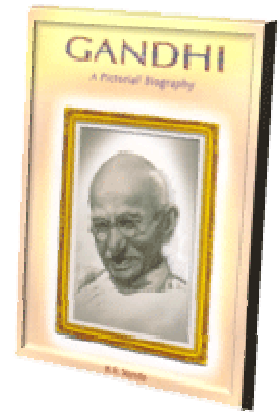


GANDHI a pictorial biography

Written by: B. R. Nanda



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This is the first pictorial biography of Gandhi in which the narrative-concise, readable and incisive is illustrated with contemporary photographs and facsimiles of letters, newspaper reports and cartoons, adding up to a fascinating flash-back on the life of Mahatma Gandhi and the struggle for Indian freedom led by him. There is a skilful matching in this book of text and illustrations, of description and analysis and of concrete detail and large perspective. This pictorial biography will revive many memories in those who have lived through the Gandhian era; it should also be of interest to the post-independence generation.



Sevagram ashram near Wardha in Maharashtra founded by Gandhiji in 1936.

In January 1948, before three pistol shots put an end to his life, Gandhi had been on the political stage for more than fifty years. He had inspired two generations of India, patriots, shaken an empire and sparked off a revolution which was to change the face of Africa and Asia. To millions of his own people, he was the Mahatma- the great soul- whose sacred glimpse was a reward in itself. By the end of 1947 he had lived down much of the suspicion, ridicule and opposition which he had to face, when he first raised the banner of revolt against racial exclusiveness and imperial domination. His ideas, once dismissed as quaint and utopian ,had begun to strike answering chords in some of the finest minds in the world. "Generations to come, it may be", Einstein had said of Gandhi in July 1944, "will scarcely believe that such one as this ever in flesh and blood walked upon earth."

Though his life had been continual unfolding of an endless drama, Gandhi himself seemed the least dramatic of men. It would be difficult to imagine a man with fewer trappings of political eminence or with less of the popular image of a heroic figure. With his loin cloth, steel-rimmed glasses, rough sandals, a toothless smile and a voice which rarely rose above a whisper, he had a disarming humility. He used a stone instead of soap for his bath, wrote

his letters on little bits of paper with little stumps of pencils which he could hardly hold between his fingers, shaved with a crude country razor and ate with a wooden spoon from a prisoner's bowl. He was, if one were to use the famous words of the Buddha, a man who had "by rousing himself, by earnestness, by restraint and control, made for himself an island which no flood could overwhelm."

Gandhi's, deepest strivings were spiritual, but he did not-as had been the custom in his country- retire to a cave in the Himalayas to seek his salvation. He carried his cave within him. He did not know, he said, any religion apart from human activity; the spiritual law did not work in a vacuum, but expressed itself through the ordinary activities of life. This aspiration to relate the spirit-not the forms-of religion to the problems of everyday life runs like a thread through Gandhi's career; his uneventful childhood, the slow unfolding and the near- failure of his youth, reluctant plunge into the politics of Natal, the long, unequal struggle in South Africa, and the vicissitudes of the Indian struggle for freedom, which under his leadership was to culminate in a triumph not untinged with tragedy.

01. CHILDHOOD



The house at Porbandar, Gujarat, where Mohandas Gandhi was born on October 2, 1869

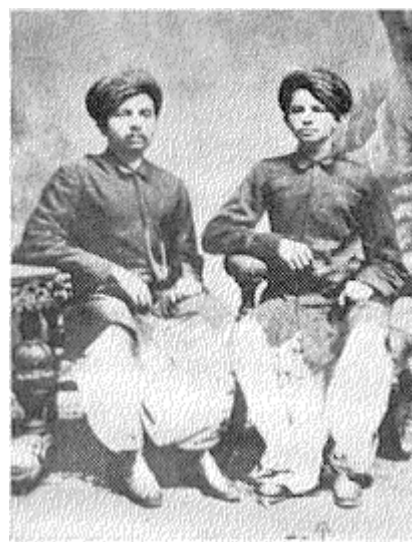
Mohandas Gandhi was born on October 2, 1869, at Porbandar, on the western coast of India. His grandfather Uttamchand Gandhi and father Karamchand Gandhi occupied the high office of the diwan (Chief Minister) of Porbandar. To be Diwan of one of the princely states was on sinecure. Porbandar was one of some three hundred 'native' states in western India which were ruled by princes whom the accident of birth and the support of the British kept on the throne. To steer one's course safely between wayward Indian princes, the overbearing British 'Political Agent' of the suzerain power and the long-suffering subjects required a high degree of patience, diplomatic skill and commonsense. Both Uttamchand and Karamchand were good administrators. But they were also upright and honourable men. Loyal to their masters, they did not flinch from offering unpalatable advice. They paid the price for the courage of their convictions. Uttamchand Gandhi had his nose besieged and shelled by the ruler's troops and had to flee the State; his son Karamchand also preferred to leave Porbandar, rather than compromise with his principles.

Karamchand Gandhi was, in the words of his son, "a lover of his clan, truthful, brave, generous." The strongest formative influence on young Mohandas, however, was that of his mother Putlibai. She was a capable woman who made herself felt in court circles through her friendship with the ladies of the palace,

but her chief interest was in the home. When there was sickness in the family, she wore herself out in days and nights of nursing. She had little of the weaknesses, common to women of her age and class, for finery or jewellery. Her life was an endless chain of fasts and vows through which her frame seemed to be borne only by the strength of her faith. The children clung to her as she divided her day between the home and the temple. Her fasts and vows puzzled and fascinated them. She was not versed in the scriptures; indeed except for a smattering of Gujarati, she was practically unlettered. But her abounding love, her endless austerities and her iron will, left a permanent impression upon Mohandas, her youngest son. The image of woman he imbibed from his mother was one of love and sacrifice. Something of her maternal love he came to possess himself, and as he grew, it flowed out in an ever-increasing measure, bursting the bonds of family and community, until it embraced the whole of humanity. To his mother, he owed not only a passion for nursing which later made him wash leper's sores in his ashram, but also an inspiration for his techniques of appealing to the heart through self-suffering -a technique which wives and mothers have practised from time immemorial.



