of *satyagrahis* left the *ashram* at dawn. The first night halt was 20 kilometers away. On both sides of the road, along the entire stretch, were rows of people. Many of them had been standing for hours to have *darshan* of Gandhiji. Those who could not find standing place in the streets through which the *satyagrahis* marched were perched on house tops and trees.

Policemen were out in force, but the discipline of the crowd and the marchers was such that there was no danger of any disorder. "We are marching in the name of God," Gandhiji said.

At Aslali, Gandhiji told the people, "The soldiers of the first batch had burnt their boats the moment the march began." He vowed not to return to the Sabarmati *ashram* until the Salt Act was repealed and *Swaraj* won. He defied the British Government to arrest him.

At a nearby village, Gandhiji was sad to see no spinning wheel and he urged the people to wake up from their sleep if they wished to win independence. "If you do not wake up, you will be looted by other people, if not Englishmen."

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(V)

The scene was almost the same all along the 400 kilometer route that the *satyagrahis* took to reach Dandi, with excited but orderly crowds, who had been waiting for hours, greeting them at every village. And the message that Gandhiji had for them was the same. Be pure in thought, word and deed; spin yarn and wear *khadi*; give up liquor, end social evils, be united, peaceful and non-violent; be ready to break the salt law. It was a simple message, simply given. The impact was tremendous.

This message had preceded the marchers. Everyone knew all about the Salt *Satyagraha* and why Gandhiji and his band of followers were out to break the salt law. The Arun Tukdi (Army of the Dawn) had traveled by rail ahead of Gandhiji giving the villagers the message and making arrangements for the night halt of the *satyagrahis*.

During the march, the *ashram* routine was maintained. Prayers were said twice a day. Everyone had to spin on the *charka* and keep a diary. They walked almost 20 kilometers in the day and several of them were footsore. But Gandhiji, the oldest among them, had no difficulty. He said, teasing his followers, "The modern generation is weak and pampered." There was a horse for Gandhiji's use, but he did not ride it.

Everyday, after morning prayers, Gandhiji addressed the marchers and answered any questions they might have. And the march started punctually at 6 a.m. Time was important. Gandhiji said, "Ours is a sacred pilgrimage and we should be able to account for every moment of our time."

Everyone retired at 9 p.m. But long before the others got up, Gandhiji would be up, often at 4 a.m., to deal with his correspondence. Once he had to write

by moonlight as his lamp had gone out for lack of oil and he did not want to disturb anyone.

Every Monday was a day of silence for Gandhiji and a day of rest for the marchers. Five years earlier he had decided on making Monday a day of silence and he would not break the rule for anyone. Even if he had to meet the Viceroy or some other important person on a Monday, he would not speak but write what he had to say. Once, asked why he did not speak on Mondays, he laughed and answered, "I want a day of rest in the week. So many people ask me so many questions that I do not have a moment's peace. I need a day off." The *satyagrahis* marched in the cool of early morning and evening, resting at one village in the day and another at night. They slept in the open and ate the simplest food. The villagers were told not to spend anything on the marchers' food or accommodation or donate money. Gandhiji told them, "Money alone will not win *Swaraj*. If money could win it, I would have got it long ago. What is required is your blood." All that the *satyagrahis* needed was uncooked food and a clean resting place.

The march to Dandi was more than a political campaign. It was aimed at educating the people. By leading a simple life and making a minimum of demands on the villagers, Gandhiji wanted to emphasize his nearness to and fellow feeling with the poor and the lowly. For this reason he criticized some of his companions who ordered fresh milk and vegetables by lorry from Surat and some who, on the slightest excuse, tried to climb into carts or cars passing by. He was angry when, one night, he found a labourer carrying a heavy kerosene lamp for the marchers.

He wanted to emphasize that his movement was for the lowly and poor peasants who formed the majority of the people of India. He was against all exploitation and he saw no reason why imperial exploitation should be replaced by exploitation by Indians.

He said that they would have no moral right to criticize the government for luxurious living if they too were going to live luxuriously. They should live at the same level as the common people in India. They had no right to eat better

food than what those among whom they lived and worked ate. "To live above the means befitting a poor country is to live on stolen food," he said. "The battle for independence can never be won by living on stolen food." At halts all along the way, local leaders met Gandhiji to discuss plans for the civil disobedience campaign they were to launch in their areas after the salt law was broken at Dandi.

In answer to Gandhiji's call more than 300 village headmen resigned their government jobs. Gandhiji had to restrain his over-enthusiastic followers from going too far in their social boycott of government servants who did not resign their posts. At some places, the boycott against policemen and village officials was so strict that they could not even buy food. Gandhiji told the people that it was against religious principles to starve officials. He said, "I would suck snake's poison from General Dyer if he was bitten."

It was General Dyer who had ordered the Jallianwala Bagh massacre eleven years earlier. He and his action will not easily be forgotten, but what, perhaps, brought him freshly to Gandhiji's mind were the words of a Gurkha, Kharag Bahadur, who wanted to join the march after it had started. Gandhiji had said 'no' at first, but relented when Kharag Bahadur said that he wanted to atone for the sins of the Gurkhas who had obeyed General Dyer's order to fire at the peaceful crowd at Jallianwala Bagh. Thus it was that one more was added to the seventy-eight *satyagrahis* who had set out from the Sabarmati *ashram*.

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## (VI)

The slow march to Dandi that took twenty-four days drew the attention not only of the people in India but all over the world.

It dominated newspapers and newsreels. When the government banned the showing of newsreels in several provinces in India, Gandhiji's secretary commented, "India's battle for freedom does not depend in the least on cinema films."

The entire nation's attention was focused on Gandhiji. Nehru said: "And today

the pilgrim marches on his long trek. Staff in hand, he goes along the dusty roads of Gujarat, clear-eyed and firm of step, with his faithful band trudging along behind him. Many a journey has he undertaken in the past, many a weary road had he traversed. But longer than any that have gone before is this last journey of his and many are the obstacles in his way. The fire of a great resolve is in him and a surpassing love of his miserable countrymen. And love of truth that scorches and love of freedom that inspires.... It is a long journey, for the goal is the independence of India and the ending of the exploitation of her millions."

The All India Congress Committee met at Ahmedabad on March 21, nine days after the march to the sea had started. It approved of Mahatma Gandhi's campaign and hoped that the whole country would respond. It authorized Congress Committees in the provinces to organize the breaking of the salt law after Mahatma Gandhi had broken it at Dandi.

Pandit Nehru, who was then President of the Indian National Congress, met Gandhiji at Jambusar. With him was his father, Motilal Nehru.

They drafted a pledge that every volunteer who wanted to take part in the coming *satyagraha* would have to take. It said:

1. I desire to join the civil resistance campaign for the independence of India undertaken by the National Congress.
  2. I accept the creed of the National Congress, that is the attainment of *Purna Swaraj* by the people of India by all peaceful and legitimate means.
  3. I am ready and willing to go to jail and undergo all other sufferings and penalties that may be inflicted on me in the course of this campaign.
  4. In case I am sent to jail I shall not seek any monetary help for my family from Congress funds.
  5. I shall obey the order of those who are in charge of the campaign.
- There was no doubt that thousands were ready to take the pledge. As the march continued, a wave of patriotic feeling swept the country. The national flag was being hoisted all over India and speeches were being made in defiance of the law.

Many people had been and were being arrested and sent to prison. But they had remained peaceful, as instructed by Gandhiji. He had said, "If you are sent to prison, you should go piously. If assaulted, you should bear it cheerfully, and, if shot, you should die peacefully."

Such was his hold on the people that they were ready to follow him unquestioningly. They were convinced of the justness of the cause, remembering the words: "The present government is corrupt and evil.... Loyalty to a State so corrupt is a sin, disloyalty a virtue.... The spectacle of three hundred million people being cowed down and living in dread of three hundred Englishmen is demoralizing alike for the despot as the victims.... It is the duty of those who have realized the evil nature of the system... to destroy it. It is their clear duty to run any risk to achieve this end." Seeing the strong nationalistic feelings that had been aroused, the government gave signs of weakening. It promised to refer the question of the Salt Tax to the Tariff Board so as to provide salt to the masses at a low price. Gandhiji, however, refused to be satisfied with this.

The *satyagrahis* were now nearing the sea. Palm trees became more common, sea birds could be seen and they could feel the cooling sea breeze blowing in land. In the little town of Navsari, just twenty kilometers from Dandi, Gandhiji addressed a meeting and said, "I shall return with what I want or my dead body will float in the ocean".

On April 3, Gandhiji wrote in *Young India* an article giving the call for the mass civil disobedience campaign to begin on April 6, when he would break the salt law at Dandi. The date was chosen to coincide with the beginning of "National Week" in homage to the victims of the Jallianwala Bagh massacre of 1919. On April 5, in the morning, the *satyagrahis* reached Dandi. Gandhiji retired to a bungalow on the beach which had been offered to him by its owner, a merchant, for his stay. He spent the day in prayer and meditation. Passages from the Vedas were read to him. From the bungalow he could see the rolling waves. On the sand lay great sheets of salt that had been left by the sea.

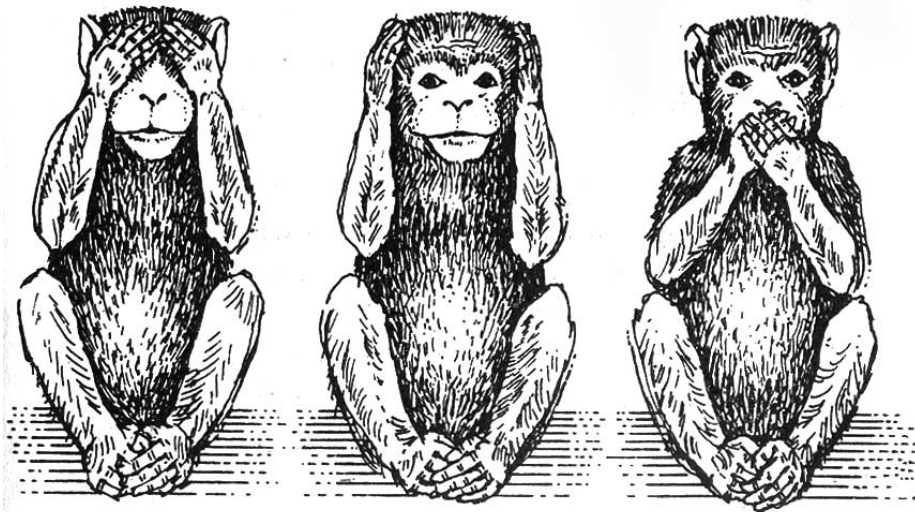
There were many journalists at Dandi to interview Gandhiji and he told the Associated Press:

"I cannot withhold my compliments from the government for the policy of complete non-interference adopted by them throughout the march... It remains to be seen if the government will tolerate, as they have tolerated the march, the actual breach of the salt law by countless people from tomorrow... God willing, I expect, with my companions, to commence actual civil disobedience at 6.30 tomorrow morning.

"The 6th of April has been to us, since the Jallianwala Bagh massacre, a day of penance and purification. We, therefore, commence it with prayers and fasting. I hope the whole of India will observe National Week commencing from tomorrow in the spirit in which it is conceived.

"I want world sympathy in this battle of right against might."

The *satyagrahis* who had come with Gandhiji strolled on the beach and many bathed in the sea. Police were posted in the compound of the bungalow where Gandhiji was staying, but everything was peaceful and they had no reason to worry.





(VII)



Gandhiji breaking the Salt Law by picking up a handful of natural salt on the beach at Dandi.

On the morning of April 6, 1930, as Gandhiji walked down the steps of the bungalow, he was greeted by about four thousand people who had been gathering all night.