Gandhi at the age of seven



With his brother, Laxmidas, 1886

Young Mohandas' school career was undistinguished. He did not shine in the classroom or in the playground. Quiet, shy and retiring, he was tongue-tied in

company. He did not mind being rated as a mediocre student, but he was exceedingly jealous of his reputation. He was proud of the fact that he had never told a lie to his teachers or classmates; the slightest aspersion on his character drew his tears. Like most growing children he passed through a rebellious phase, but contrary to the impression fostered by his autobiography, Gandhi's adolescence was no stormier than that of many of his contemporaries. Adventures into the forbidden land of meat- eating and smoking and petty pilfering were, and are not uncommon among boys of his age. What was extraordinary was the way his adventures ended. In every case when he had gone astray, he posed for himself a problem for which he sought a solution by framing a proposition in moral algebra. 'Never again' was his promise to himself after each escapade. And he kept the promise.

02. OFF TO ENGLAND

Mohan passed the matriculation examination of Bombay University in 1887. His father's death a year earlier had strained the means of the family. Being the only boy in the family who had persevered in his studies, its hopes rested on him and he was sent to Bhavnagar, the nearest town with a college. Unfortunately for Mohan the teaching was in English. He was unable to follow the lectures and despaired of making any progress. Meanwhile, Mavji Dave, a friend of the family, suggested that Mohan should go to England to qualify at the bar. Mohan jumped at the idea of going abroad. His elder brother had no doubt that the proposal was attractive but wondered how they could afford it. His mother was reluctant to let her youngest boy sail to an alien land to face unknown temptations and dangers. The Modh Bania caste to which the Gandhis belonged, threatened to excommunicate the whole family if its injunction against foreign travel was infringed. All these hurdles were, however, successfully overcome by Mohan's determination to go broad, and in September 1888, at the age of 18, he sailed for England.

From the rural surroundings of Rajkot to the cosmopolitan atmosphere of a steamship was a tremendous change for Mohan. Adaptation to Western food, dress and etiquette was a painful process. Both on board the ship and in London in the first few weeks, Mohan could not help feeling that he was making a fool of himself. He had promised his mother before leaving India that he would not "touch wine, woman or meat". The vegetarian vow became a continual source of embarrassment to him. His friends feared that his food fads would ruin his health, and make of him, socially, a square peg. To disarm his critics and to prove that, vegetarianism apart, he was not impervious to the new environment, he decided to put on a thick veneer of 'English culture'. Having made up his mind to become an 'English Gentleman', he spared neither time nor money. Whatever the cost, the veneer had to be the best in the market. New suits were ordered from the most fashionable tailors in London; the watch

was adorned with a double gold chain from India; under expert tuition, lessons began in elocution, dancing and music.

Gandhi could not, however, throw himself into this experiment with complete self-abandon. The habit of introspection had never deserted him. English dancing and music did not come easy to him. He began to see that drapers and dance halls could turn him into an English gentleman, but only an English gentleman about town. After a brief three months' excursion, the introvert returned to his shell. There was a rebound from extreme extravagance to meticulous economy. He began to keep an account of every farthing he spent. He changed his rooms, cooked his own breakfast and, to save bus fares, walked eight to ten miles daily. He was able to pare down his expenses to £2 a month. He began to feel keenly the obligations to his family and was glad that he had reduced the calls on his brother for funds. Simplicity harmonized his inward and outward life; the dandyism of the first three months had been only a defensive armour against those who considered him a misfit in English society.

Vegetarianism, which had been a source of embarrassment to him, soon became an asset. He came across a book entitled Plea for Vegetarianism by Henry S. Salt, whose arguments went home. A meatless diet had been hitherto a matter of sentiment to him; henceforth, it was one of reasoned conviction. Vegetarianism was no longer an inconvenient obligation to his parents; it became a mission, the starting point of a discipline of body and mind which was to transform his life. With the zeal of a new convert, Gandhi devoured books on developed an interest in cooking, outgrew the taste for condiments, and came to the sensible conclusion that the seat of taste is not in the tongue but in the mind. The control of the palate was one of the first steps in that discipline which was to culminate many years later in total sublimation.

The immediate effect of vegetarianism was to give a new poise to young Gandhi, and to draw him out of his shell. He made his first venture into journalism by contributing nine articles to the Vegetarian. These articles, largely descriptive, and had occasional flashes of humour. That he should have sent these articles for publication at all is a notable achievement, if we recall

that back home in Bhavnagar College he had been unable to follow lectures in English. He became a member of the Executive committee of the London Vegetarian Society. In Bays water where he stayed for a short time, he formed a vegetarian club. He came into contact with at least one eminent vegetarian, Sir Edwin Arnold, the author of the Light of Asia and The song Celestial, the two books which moved him deeply. He was stirred by the life of the Buddha and the message of the Gita. In the vegetarian restaurants and boarding houses of London he came across not only food faddists but also a few devout men of religion. He owed his introduction to the Bible to one such contact.

The New Testament, particularly the Sermon on the Mount went straight to his heart. The verses, "But I say unto you that ye resist not evil; but whosoever shall thee at the law and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also" reminded him of the lines of the Gujarati poet, Shamal Bhatt, which he used to hum as a child:

For a bowl of water give a goodly meal;
For a kindly greeting bow thou down with zeal;
For a single penny pay thou back with gold;
If the life be rescued, life do not withhold.
Thus the words and actions of the wise regard;
Every little service tenfold they reward.
But the truly noble know all men as one,
And return with gladness good for evil done.

The teachings of the Bible, the Buddha and Bhatt fused in his mind. The idea of returning love for hatred, and good for evil, captivated him; he did not yet comprehend it full, but it continued to ferment in his impressionable mind.

03. BRIEFLESS BARRISTER

Our Workers.



the many who know something of India there are few who have any true conception of the habits and customs, the thoughts and aspirations, the religious theory and its practice of the natives of India. Mr. Gandhi's work, however, has been active in the pages of this paper in doing something to dispel that ignorance.

There is one point connected with the presence of all Hindus in England who is not generally known, and that is the patient, persistent labor of character which has been necessary to enable them to overcome the enormous difficulties which lie in the way of their coming here.

To enable Englishmen to appreciate these difficulties and so to respect every Hindu who lands upon these shores, and also to point out to Hindus how these difficulties may be overcome, and how they will find Vegetarian friends in England, we have asked Mr. Gandhi to reply fully to a few questions.

Mr. Gandhi was first asked what was the reason which first induced him to think of coming over to England and adopting the legal profession in a second, ambitious, I institutionalized at the Bombay University, in the year 1885.

Then I joined the Bhorwade College, to which you give a status of respect. If you want any employment before that, you can not serve a student of yours who has a very good influence to help you up, a respectable post, giving a handsome salary. The friend that I would have to spend three years in the same lecture would graduate. Moreover, I suffered from constant headaches and nose-bleeding, and this was supposed to be due to the hot climate. And after all, I could not, even after graduating, expect any very great income. While I was accustomed to breathing these things as old friends of my father's saw and advised me to go to England and take the robe, he, as it were, issued the fiat that was burning within me. I thought, "If I go to England, I shall be able to see England, the land of philosophers and poets, the very centre of civilization." The gentleman had great success with my elders, and so he succeeded in persuading them to send me to England.

This is a very brief statement of my reasons for coming to England, but they do not in any way represent my present views.

Of course your friends were all delighted at your ambitious purpose.

Will, not all. There are friends and friends. Those who were my real friends, and of about my age, were very glad to hear that I was to go to England. Some were friends, or rather, well-wishers, old in years. These sincerely believed that I was going to run myself, and that I would be a blessing to my family by going to England. Others, however, set up their opposition simply from malice. They had seen some of the barristers who derived fabulous incomes, and they were afraid that I might do the same. Some, again, there were, who thought that I was too young. I am now about twenty-two, so that I should not be able to bear the climate. To cut the matter short, no two persons supported or opposed my coming on the same grounds.

How did you set about carrying out your intention? Just tell me, if you please, what were your difficulties, and how you overcame them?

I tried to try to tell you the story of my difficulties would fill up the whole of your valuable paper. It is a tale of money and woe. The difficulties may well be likened to the beads of Kaima (the giant of the second great Hindu epic Ramayan, whom Kaima the Hero fought, and ultimately defeated, which were many, and which were no sooner dropped off than renewed by my elders, separation from relatives, and caste restrictions.

First, then, as to money. Though my father was the prime minister of more than one native state, he never hoarded money. He spent all that he earned in charity and the education and marriage of his children, and we were practically left without much cash. He left some property, and that was all. When asked who he did not collect money and set it aside for his children, he used to say that he who takes possession of his wealth, and if he hoarded much money he would spend them. So, then, money was no small difficulty in my way. I tried for some State scholarship, but failed. At one place I was asked to prove my worth by graduating, and then receive a. Experience teaches me that the gentleman who said so was right.

Nothing daunted, I requested my elder brother to devote all the money that was left to my education in England.

Then I cannot help but mention to explain the family situation that prevails in India. There are, as you know, England, the children always, it seems, had a very strange, if not a very odd, way with their parents. What they earn goes to the father, and he does what they like as a rule to the father. Of course even the male children do separate (under exceptional circumstances, e.g., in the case of a great quarrel). But there are the exceptions. In the light of language of Mahatma I find without property of the male as well. (Of course property is his share in the family, but then I have and had no property of my own.) Everything was under the control of my brother, and we were all living together.

To return to the question of money. What little my father could leave for me was in the hands of my brother. It could only be set free subject to his consent. Moreover, he was not enough, so I proposed that the whole capital should be devoted to my education. I told you if my brother would do so here. There are very few such brothers in India. He was told that I might prove an untimely brother after reaching the western shores, and that the only chance of regaining the money would be in my returning alive to India, which was very difficult. He had heard a deal of rumors, some to India, which was very difficult. Now was one, and the only one, condition attached to the consent of my brother, viz., that I should get the permission of my mother and my wife. May many persons have such brothers as mine. I then enquired the mother's consent, which I got. I then enquired the wife's consent, which I got. She had much faith in me, and I succeeded in getting over her objections, but there was I to make her and I cannot go to a three years' separation. However, by showing the exaggerated advantages of coming to England, I got her to accede with much reluctance, to my request. Now for the uncle. He was on the point of going to Belgium and his other half places. After three days' incessant persuasion and arguments I should get the following answer from him.

I am going on a pilgrimage. What you say may be right, but how could I willingly say yes to your father's proposal. The only thing I can say is that if your mother does not mind your going, I have no right to interfere.

This was easily interpreted into "yes." Now were these the only two whom I had to please. In India very few, no matter how remotely connected, think that he has a right to poke his nose into another's affairs, but when I had excited her it was nothing else acquiescence from the two, the pecuniary difficulties almost disappeared.

The difficulty under the second head are partially discussed above. You will, perhaps, be astonished to hear that I am married. (The marriage took place at the age of twelve.) I shall blame them to my wife's parents if they thought that they had a right to interfere in only for the sake of their daughter. Who was to look after her? How was she to manage to spend the three years? Of course she was to be looked after by my brother. Poor brother! According to my ideas at that time I should have taken little notice of their legitimate fears and growings, but it not been that their displeasure would have been reflected on my mother and brother. It may be said that to do right after night with my father in law and to bear and successfully answer his objections. But then I was taught the old proverb, "Patience and perseverance overcome mountains," too well to give way.

When I had the money and the requisite permission I said to myself, "How am I to persuade myself to separate from all that is dear and mine to me?" In India we fight shy of separation. Even when I had to go from home for a few days my mother would weep. How, then, was I to witness, without being affected, the heart rending scene. It is impossible for me to describe the tortures that my mind had to suffer. As the day of my departure drew near I really broke down. But I was wise enough not to say that, even to my closest friends. I knew that my health was failing, sleeping, waking, eating, walking, nothing, nothing, I was dreading and thinking of England and what I would do on that momentous day. At last the day came. On the one hand my mother was looking her eyes full of tears, in her hands, but the wedding was clearly heard. On the other, I was gazed among a circle of solemnly mute. "If I wept they would think me too weak, perhaps they would not allow me to go to England," said I to myself, I did not weep, even though my heart was breaking. Last, but not least, came the parting with my wife. It would be unnecessary to say that I did not take to her in the presence of friends. So I had to see her in a separate room. Of course, had begun sobbing, but before I went to bed and could have a chance to see her for a moment. I loved her, and she said, "Don't go!"



MAHATMA GANDHI (YOUNG)

Barrister at Law.

An interview with Gandhi published by the Vegetarian, London, June 13, 1891

In 1891 Gandhi passed the law examination successfully, but was assailed by doubts and anxieties. He had read the law, but could he practise it? He found it hard enough to speak to strangers in a small party. How would he be able to cross swords with his rivals in the court-room? He had heard of legal luminaries like Sir Pherozeshah Mehta of Bombay and could well imagine the sorry figure

he would cut in comparison. It was thus "with just a little leaven of hope mixed with despair" that he sailed for India.

A great shock lay in store for him when he landed at Bombay. His mother had died while he was in England. It was only natural that he should have been anxious to justify the hopes of his family which had invested so much on his foreign education. His elder brother frankly expected rich dividends in the form of "wealth, and name and fame". The barrister's degree, however, was not an open sesame to the top of the bar. Gandhi noticed that the home-bred Vakils of Rajkot knew more of Indian law and charged lower fees than England sure ridicule; Gandhi, therefore, accepted the advice of friends to go to Bombay to study India law and to secure what briefs he could.