Gandhiji swam for a while in the sea and came out when his companions told him that it was nearly time for the start of the *satyagraha*. Gandhiji bent down and scooped up a handful of salt.

Gandhiji's face was calm as he held out his fist to the crowd and opened it to show the white crystals. It was the newest symbol in the struggle for India's freedom.

Shortly afterwards the *satyagrahis* went to a creek nearby where the salt



deposits were thicker than on the beach. At another creek fifty-six volunteers from a neighbouring village collected salt, piled it up and carried it away in bags. The whole operation was done in an orderly manner with a leader giving sharp blasts on a whistle to mark each stage. It looked as if the group had been drilled for a long time.

About five hundred kilos of salt was collected that morning. Late in the afternoon, the police seized the salt. But as soon as the police left, the villagers again collected salt and distributed it in the village.

The Salt Act had been broken. The signal had been given for Indians to act. In a press statement Gandhiji urged people everywhere to violate the salt law. Those who knew how to clean and prepare salt should show others how to do it. But the villagers should be clearly told that, in making salt, they ran the risk of arrest, fine and imprisonment. The law had to be broken openly.

The attack on the Salt Act was to continue throughout National Week. Also, people were asked to boycott foreign cloth, produce and use *khadi* and give up drinking liquor.

The country was flooded with pamphlets explaining how to make salt from sea water. And all along India's long coastline, villagers waded into the sea with pans.

Inland also people made salt. There were mass meetings, fiery speeches and large processions. From one end of India to the other bonfires of British cloth were lighted. Liquor shops were picketed. Some government servants resigned. In Gujarat, the civil disobedience movement spread fast. The government arrested the leaders, but new leaders came forward to take their places. Gandhiji congratulated those who were arrested. "Imprisonment and the like are a test which the civil resistor has to pass", he said.

He told the people, "The honour of India has been symbolized by a fistful of salt in the hand of a man of non-violence. The fist which held the salt may be broken, but it will not yield up its salt.

"Salt in the hands of *satyagrahis* represents the honour of the nation. It cannot be yielded up, except to force that will break the hand to pieces. Let the people defend the salt in their possession till they break in the attempt, but they should do so without anger."

Addressing a women's conference at Dandi on April 13 he said that women should join the national movement.

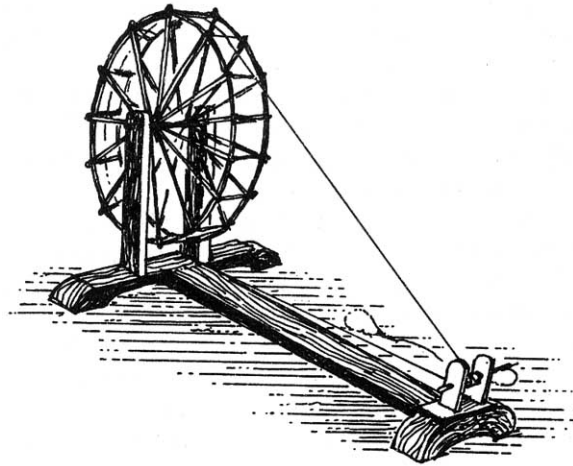
How well Gandhiji's instructions were understood was evident when police raided Congress House in Bombay. They rushed upstairs and began breaking the thirty-two salt pans that had been placed on the roof. During the two hours it took them to finish that operation a crowd of sixty thousand gathered round the building and on the roads leading to it.

When the policemen came down and tried to enter the office, they found six women blocking their way. Their leader said, "You may arrest us or do what you like, but we will not desert our post of duty."

The police lost patience and pushed the women aside, while the crowd outside sang national songs. They then turned their attention to the salt pans downstairs, but a party of a hundred volunteers had formed a circle round the pans and the cordon could be broken only after repeated charges. The volunteers suffered the attacks cheerfully and made no attempt to harm the policemen or even try to push them back. And the crowd outside remained peaceful.

It was a remarkable demonstration of non-violent agitation and an example that must have gladdened Gandhiji's heart. The crowd could easily have overpowered the few policemen, but it desisted. On seeing the volunteers' patience, courage and patriotism, several people enrolled themselves to offer *satyagraha*.

As the movement spread, salt illegally made or collected was openly sold in the streets of cities. In Ahmedabad, contraband worth Rs 11,000, all of it made in the first week of the *satyagraha*, was sold or distributed. The salt picked up by Gandhiji at Dandi was of such poor quality that it could hardly be used, but it had symbolic value. When auctioned, it fetched Rs 1,600.



A Charkha

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(VIII)

More and more people were arrested as the movement spread. Soon almost a lakhs of people were in jail.

And the government began to turn brutal. It became common for three or four policemen to pounce on a single *satyagrahi* and twist his wrist and thumb or throw him on the ground and trample on him till he bled, to make him surrender the salt in his possession.

An eye-witness gave this account of the Salt *Satyagraha* in a village in the Balasore district of Orissa: "When volunteers were bringing 'salt-earth' to make salt, policemen fell on them and started beating and kicking them. Their patient suffering drew tears from the eyes of spectators. At last, tired of beating and kicking them, the policemen stood beside the volunteers as they made a pile of the "salt-earth" and kicked and leveled the pile. In spite of this, the volunteers worked from early morning to noon and again from three to six in the afternoon. Many succeeded in taking the 'salt-earth' to their camp and made salt from it. This salt was publicly sold in Balasore town."

The police then tried to prevent the volunteers from collecting 'salt-earth' by seizing them by the arms. But they could not restrain all of them and salt was again made and sold in Balasore.

Meanwhile, people from nearby villages started making salt. The authorities knew of it but could not do much, with thousands of people flouting authority. They followed the policy of arresting those who appeared to be the leaders, but that did not deter the people.

The villagers retaliated by boycotting government servants. No official could buy any article in the village. Everything had to be brought from Balasore. This kind of social boycott of government servants took place all over India and caused great hardship to them.

There were reports of brutality by policemen everywhere. In Delhi, it was reported: "Ten *satyagrahis* were injured, five of them seriously, as the police tried to wrest a bucket of salt from their hands."