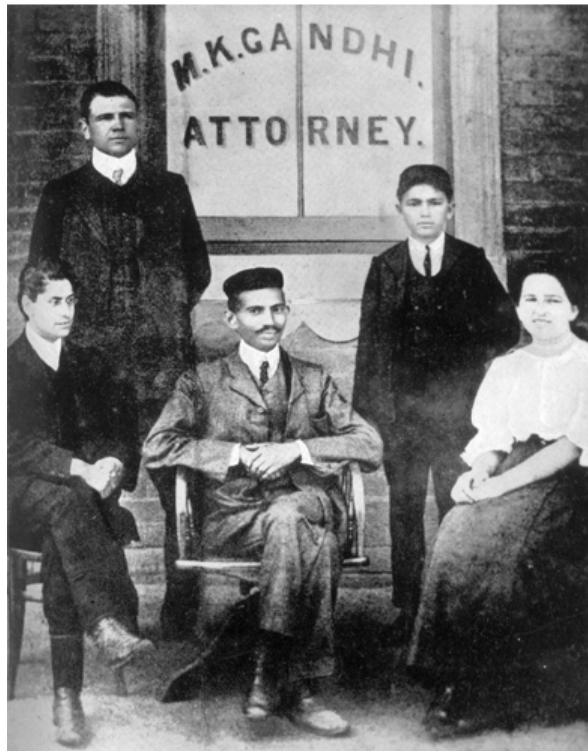
Gandhi as a barrister
in South Africa

His experience in Bombay was no happier than in Rajkot. After waiting unconscionably, he got his first brief for the modest fee of thirty rupees. As he rose to cross-examine a witness, he was unable to collect his thoughts, collapsed into his chair and refunded the fee to his client. This was a disgraceful debut, which filled the young barrister with black despair as to his future in a profession he had entered at such a heavy cost.

The straits to which he had been reduced may be surmised from the fact that he applied and was turned down for a part time job as a teacher in a Bombay high school with the modest salary of seventy rupees (£5 1/2) a month. It was with some relief that he discovered that he had a flair for drafting memorials and petitions. He wound up his little establishment in Bombay and returned to Rajkot where petition-writing brought him an income of three hundred rupees a month. He might have settled down as a barrister scribe if he had not incurred the displeasure of the British Political Agent in Rajkot in whose court most of his work lay. So, when

an offer of a job came to him from South Africa, he gladly accepted it. The contract was for a year in connection with a civil suit; the remuneration was £105, a first-class return fare and actual expenses. The fee was modest and it was not quite clear whether he was engaged as counsel or as a clerk, but he was in no position to pick and choose. He could hardly have imagined the new vistas of maturity and public service which the South African adventure was to open to him.

04. IN THE 'DARK CONTINENT'



M. K Gandhi, Attorney, with his colleagues, at Johannesburg

Gandhi landed at Durban in May 1893. His employer Dada Abdulla, one of the wealthiest Indian merchants in Natal, took him to see the Durban court. When the European magistrate ordered Gandhi to take off his turban, he refused, left the court- room and wrote a letter of protest in the local press in which he was mentioned "as an unwelcome visitor". The experience in Durban, however, was nothing compared with what befell him in the course of his journey from Durban to Pretoria. When his train reached Maritzburg late in the evening, he was ordered to leave the first class compartment and shift to the van compartment. He refused, but was unceremoniously turned out of the carriage. It was a bitterly cold night as he crept into the unlit waiting- room of Maritzburg station and brooded over what had happened. His client had given him no warning of the humiliating conditions under which Indians lived in South Africa. Should he not call off the contract and return to India? Should he accept these affronts as part of the bargain? So far Gandhi had not been conspicuous for assertiveness; on the contrary he had been pathologically shy and retiring.

But something happened to him in that wind-swept waiting-room of Maritzburg railway station as he smarted under the insult inflicted on him. The iron entered his soul. In retrospect, this incident seemed to him as one of the most creative experiences of his life. From that hour, he refused to accept injustice as a part of the natural- or unnatural- order in South Africa. He would reason, he would plead; he would appeal to the better judgment and the latent humanity of the ruling race; he would resist, but he would never be a willing victim of racial arrogance. It was not so much a question of redeeming his own self-respect as that of his community, his country, even of humanity.

The helpless resignation of the mass of Indian settlers, the fact that they were illiterate, had few rights and did not know how to assert the rights they had. All this had the miraculous effect of dissipating young Gandhi's own diffidence. The feeling of inferiority which had dogged him as a student in England and as a budding lawyer in India vanished. In Bombay he had been unable to face a small cause court but one of the first things he did on arrival at Pretoria was to convene a meeting of the Indian residents "to present to them a picture of their condition in Transvaal".

During the next twelve months, Gandhi was busy with the civil suit which had brought him to Pretoria. In June 1894, he returned to Durban to sail for India. At the farewell party which his grateful client Dada Abdulla gave him at Sydenham, a pleasant suburb of Durban, Gandhi happened to glance through the pages of the Natal Mercury, and learnt that a bill was being introduced into the Natal Legislature to disfranchise India settlers. Gandhi's host and other Indian merchants present at the party were unable to throw any light on this measure. They knew enough English to be able to converse with their white customers, but few of them could read newspapers, much less follow the proceedings of the Natal Legislature. They had come to Natal for trade, and politics did not interest them. They had not yet realized that politics could affect their trade. "This is the first nail into our coffin", was Gandhi's comment. The Indian merchants pleaded with him to stay on in Natal to take up the fight on their behalf. Gandhi agreed to defer his stay for a month.

Gandhi lost no time in settling down to work; the farewell party converted itself into a political committee to plan Indian opposition to the bill. A sound instinct seems to have guided the young barrister in organizing his first political campaign. He infused a spirit of solidarity into the heterogeneous elements composing the Indian community, and brought home the implications of the disfranchising measures not only to his own people, but to the saner section of the European public opinion and the Natal Government. Most important of all, he gave the widest publicity to his campaign to quicken the conscience of the peoples and Governments of India and Great Britain; through petitions to the legislatures, statements in newspapers, letters to prominent persons in Natal, Britain and India, and through public meeting, Gandhi stressed the justice of the Indians' case. All this created a great stir but the disfranchising bill was nevertheless passed by the Natal Legislature. On the insistence of his Indian friends in Durban, Gandhi agreed to prolong his stay in Natal, and was enrolled as an advocate to the Supreme Court. Since he retaining fees to produce a minimum 300 a year which he reckoned enough to pay his way in Durban.

05. THE YOUNG POLITICIAN

The first experience of political agitation into which Gandhi had been pitched cured him of what once had seemed an incorrigible self-consciousness. Not that he had a sudden attack of egotism; he was conscious of his limitations, and in a letter dated July 5, 1894 to Dadabhai Naoroji, the eminent leader of the Indian National Congress, wrote: "A word for myself and I have done. I am inexperienced and young and, therefore, quite liable to make mistakes. The responsibility undertaken is quite out of proportion to my ability. So, you will see that I have not taken the matter up, which is beyond my ability, in order to enrich myself at the expense of the Indians. I am the only available person who can handle the question." The concept of inferiority is a relative one; in a community looking to him for leadership, Gandhi forgot his own limitations. As the only available person, he undertook a task from which elsewhere he would have shrunk.

Gandhi had come to South Africa in 1893 for a year. He could hardly have imagined that he would have to stay on for the best part of two decades. The struggle of the Indian immigrants for elementary civic rights was to be long and hard. The disfranchising of the Indians which had been the immediate cause of Gandhi's intervention in the politics of Natal was only a symptom of the racial malaise that had begun to afflict the Dark Continent.

"The Asiatics", wrote Lord Milner, "are strangers forcing themselves upon a community reluctant to receive them." In fact, the Indian emigration to South Africa in the eighteen- sixties started at the instance of the European settlers who were in possession of vast virgin lands ideal for tea, coffee and sugar plantations, but lacked man-power. The Negro could not be compelled to work after the abolition of slavery. Recruiting agents of the European planters toured some of the poorest and most congested districts of India and painted rosy prospects of work in Natal. Free passage, board and lodging; a wage of ten shillings a month for the first year rising by one shilling every year; and the right to a free return passage to India after five years' 'indenture' (or

alternatively, the option to settle in the land of their adoption) drew thousands of poor and illiterate Indians to distant Natal.

The European planters and merchants did not relish the idea of Indian Labourers settling down as free citizens at the end of the five year 'indenture'. A tax of £3 was therefore levied on every member of the family of an ex-indentured labourer even though he was merely exercising his right to settle in Natal in terms of the agreement which had governed his emigration from India. It was a crippling tax for the poor wretches whose wages ranged between ten and twelve shillings month.

The Indian merchant who had followed the Indian labourer to Natal had disabilities of his own. No one could trade without a licence, which a European could have for the asking and Indian only after much effort and expense, if at all. And since an educational test in a European language was made a sine quanon for an immigrant from India, except of course the semi-slave indentured labourers who continued to be imported.

The legal disabilities on Indians were bad enough, but the daily humiliations they suffered were worse. They were commonly described as "Asian dirt to be heartily curse, chokeful of vice, that live upon rice and the black vermin". They were not allowed to walk on footpaths. First and second class tickets were not issued to them. If a white passenger objected, they could be unceremoniously bundled out of a railway compartment; they had sometimes to travel on footboards of trains. European hotels would not admit them.

Gandhi realized that what the India urgently needed was a permanent organization to look after their interests. Out of deference to Dadabhai Naoroji, Who had presided over the Indian National Congress in 1893, he called the new organization Natal Indian Congress. He was not conversant with the constitution and functions of the Indian National Congress. This ignorance proved an asset, as he fashioned the Natal Congress in his own way to suit the needs of the Natal Indians, as a live body functioning throughout the year and dedicated not only to politics but to the moral and social uplift of its members. Though it served a community which had very little political experience, it was

not a one-man show. An indefatigable secretary though he was, Gandhi enlisted popular interest and enthusiasm at every step. He made the enrolment of members and the collection of subscriptions into something more than a routine. He employed a gently but irresistible technique for exerting moral pressure on halfhearted supporters. Once in a small village, he sat through the night and refused to take his dinner until at dawn his host, an Indian merchant, agreed to raise his subscription for the Natal Indian Congress from three to six pounds.

In these early years of his politics apprenticeship, Gandhi formulated his own code of conduct for a politician. He did not accept the popular view that in politics one must fight for one's party, right or wrong. He avoided exaggeration and discouraged it in his colleagues. The Natal Indian Congress was not merely an instrument for the defence of political and economic rights for the Indian minority, but also a lever for its internal reform and unity. He did not spare his own people and roundly criticized them for their shortcomings. He was not only the stoutest champion of the Natal Indians, but also their severest critic.

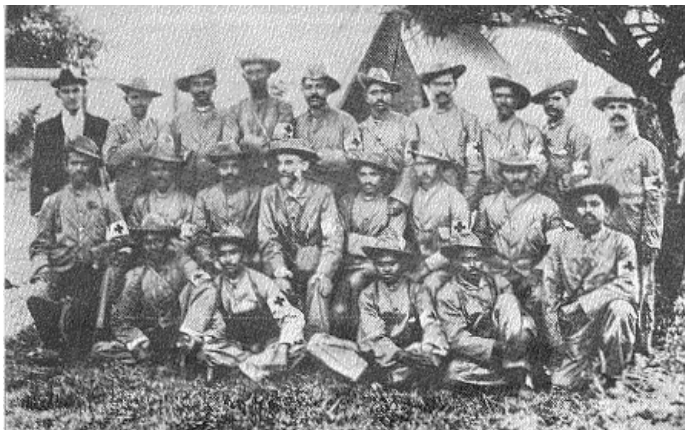
Under his leadership, the Indian community in Natal endeavoured to secure the repeal of discriminatory laws and vexatious regulations and stave off further oppressive measures. Gandhi was in touch with Naoroji and other members of the British committee of the Indian National Congress in London. He sought their advice and support in representing the South African Indian's case to the Secretary of State for India, and British Colonial Secretary.

He was an indefatigable correspondent, bombarding his friends, opponents, newspaper editors and men in authority in three continents, with telegrams, letters and memoranda on the grievances of the India in South Africa. It is a measure of Gandhi's success as a publicist that the Indian National Congress Recorded its protest against the disabilities imposed upon the Indian settlers in South Africa, and the London Times devoted several leading articles to this problem. In 1896 he paid a brief visit to India to canvass public support for the cause he had made his own. On return to Natal from this trip on January 10, 1897, he was nearly lynched in the streets Durban by a mob of Europeans

who had been infuriated by Press reports of Gandhi's advocacy of the Indian cause in his native land.