From Bihar, Rajendra Prasad, who was later to be the first President of independent India, gave this report:

"According to our plan the first batch of five volunteers went in the morning and when they were walking along the road they were overtaken by a body of *sowars* under the command of an European officer. Three of them were mercilessly beaten by the European officer and thrown into the drain from where they were removed by our stretcher bearers.

"A second batch of volunteers was sent, but they too were beaten. In the evening, a third batch of five volunteers was sent. They were challenged by the police who tried to snatch away the flags they had in their hands. The two European officers used their batons on the leaders. There was no retaliation or fight by the people."

When thousands of people set out from Patna to go to a spot where salt could be made, police blocked the highway. The crowd stayed and slept on the road and the surrounding fields for forty hours.

After Rajendra Prasad, who was leading them, had refused to ask the crowd to disperse, a charge by mounted police was ordered. As the horses galloped forward, men and women threw themselves on the ground. The horses reared and stopped. They would not trample them. Then the constables lifted those lying on the ground and took them to jail. But other demonstrators took their place.

At Ludhiana, in Punjab, fifty men were injured in a police *lathi* charge. At Peshawar, in the North-West Frontier Province, which is now a part of Pakistan, two armoured cars full of soldiers were driven into a crowd returning from a meeting. Many people were run over and injured and at least three were killed on the spot. In spite of this, the crowd continued to be peaceful. As they were collecting the dead and injured, an English officer on a motorcycle who dashed into the crowd was killed when he collided with one of the armoured cars.

More English soldiers had by then reached the place, and, without warning, started firing into the crowd in which there were women and children. The people gave a good demonstration of the lesson of non-violence they had learnt. When those in front fell, those behind came forward to expose themselves to the firing. Soon there were heaps of dead and wounded. The firing continued from eleven in the morning till five in the evening. But not one broke ranks or fled. When the bodies were collected, it was found that not a single demonstrator had bullets in the back. Not one made a hostile move. Even the police admitted that the crowd was perfectly peaceful throughout. In no battle was greater courage ever shown. Gandhiji had inspired them. Another noteworthy feature of the movement was the way in which women took part in it. Gandhiji had always insisted on treating women as equals and on removing their disabilities. Now they came forward to take part in the demonstrations and picketing of shops selling foreign cloth or liquor. The government was taken aback.

The movement launched by Gandhiji had proved successful. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru wrote, "It was as though a spring had been suddenly released. We

marveled at the amazing knack of the man to impress the multitude and make it act in an organized manner."

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(IX)

On May 4, 1930, Gandhiji wrote a second letter to the Viceroy. He was at the small village of Karadi, seven kilometers from Dandi. He again addressed the Viceroy as "Dear Friend" and wrote that it was his intention to reach Dharasana with his companions and ask for possession of the Government Salt Works there. Gandhiji wrote that the government could prevent the raid, "as it was playfully and mischievously called," by abolishing the salt tax, by arresting him and his party, or by brutally attacking the *satyagrahis*.



Gandhiji gave the brutal repression of *satyagrahis* as his reason for raiding the Dharasana Salt Works.

He wrote: "I had hoped that the government would fight the civil resisters in a civilized manner... While the known leaders have been dealt with more or less according to the legal formality, the rank and file have been often savagely...assaulted.

"Had these been isolated cases, they might have been overlooked. But accounts have come to me from Bengal, Bihar, Utkal, U.P., Delhi and Bombay confirming the experiences of Gujarat of which I have ample evidence.

"In Karachi, Peshawar and Madras the firing would appear to have been unprovoked and unnecessary... In Bengal... unthinkable cruelties are said to have been practiced in the act of snatching the national flag from volunteers. Paddy fields are reported to have been burnt, eatables forcibly taken. A vegetable market in Gujarat has been raided because the dealers would not sell vegetables to officials.

"These acts have taken place in front of crowds who, for the sake of the Congress mandate, have submitted without retaliation.

"According to the law of *Satyagraha*, the greater the repression and lawlessness on the part of authority, the greater should be the suffering courted by its victims. Success is the certain result of suffering of the extreme character voluntarily undergone...I have been saying for the last fifteen years in India, and outside for twenty years more, and repeat now, that the only way to conquer violence is through non-violence."

Gandhiji begged the Viceroy, Lord Irwin, to abolish the salt tax, "which many of your illustrious countrymen have condemned in unmeasured terms and which....has evoked universal protest and resentment expressed in civil disobedience. You may condemn civil disobedience as much as you like. Will you prefer violent revolt to civil disobedience?"

It was evening and, after writing the letter and finishing his routine work, Gandhiji dropped off to sleep on a cot in a shed beneath the branches of an old mango tree. Some of his followers slept by his side, while others slept elsewhere in the grove.

At dead of night, at 12.45 a.m. they were awakened by the tramp of heavy boots. It was the District Magistrate of Surat, an Englishman, accompanied by two Indian officers and thirty policemen armed with rifles, pistols and lances. A party of armed constables entered the shed and the District Magistrate flashed his torch on Mahatma Gandhi's face. He woke up and asked the Magistrate, "Do you want me?"

"Are you Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi?" the District Magistrate asked formally. "Yes", Gandhiji answered with equal formality.

When the District Magistrate said that he had come to arrest him, Gandhiji said, "Please give me time for my ablutions."

The official agreed and, while brushing his teeth, Gandhiji asked, "Mr. District Magistrate, may I know under what charge I am arrested? Is it section 124?"

"No, not under Section 124. I have a written order", was the curt reply. "Please", said Gandhiji, "would you mind reading it to me?"

The District Magistrate read, "Whereas the Governor-in-Council views with alarm the activities of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, he directs that the said Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi should be placed under restraint under Regulation XXV of 1827 and suffer imprisonment during the pleasure of the Government, and that he be immediately removed to the Yeravda Central Jail." Gandhiji packed some articles and papers in a small bag and asked for "a few more minutes for prayers."

The District Magistrate agreed and one of the men recited a hymn. Then Gandhiji stepped to the side of the District Magistrate, who led him to a waiting vehicle.

Gandhiji was put on a train to Bombay. The authorities had decided that at Borivili he was to change to a car and travel by it to the Yeravda Central Jail in Pune.

Foreign newspaper correspondents had got wind of what was happening and they were waiting when the train stopped at Borivli. An American correspondent asked, "Have you any farewell message, Mr. Gandhi?" "Tell the people of America to study the issues clearly and to judge them on their merits," Gandhiji replied.

"You have no bitterness or ill feeling towards anyone?" the correspondent asked.

"No. I have long expected to be arrested," Gandhiji replied.

"Do you think your arrest will lead to great disturbances throughout India?"

"No, I do not. In any case, I can say that I have taken every precaution to avoid disturbances," Gandhiji replied.

Gandhiji was taken in a car, with curtains drawn, to the Yeravda Central Jail. The prison authorities noted down these details about their prisoner: 5 feet 5 inches (about 166 centimeters); identification marks: scar on the right thigh,



small mole on the lower right eyelid and a scar about the size of a pea below the left elbow.

There was no trial, no sentence and no fixed term of imprisonment. Gandhiji was to be held in prison for as long as the government thought it necessary.

When the news of Gandhiji's arrest spread, there were demonstrations everywhere, but the people were non-violent. *Hartals* were declared in Bombay, Delhi, Navsari, Ahmedabad and Surat. The next day more areas were on *hartal*.

There were reactions abroad, too. Indian businessmen in Panama closed their business for 24 hours. Indians in Sumatra did the same. In Nairobi, the Indian community went on *hartal*. From America, 102 clergymen sent a telegram to the British Prime Minister urging him to seek a friendly settlement with Gandhiji and the Indian people. Reports of Gandhiji and his doings filled newspapers all over Europe.

Seeing the support that Gandhiji had, the Government feared that there might be demonstrations at the Yeravda Central Jail and secretly took him from there to Shivaji's fortress in the Purandar Hills.

Gandhiji had expected to be arrested, and as far back as April 9 he had drafted a message to the Indian people which was released upon his arrest: "If the struggle so auspiciously begun is continued in the same spirit of non-violence to the end, not only shall we see *Purna Swaraj* established in our country before long, but we shall have given to the world an object lesson worthy of India and her glorious past.

"*Swaraj* won without sacrifice cannot last long.... Let not my companions or the people at large be perturbed over my arrest, for it is not I but God who is guiding this movement.....

"Let every villager fetch or manufacture contraband salt, sisters should picket liquor shops, opium dens and foreign cloth dealers' shops. Young and old in every home should spin and get woven heaps of yarn every day. Foreign cloth should be burnt.

"Hindus should give up untouchability. Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Parsees and Christians should all achieve unity of heart..... Let students leave government schools and colleges and government servants resign their services and devote themselves to the service of the people and we shall find that *Purna Swaraj* will come knocking at our door."

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(X)

Since Gandhiji was under arrest and could not lead the raid on the Dharasana salt depot, his successor, Abbas Tyabji, set out from Karadi to lead the raid. On the morning of May 12, the *satyagrahis* got up early, said their prayers and fell into line, ready to march to Dharasana. The party had hardly started walking when it was confronted by the District Magistrate and the District Superintendent of Police of Surat with four hundred policemen armed with rifles and *lathis*. Abbas Tyabji and the *satyagrahis* were arrested, put in buses and taken to Jalalpur.

Now it became Sarojini Naidu's responsibility to lead the raid. She was in Allahabad attending a meeting of the Congress Working Committee when she learnt of Abbas Tyabji's arrest. She immediately hurried to Dharasana, 250 kilometers north of Bombay.



During the Salt Satyagraha with Sarojini Naidu in Dandi (Gujarat), 1930

She said, "I go to victory or death. I shall march ahead of the *satyagrahis*..... when they try to break through the military guards at the salt depot. I shall cut

the barbed wire with pliers and seize the salt with my own hands.....  
"I am a woman but I shall actively participate in this campaign for liberty as though I were a man. I realize the tremendous responsibility entrusted to me by the Mahatma and the nation, but in making the most of this heaven-sent opportunity, neither jail nor death shall hold any terror for me.

"At daybreak on May 15, Sarojini Naidu and fifty volunteers, clad in *khadi*, marched towards the depot, armed with pliers to cut the barbed wire. Half an hour later they were stopped by a police force. The Superintendent of Police told Sarojini Naidu that she could go no further and she replied, "Well, I shall stay here. I am not going back."

The Superintendent of Police said, "We are going to stay here and offer *satyagraha* as long as you stay."

Both sides sat facing each other. Sarojini Naidu got a chair from a house nearby and sat writing letters and later spinning yarn. The sun blazed overhead and it was very hot, but the volunteers sat on the road seeking no shelter.

After 28 hours of this peaceful confrontation, the police threatened to arrest Sarojini Naidu. She retired to the volunteers' camp to arrange for more groups to march to the depot. The others were then removed by the police.

More volunteers took their place and, when they were taken away, there were more to replace them. The volunteers would squat on their haunches, waiting for an opportunity to dash to the barbed wire round the depot. Every time they tried to reach it, the police would block them. During the four days that this "game" lasted, two hundred and fifty volunteers were taken from the road and lodged in a temporary jail nearby.

On May 20 the volunteers were ordered to adopt any means short of violence to get through the wire fence and seize the salt pans. They were told not to return without doing what they had set out to do. That day more than 150 volunteers were arrested, but later, they were released.

Very early the next morning, by moonlight, prayers were said and Sarojini Naidu exhorted the volunteers to start the attack on the Dharasana Salt Works. She said:

"India's prestige is in your hands. You must not use any violence under any circumstance. You will be beaten, but you must not resist. You must not even raise a hand to ward off blows. Although Gandhiji's body is in prison, his soul goes with you."