Founders of the Natal Indian Congress



Gandhi with the Indian Ambulance Corps during the Boer War

On the outbreak of the Boer War in 1899, Gandhi organized an Indian Ambulance Corps of 1100 men. Vere Stent, the editor of the Pretoria News, has left a fascinating pen-portrait of Gandhi in the battlefield: "After a night's work which had shattered men with much bigger frames, I came across Gandhi in the early morning sitting by the roadside-eating a regulation biscuit. Every man in (General) Buller's force was dull and depressed, and damnation was heartily invoked on everything. But Gandhi was stoic in his bearing, cheerful and confident

in his conversation and had a kindly eye."

It must be recognised that Gandhi's ideas on non-violence had not yet fully matured. His argument at this time was that Indian settlers in British colonies, while demanding all the privileges of citizenship must also accept all its obligations, which included participation in the defence of the country of adoption. Gandhi's gesture in raising an ambulance corps on behalf of a minority which was denied elementary rights was a fine one, but it was wasted. The end of the Boer War brought no relief to the Indians. Their grievances remained unredressed. Indeed, new chains were forged for them in the former Boer Colonies.

6. SATYAGRAHA STRUGGLE IN SOUTH AFRICA

It was the passage of the Asiatic Registration Act in Transvaal in 1907 which convinced Gandhi that the method of protest, petition and prayer which he had sedulously pursued for nearly fourteen years had failed. It was at this juncture that he evolved a new technique, which came to be known as Passive Resistance; but as it ruled out both verbal and physical violence, it differed in important respects from the campaign waged on behalf of the suffragettes in England. The principles and techniques of Gandhi's movement were to evolve gradually in the ensuing months and years; its author was a man for whom theory was the handmaid of action.

It is not possible here to give a detailed account of the Satyagraha struggle which Gandhi led in South Africa for seven years. It required great courage, patience and organizing ability to persuade the small Indian community to pit itself against the government. Gandhi had to reckon with the immense political and economic power wielded by the dominant European community, the stubbornness of the local government in South Africa, the reluctance of the British Colonial Office to antagonize the Union Government in Pretoria, the apathy of the Government of India and the limited resources of the small India minority fighting for its survival on an alien soil. Gandhi himself worked under terrific pressure. In January 1908, he was arrested for breach of the registration law and clapped into prison. The following month he was released after an understanding seemed to have been reached with the government. A few days later, he was beaten up and severely injured by a compatriot, who accused him of betraying the Indian cause.

The truce with the Transvaal Government did not last long. The Satyagraha campaign had to be renewed. There were acts of defiance by the Indians and punitive measures by the authorities. Gandhi set up a small colony-Tolstoy Farm- at an 1100 acre site, 21 miles from Johannesburg where his colleagues in the Satyagraha struggle and their families could support a frugal and hard existence- which was in fact harder than life in jail-by-running a cooperative

farm. "We had all become labourers," Gandhi recalled later, "put on laborer's dress, but in the European style, viz., Workman's trousers and shirts which were imitated from prisoner's uniform". Those who went to Johannesburg on private errands had to walk. Gandhi himself, though past forty and living only on fruits, did not think much of walking forty miles a day; he once did 55 miles without feeling any the worse for it. All residents of Tolstoy Farm including children had their quota of manual labour. Those who had known this austere discipline could have little fear of goal.

In 1912, Gokhale, one of the most eminent Indian politicians of the day, paid a visit to South Africa and discussed the problems of the Indian community with General Smuts and other members of the South African Government. He returned to India with the impression that the Asiatic Registration Act and the hated £3 tax on the ex-indentured labourers would be abolished. When this did not happen, and an additional provocation was given by Supreme Court Judgment invalidating marriages of non-Christians in South Africa, Gandhi launched what turned out to be the final phase of his struggle in South Africa.

A party of eleven Indian women, including Gandhi's wife Kasturba, courted imprisonment by crossing from Natal into Transvaal without a permit. The Indian labourers in the coal mines at New Castle went on a sympathetic strike. The mine-owners retaliated by cutting off water and electric connection to the areas where the labourers lived. Gandhi had no option but to take charge of the miners and their families, 2037 men, 127 women and 57 children. He decided to walk them from New Castle to Tolstoy Farm, but was arrested on the way. In Volksrust jail he was made to dig stones and sweep the compound. Later he was transferred to Pretoria jail and lodged in a dark cell ten feet long and seven feet wide, which was lit up at night only to check up on the prisoner. He was denied a bench, refused permission to walk in the cell and subjected to numberless pinpricks. Summoned for evidence in a case, he was marched to the court with hand-cuffs on his hands and manacles on his feet. Meanwhile, the Indian labourers had been put into special trains, and taken back to New Castle mines where they were forced to go underground by mounted military police.

The 'blood and iron' policy of the South African Government stirred India deeply. Gokhale sent two earnest Christian young men, C.F. Andrews and Pearson, to assist Gandhi. Lord Hardinge, the viceroy of India, courageously denounced the high-handed policies of the South African Government. Negotiations began between Gandhi and the South African Government under pressure from Delhi and London. Eventually an agreement was reached. Some of the major points on which the Satyagraha struggle had been waged were conceded to the Indians. The tax on the ex-indentured labourers was abolished; marriages performed according to Indian rites were legalized, and a domicile certificate bearing the holder's thumb-imprint was too a sufficient evidence of the right to enter South Africa.

In 1939, a quarter of a century after the conclusion of the Satyagraha campaign, General Smuts, Gandhi's chief antagonist in South Africa, recalled: 'Gandhi himself received what no doubt he desired a short period of rest and quiet in goal. For him everything went according to plan. For me the defender of law and order—there was the usual trying situation, the odium of carrying out a law which had no strong public support, and finally the discomfiture when the law had to be repealed. For him it was a successful coup.'

In goal Gandhi had prepared a pair of sandals for General Smuts, who wrote that there was no hatred and personal ill-feeling, and when the fight was over, "there was the atmosphere in which decent peace would be concluded".

7. The Making of Mahatma

In 1914 Gandhi left South Africa. He had gone there as a junior counsel of a commercial firm for £105 a year; he had stayed on to command, and then voluntarily to give up a peak practice of £5000 a year. In Bombay as a young lawyer he had a nervous break-down while cross-examining witnesses in a petty civil suit; in the South Africa, he had founded a new political organization with the sure touch of a seasoned politician. The hostility of the European politicians and officials and the helplessness of the Indian merchants and labourers had put him on his mettle. No glittering rewards for him; the perils ranged from professional pinpricks to lynching. Nevertheless, it was a piece of good fortune that he began his professional and political career in South Africa. Dwarfed as he had felt by the great lawyers and leader of India, it is unlikely that he would have developed much initiative in his homeland. When he founded the Natal Indian Congress at the age of twenty-five, he was writing on a tabula rasa: he could try out ideas which in an established political organization would have been laughed out court.