The volunteers shouted, "*Gandhiji ki Jai!*", formed columns and, with their leaders carrying ropes and wire cutters, advanced on the depot.

Heaps of shining salt lay behind the barbed wire, guarded by four hundred policemen who were directed by several British officers.

Manilal Gandhi, the second son of Gandhiji, was in the front rank of the marchers. As they approached the barbed wire they started chanting, "*Inquilab Zindabad! Inquilab Zindabad!*"

The column reached the depot at 6.30 a.m. When the leaders tried to throw ropes round the posts holding the barbed wire to pull and uproot them, the police rushed on them with steel tipped *lathis*.

Not a single marcher raised his arm to defend himself as the police repeatedly beat him. In two or three minutes the ground was covered with fallen volunteers, their skulls or shoulders fractured with the blows. Great patches of blood stained their white clothes. But those behind them continued to press forward till they too were struck down.

When everyone in the first column had been struck down, stretcher bearers rushed up and carried the injured to a thatched hut.

Another column then formed up and marched towards the barbed-wire fence. This column also was struck down. There was no fight or struggle. The marchers just walked forward until they fell injured.

The brutal beating of unresisting men angered many in the watching crowd. The leaders had a hard time persuading them to remain peaceful, reminding

them of Gandhiji's instructions. The British Superintendent of Police also sensed their anger and posted twenty-five of his men armed with rifles on raised ground to fire if the crowd turned violent.

The volunteers now changed their tactics. In groups of twenty-five they sat near the wire fence, making no attempt to go through it. Yet the police attacked them. Bleeding bodies toppled over, but fresh groups of men took their place and allowed themselves to be beaten.

The police then started dragging the men away, seizing their arms or legs. Some were thrown into a nearby ditch filled with water.

Hour after hour, the stretcher bearers carried away bleeding bodies and put them in rows in the temporary hospital. The few doctors there were unable to cope with the number of injured.

At last a British Officer went up to Sarojini Naidu and touching her arm, said, "You are under arrest."

She said, "I will come with you, but don't touch me."

The crowd cheered as she followed the officer to the barbed-wire enclosure that served as jail. Later, Manilal Gandhi was also arrested.

The volunteers then decided to suspend the operation for two days, till reinforcements of *satyagrahis* arrived. But the police and the military blocked the main road to Dharasana and managed to prevent volunteers from getting through.

Though denied reinforcements, the *satyagrahis* continued the attempt to enter the salt works till June 6.

Writing about the action at Dharasana, *Young India* reported, "And this is the Government of India, red in all its tooth and claw. It can strike its *lathis* on harmless, unarmed citizens.... The *satyagrahis* did not succeed in bringing salt from the salt heaps. They were beaten, wounded, abused. They sustained a partial defeat in as much as some of them gave way before the furious *lathi* charges.

"But those who suffered the blows did so quite joyfully.... They unmasked to the whole world that the Government is not founded on love and consent of the people, but it rules the people against their will, keeping them down by sheer physical force.

"They can only rule India as long as the people are not strong and determined enough to undergo all possible suffering unflinchingly in order to overthrow this Government.... Who will say that the *satyagrahis* are defeated?.... We hope that their sufferings will bring about a change of heart in the oppressors."

The ultimate aim was not so much to seize salt as to bring to light the violence on which British rule rested and to put moral pressure on the government.

Gandhiji also wanted Indians to regain their self-respect by showing them that they could challenge the all powerful British Government.

As he had hoped, the Government's repressive measures, far from cowing the people, only made them intensify the *satyagraha*. All over the country, people either made salt or raided government salt works. Nearly fifteen thousand marched on the salt depot at Wadala near Bombay. Many were beaten with *lathis* and badly injured.

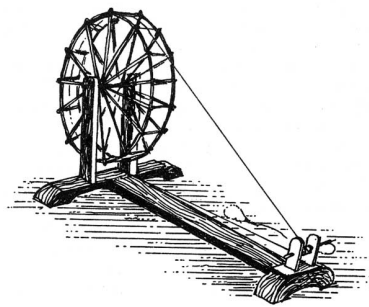
The boycott of foreign cloth was having its effect on the textile industry in England. Hardly any cloth could be sold in India. So many mills in Lancashire were idle.

The no-tax campaign also spread, particularly in Gujarat. In the *taluks* of Bardoli, Borsad and Kambusar the peasants had to suffer great repression for refusing to pay land revenue. The property they owned was sold at ridiculously low price. At one place, property worth Rs. 3,000 was sold for just Rs. 15. When they could no longer bear the repression, about eighty thousand people migrated from Gujarat to the State of Baroda.

A report said, "One passed row after row of padlocked cottages, and through the bars of windows one could see only empty rooms. The streets were silent lakes of sunlight."

Unrest had spread. About one lakh *satyagrahis*, seventeen thousand of them women, were in jail. The Indian National Congress now called upon students to boycott schools and colleges and take part in the national struggle for freedom. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru called upon the people to boycott the coming census operations.

The administration was nearly paralyzed. The Viceroy, who had laughed at Gandhiji's "crazy scheme of upsetting the government with a pinch of salt", found that he was no longer in control. The pinch of salt had proved more powerful than a trainload of dynamite!



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(XI)

The British Government was now inclined to negotiate. It called a Round Table Conference, which opened in London on November 12, 1930. But with neither Mahatma Gandhi nor any of the leaders of the Indian National Congress there, it was a meaningless exercise. The government realized this and the British Prime Minister, Ramsay MacDonald, expressed the hope that the Congress would send delegates to the Second Round Table Conference.

Gandhiji, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Motilal Nehru, and more than twenty other Congress leaders were released from prison on January 26, 1931, the second Independence Day. Gandhiji immediately wrote a letter to the Viceroy asking for an interview.

Lord Irwin promptly agreed and the two met on February 17, 1931. And they met as equals, not as ruler and subject. It was the representative of one nation meeting the representative of another. It was a historic moment when Gandhiji climbed the steps of the Viceroy's House. The frail figure, clad in *khadi*, made a

mockery of the imperial splendor around him. The Viceroy lived in such luxury that the Prince of Wales on a visit to India had remarked, "I never understood how a king should live until I saw the Viceroy of India."

The contrast between Gandhiji and Lord Irwin was marked, but the negotiations were held in an atmosphere of great cordiality and goodwill. This again showed how successful Gandhiji had been with the weapon of *satyagraha* which does not hate or harm the opponent but tries to turn his heart with love and non-violence.

One night, Gandhiji insisted on walking from the Viceroy's palace to where he was staying. It was an eight-kilometer walk and the Viceroy said, "Good night, Mr. Gandhi, and my prayers go with you."

Once, when leaving, Gandhiji forgot his shawl. Lord Irwin gave it to him saying, "Gandhi, you haven't so much on that you can afford to leave this behind." At one of the meetings, Lord Irwin asked Gandhiji if he would have tea. Gandhiji thanked the Viceroy, took a paper bag out of a fold in his shawl and said playfully, "I will put some of this salt into my tea to remind us of the famous Boston Tea Party." Both men laughed.

Under what came to be known as the Gandhi-Irwin Pact or the Delhi Pact, the civil disobedience movement was called off, prisoners were released and salt manufacture allowed on the coast. It was also agreed that the Indian National Congress would attend the Round Table Conference in London.



Walking in Noakhali  
(Bengal), 1946

India is not a sickly child requiring nursing, outside help and other props.

In speeches and articles, Gandhiji urged unity between Hindus and Muslims, strict observance of the conditions of the pact, energetic work on the constructive programmes, including boycott of foreign cloth and non-violent picketing of liquor shop.

He explained the reasons for accepting the terms of the agreement: "Whilst a *satyagrahi* never yields to



panic...neither does he think of humiliating the other party.... He may not swerve from the path of justice and may not dictate impossible terms. He may not pitch his demands too high, neither may be pitch them too low. The present settlement, I submit, satisfied all these conditions.

"We are going to ask for nothing less than independence. Whether we will get it is another matter."

The Indian National Congress elected Gandhiji to be its representative at the Second Round Table Conference in London.

He sailed for London on August 29, 1931, by the S.S. Rajputana. Before leaving, he warned that there was every chance of his returning empty-handed. He said, "As the elephant is powerless to think in terms of the ant, in spite of the best intentions in the world, even so is the Englishman powerless to think in terms of the Indian."

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## (XII)

Gandhiji did not sail alone for England. With him were Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya, Sarojini Naidu, his youngest son, Devdas, his British disciple, Madeline Slade, who on joining the Sabarmati *ashram* had taken the name of Miraben, and his secretary.

As always, Gandhiji wished to lead a simple life. He had given orders that he and his party were to travel by the lowest class, as deck passengers. When he discovered how much luggage his companions had brought with them, he insisted on seven trunks and suitcases being sent back from Aden, the first halt after Bombay.



**Poking his grandson Kanaa during a walk at Juhu Beach (Bombay), 1937**

Gandhiji's followers had brought along his goat, because goat's milk was an essential part of his diet. On the ship, Gandhiji spent most of the day and night

on the deck spinning, writing, praying, talking to other passengers and playing with their children.

He reached London on September 12. The British were astonished to see the *khadi*-clad figure, leaning on a bamboo staff, with his disciples and his goat, getting off the ship. They were even more astonished to think that such a man had come to hold talks with their Prime Minister.

The newspapers were full of photographs and cartoons of the "Mickey Mouse of India". Newspaper men followed him wherever he went. Never before had they seen such a leader, a man who did not need the power of the State to make him great. He had no official position, but people had willingly, almost blindly, followed him to prison. Suffering, and even death, had not deterred them.

Gandhiji was the guest of Miss Muriel Lester, who had visited him in 1926, and he stayed in Kingsley Hall, in the East End, where the poor lived.

It was eight kilometers from the centre of the city and from St. James Palace, where the Round Table Conference was to be held. His friends told him that he would save many hours for sleep and work if he lived in a hotel, but he did not want so much money to be spent on his comfort. Neither would he live in the big houses of his English friends or wealthy Indians. He said he loved living among his own kind, the poor. All that he would agree to was to have a small office at 88, Knightsbridge, so that those who wanted to meet him or interview him would not have to come all the way to the East End slums.

In the mornings, Gandhiji walked through the slum streets and men and women greeted him and smiled at him. He talked to them and visited some of them in their houses. Children crowded round him. When one mischievously asked, "Hey, Gandhi, where are your trousers?", Gandhiji laughed and the children laughed too!

Lloyd George, Britain's wartime Prime Minister, invited Gandhiji to his farm.

Charlie Chaplin, the comedian, wanted to meet him. Gandhiji had never seen a film and had no interest in actors, but on learning that Chaplin had been born in a poor family in the East End, he was happy to meet him.

Among other famous persons who met him were General Smuts, Maria Montessori, and George Bernard Shaw. Lord Irwin, who had been replaced by Lord Willington as Viceroy before Gandhiji left India, also met him.

Gandhiji visited schools and also London University, Cambridge and Oxford. He went to Lancashire to meet the textile workers who were out of work because of the boycott of foreign cloth in India. He explained to them the reasons for the boycott and spoke with such conviction, kindness and directness that he got a wonderful welcome from the people he had put out of work. They told him that they would have done the same thing had they been in his place. It was a measure of the greatness of the English people and their sense of fair play that they could see the point of view of the other party even when that meant suffering for them.

King George V had misgivings about including Gandhiji in the list of Round Table Conference delegates invited to a reception at Buckingham Palace.

When Sir Samuel Hoare, Secretary of State for India, told the King that Gandhiji could not be excluded, he asked, "What! Have this rebel fakir in the palace after he has been behind all those attacks on my loyal officers?"

"I am afraid so. It would be a mistake not to invite him, Your Majesty," Sir Samuel replied.

The King then said that he could not invite to the palace a man "with no proper clothes on and bare knees."