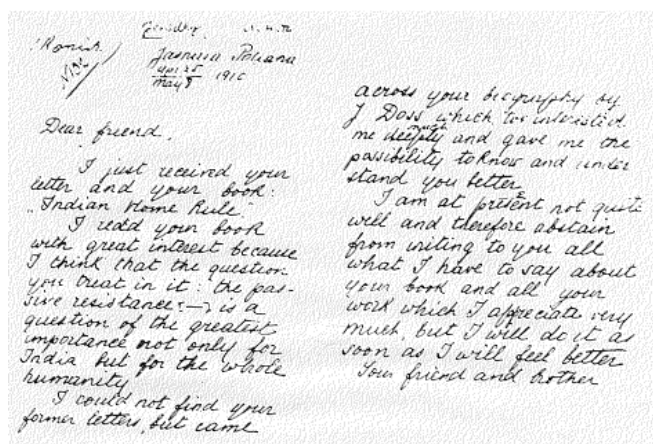
What had truth and vows to do with politics? It was a question which often recurred in Indian politics, and if Gandhi was not confounded by it, it was because, far back in South Africa, he had observed and confirmed the connection. For a man who was no doctrinaire, and whose theory often lagged behind practice, it was a decided advantage that the scene of his early activities should have been one where he was unfettered by political precedents or professionals. Natal and Transvaal were no bigger than some of the smallest provinces of India. The struggle for Indian independence was conducted Gandhi on much larger scale and on much bigger issues, but there were not a few occasions when he derived inspiration from his experience in South Africa.

Not only his politics, but his personality took shape in South Africa. The most formative years of his life had been spent there. His interest in moral and religious questions dated back to his early childhood. but it was only in South

Africa that he had an opportunity of studying them systematically. His Quaker friends in Pretoria failed to convert him to Christianity, but they whetted his innate appetite for religious studies. He delved deep into Christianity and other religions, including his own. In his first year in South Africa he read 'quite eighty books', most of them on religion. One of these was Tolstoy's Kingdom of God is Within You.



Leo Tolstoy: His ideas exercised a profound influence on Gandhi's mind.



Letter dated May 8, 1910 to Gandhi from Tolstoy

Tolstoy became his favourite author and in the coming years he read the Gospels in Brief, What to do? The Slavery of Our Times, How Shall We Escape? Letters to a Hindoo and The First Step. Tolstoy's bold idealism and fearless candour gripped him, his Christian anarchism dissipated the spell of institutional religion. Tolstoy's emphasis on the necessity of an accord between moral principles and daily life confirmed his own strivings for self-improvement.

Few men read so little to so much profit as Gandhi did. A book was for Gandhi not a mere diversion for the hour, it was embodied experience, which had to be accepted or rejected. Ruskin's Unto The Last drove him with compelling urgency from the capital of Natal to the wilderness of Zululand to practise a life of voluntary poverty, and literally to live by the sweat of his brow. It was in Tolstoy's books that we may seek one of the strongest influences on Gandhi. He was, of course, not given to indiscriminate imitation. But in Tolstoy he found a writer whose views

elaborated his own inchoate beliefs. It was not only on the organized or covert violence of the modern state and the right of the citizen to civil disobedience that Gandhi found support in Tolstoy.

There were innumerable subjects, ranging from modern civilization and industrialism to sex and schools, on which he tended to agree with Tolstoy's analysis. There was an exchange of letters between the two which gives an impression of gratitude and reverence by the young Indian on the threshold of his career, and of delightful surprise by the aged Tolstoy. "And so your activity in Transvaal," wrote Tolstoy to Gandhi, "as it seems to us, at the end of the world, is the most essential work, the most important of all the work now being done in the world, and in which not only the nations of the Christian, but of all the world will undoubtedly take part."

While books on Christianity and Islam were easily available in South Africa, Gandhi had to send for books on Hinduism from India. He corresponded with his friend Raychandbhai, whose influence in favour of Hinduism was decisive at a time when Gandhi's Quaker friends believed him to be on the way to baptism. The study of comparative religion, the browsing on theological works, the conversations and correspondence with the learned, brought Gandhi to the conclusion that true religion was more a matter of the heart than of the intellect, and that genuine beliefs were those which were literally lived.

Gandhi's style of life was also transformed during these years. From the Gita which he described as his "spiritual dictionary", he had imbibed the ideal of "non-possession" which set him on the road to voluntary poverty, and of "selfless action" which equipped him with an extraordinary stamina for his public life. He trained himself as a dispenser in a charitable hospital in order to be able to attend on the 'indentured' labourers, the poorest Indians in South Africa. At Phoenix near Durban, and at Tolstoy Farm near Johannesburg, he set up little colonies, where he and those who shared his ideals, could find a haven from the heat and dust of towns, and men's greed and hatred, A pen-portrait of Gandhi as he was in his late thirties has been left by his first biographer Rev. Joseph J. Doke of Johannesburg: "A small, lithe, spare figure stood before me,

and a refined earnest face looked into mine. The skin was dark, the eyes dark, but the smile which lighted up the face, and that direct fearless glance simply took one's heart by storm. I judged him to be some thirty-eight years of age, which proved correct. He spoke English perfectly and was evidently a man of culture...There was a quite assured strength about him, a greatness of heart, a transparent honesty that attracted me at once to the Indian leader. Our Indian friend lives on a higher plane than most men do. His actions, like the actions of Mary of Bethany, are often counted eccentric, and not infrequently misunderstood. Those who do not know him think there is some unworthy motive behind, some Oriental 'slimness' to account for such profound unworldliness. But those who know him well are ashamed of themselves in his presence. Money, I think has no charm for him. His compatriots...wonder at him, grow angry at his strange unselfishness, and love him with the love of pride and trust. He is one of those outstanding characters with whom to walk is a liberal education...whom to know is to love."