Sir Samuel said, "Your Majesty, he, not you, will feel the cold, so why worry?"

So Mahatma Gandhi received his invitation and went to Buckingham Palace in his *khadi dhoti* and shawl. Towards the end of the reception, the King said, "Remember, Mr. Gandhi, I won't have any attacks on my Empire."

Gandhiji said politely, "I must not be drawn into political arguments in your Majesty's Palace after receiving Your Majesty's hospitality."

Later, asked by a correspondent whether he had felt the cold at Buckingham Palace, Gandhiji laughed and said, "No, His Majesty had enough clothes on for both of us."

Gandhiji concentrated more on convincing the British people of the justness of India's cause than on the discussions at the Round Table Conference. He explained it by saying to an audience, "I find that my work lies outside the conference. This to me is the real Round Table Conference. The seed which is being sown now may result in softening the British spirit..... and in preventing the brutalisation of human beings."

Gandhiji gave lectures, speeches, press interviews, went on trips, met people and answered innumerable letters addressed to him. All this kept him busy for twenty-one hours of the day, leaving him with barely three hours for sleep. His aim was to convince the British people and the world that India had to be free. She needed independence just as any other nation did. He gained many friends and sympathizers.



**During the Second Round Table Conference in London, 1931**

He said in a radio address to the United States that world attention was focused on India because "the means adopted by us for attaining liberty are unique...Hitherto nations have fought in the manner of the brute. They have wreaked vengeance upon those whom they have considered to be their enemies...We in India have tried to reverse the process... I personally would wait, if need be for ages, rather than seek to attain freedom for my country through bloody means. I feel...that the world is sick unto death of blood spilling. The world is seeking a way out and I flatter myself with the belief that

perhaps it will be the privilege of this ancient land of India to show the way out to the hungry world."

He ended with the words, "May I not then, on behalf of the semi-starved millions, appeal to the conscience of the world to come to the rescue of a people dying to regain its liberty?"

However, the British were not willing to make India free. As they saw it, the purpose of the Round Table Conference was "constitution-building" for India.

Of the one hundred and twelve delegates few sided with Gandhiji to resist the forces that were working for the status quo.

The Muslims were given separate electorates. The untouchables also demanded separate electorates. All this strengthened the feudal and divisive forces.

The Round Table Conference was a failure. Gandhiji left England on December 5 disappointed that he had not succeeded in bridging the gulf between Hindus and Muslims and that India was being denied her freedom.

Gandhiji traveled across France, Switzerland and Italy and met many important people before he sailed from Brindisi in Italy for India.

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### (XIII)

Gandhiji reached Bombay on December 28. A large cheering crowd received him. He said sadly, "I have come back empty-handed, but I have not compromised the honour of my country."

Gandhiji found that Lord Willingdon, who had replaced Lord Irwin, and the new Government in Britain were determined to destroy India's recently won sense of freedom. Lord Willingdon withdrew the concessions made earlier and imposed drastic restrictions on the Indian National Congress.

Jawaharlal Nehru was arrested while going to Bombay to welcome Gandhiji. Emergency ordinances were introduced to deal with the non-rent campaign in U. P., the North-West Frontier Province and Bengal and to arrest and detain without trial those suspected of being agitators. The Government also imposed

restrictions on the press and assumed powers to seize buildings, property and bank balances.

Gandhiji remarked to a Bombay audience. "These are all Christmas gifts from Lord Willington, our Christian Viceroy."

Speaking to the Welfare of India League, Gandhiji said, "I am not conscious of a single experience throughout my three months' stay in England and Europe that made me feel that after all East is East and West is West. On the contrary, I have been convinced more than ever that human nature is much the same, no matter under what clime it flourishes, and that if you approached people with trust and affection you would have ten-fold trust and thousand fold affection returned to you."

The British government, he explained, was friendly to him and "we parted as the best of friends... But when I come here I find a different order of things altogether."

Gandhiji sent a telegram to the Viceroy condemning the ordinances and the arrests and suggesting an interview. The Viceroy's secretary replied that Congress activities against the Government made the ordinances necessary. Lord Willingdon refused to meet Gandhiji.

On January 4, 1932, Gandhiji was arrested, again under Regulation XXV of 1827. As before, he was taken to the Yeravda Central Jail.

A short time ago, he had been His Majesty's guest at Buckingham Palace. Now he was His Majesty's guest in the Yeravda Central Jail. The Government again started a policy of repression and important leaders of the freedom movement were arrested and imprisoned.

In January fourteen thousand and eight hundred people were sent to jail for political reasons. In February seventeen thousand and eight hundred. Were the Salt *Satyagraha* and all the sacrifices made by thousands of men and women in vain?

Not, if one understands Gandhiji's reasons for starting the Salt *Satyagraha*. He had said that the object of the civil disobedience movement was two-fold. The

repeal of the Salt Tax and the "repeal of the British bondage of which the Salt Tax is but an offshoot."

The true purpose was even deeper. Civil disobedience, Gandhiji had said, "is the method whereby the nation is to generate the strength to reach her formulated goal"—namely, independence.

And that strength had been achieved. The Indian people had realized their power and the British Empire its weakness.

Though Britain continued to rule India for some more years, a great change had taken place. And that was to affect not only India, but also Britain.

Rabindranath Tagore described this change: "Europe has completely lost her former moral prestige in Asia...For Europe, this is in actual fact, a great moral defeat that has happened. Even though Asia is still physically weak and unable to protect herself...nevertheless she can now afford to look down on Europe where before she looked up."

The days of not only British but all European Colonialism were numbered. Seventeen years after Gandhiji launched the Salt *Satyagraha*, India was free. And it was not long before most of the colonies ruled by European countries in Asia and Africa were also free.

Gandhiji had shown that even an unarmed people could win against the mightiest countries if their cause was just and they were prepared to face their masters with courage and fortitude.

The 'law-breakers' who stood on the sea shore at Dandi that day in 1930 achieved much more than Indian independence.