8. RETURN TO INDIA

A hero's welcome awaited Gandhi when he landed on January 9, 1915, at the Apollo Bunder in Bombay. Three days later he was honored by the people of Bombay at a magnificent reception in the palatial house of a Bombay magnate Jehangir Petit. The Government of India joined with the people of India in showering honours on Gandhi. He received a "Kaiser-I-Hind" gold medal in the King's birthday honours list of 1915. His association with Gokhale was guarantee enough of his being a safe politician. Of course, he had led an extra-constitutional movement in South Africa, defied laws and filled goals, but the cause for which he had fought appeared as much humanitarian as political, dear to all Indian as and all Englishmen whose sense of humanity had not been blunted by racial arrogance or political expediency. Lord Hardinge's open support of the Satyagraha movement had in any case removed the stigma of rebellion from South Africa's Indian movement.

Gandhi was in no hurry to plunge into politics. His political mentor on the Indian scene was Gokhale. One of the first things Gokhale did was to extract a promise from Gandhi that he would not express himself upon public questions for a year, which was to be a "year of probation". Gokhale was very keen that Gandhi should join the Servants of India Society in Poona. Gandhi was only too willing to fall in with the wishes of Gokhale, but several members of the Society feared that there was too great a gap between the ideals and methods of the Society and those of Gandhi. While the question of his admission as a 'Servant of India' was being debated, Gandhi visited his home towns of Porbandar and Rajkot and went on to Shantiniketan in West Bengal, the cosmopolitan University of the Poet Rabindranath Tagore.



Gandhi and Kasturba on their return to India, January 1915

The trip to Shantiniketan ended abruptly with a telegram from Poona that Gokhale was dead. Gandhi was stunned. He mourned Gokhale by going barefoot for a year, and out of respect for the memory of his mentor, made another effort to seek admission to the Servants of India Society. Finding a sharp division of opinion in the Society on this point, he withdrew his application for admission.

During 1915—the year of probation—Gandhi eschewed politics severely. In his speeches and writings he confined himself to the reform of the individual and the society and avoided the issues which dominated Indian politics. His restraint was partly due to self-imposed silence and partly to the fact that he was still studying conditions in India and making up his mind.

9. GANDHI'S ASHRAM



Sabarmati Ashram, near Ahmedabad, founded by Gandhi in 1917

While his political views were yet unformed, Gandhi's immediate problem was to settle the small band of relatives and associates in the South African struggle who had cast their lot in with him. He decided to found an ashram and locate it at Kochrab, a village near Ahmedabad. Later the ashram was shifted to a more permanent site on the bank of the river Sabarmati.

Gandhi once defined an ashram as "group life lived in a religious spirit". The word "religious" was used here in the widest sense. The ashram did not enforce on its inmates any theology or ritual, but only a few simple rules of personal conduct. Some of the vows administered in the ashram, such as those to truth, non-violence and chastity, were of universal application; others, such as those to eradicate untouchability, to do physical labour and to practise fearlessness were intended to meet the peculiar conditions of the Indian society, which was caste-ridden, discounted dignity of labour and was dominated by an alien government.

All these vows were to be observed in an intelligent and creative way. They were not intended to be mechanical formulae, but as practical aids to moral and spiritual growth. They may appear to be platitudes, but nevertheless they embodied ancient truths which were none the less valid for not having been realized by the common run of mankind in workaday life.

A mere enumeration of the vows is enough to indicate that life in the ashram was austere. It was also busy. Everyone had to put in some manual work. There was a spinning and weaving department, a cowshed and a large farm. Every inmate of the ashram cleaned his own plates and washed his own clothes. There were no servants. The atmosphere was, however, not so much of a monastery but that of a large family under a kindly but exacting patriarch. Gandhi was *Bapu*, the father of the household, Kasturba was *Ba*, the mother. It was a motley group including little children and octogenarians, graduates of American and European universities and Sanskrit scholars, devout whole-hoggers, and thinly disguised sceptics. It was a human laboratory where Gandhi tested his moral and spiritual hypotheses. It was also to him what the family is to most people, a haven from the dust and din of the world. It was a family linked not by blood or property, but by allegiance to common ideals. Gandhi ruled the ashram but his authority in the ashram, as well as in the rest of the country, was moral. When things went wrong or a member of the ashram was guilty of a serious lapse, Gandhi would take the blame upon himself and atone for it by undertaking a fast.

10. WORLD WAR I

When World War I broke out, Gandhi was on the high seas, he was homeward bound, though he hoped to spend a few weeks in England. On August 6, 1914, he landed on English soil and lost no time in calling a meeting of his Indian friends to raise an ambulance unit. The argument that the Empire's crisis was India's chance did not impress him: "I knew the difference of status between an Indian and an Englishman," he wrote later, "but I did not believe that we had been quite reduced to slavery. I felt then that it was more the fault of individual officials than of the British system, and that we could convert them by love. If we would improve our status through the help and cooperation of the British, it was our duty to win their help by standing by them in their hour of need."



Gopal Krishna Gokhale -

Gandhi looked upon him as his Political Guru



Bal Gangadhar Tilak- Another Veteran

Leader of The Indian National Congress

Were it not for an attack of pleurisy, Gandhi may have continued to serve in the ambulance unit he had raised, and his return to India may have been indefinitely delayed.

When he arrived in India he found that nationalist opinion was opposed to unconditional support for the war effort. Only those who were politically backward or flourished on official patronage were for loyalty at all costs. Gandhi did not favour a bargain with the government by offering cooperation at a price and said: "That we have been loyal at a time of stress is no test of

fitness for swaraj (self-government). Loyalty is no merit. It is a necessity of citizenship all the world over."

During the years 1916-18, Gandhi did not take active part in politics. His ideals and methods did not quite fit in with those of the two dominant groups in the Indian National Congress. The Moderates did not like his extra-constitutional methods of Satyagraha, the Extremists did not like his studied tenderness to the British Government during the war. He did not participate in the Home Rule agitation nor in the negotiations which led to the Lucknow pact between the Indian National Congress and the All India Muslim League. He seemed to be isolated from the main currents of Indian politics. It was not Gandhi, but the Annie Besant-Tilak combination which dominated the national scene and impressed the Government. Edwin Montague, a member of the British Cabinet, who visited India in 1917, recorded in his diary that Tilak was "at the moment probably the most powerful man in India." Gandhi seemed to Montague "a social reformer with a real desire to find grievances and to cure them not for any reasons of self advertisement, but to improve the conditions of his fellowmen. He dresses like a coolie, forswears all personal advancement, lives practically on the air and is a pure visionary."

The fact that he was committed to abstention from political agitation during the war did not prevent Gandhi from championing just grievances which could not brook delay. In the summer of 1917, he went to the indigo-growing district of Champaran and took up the cause of the tenants against the European planters. The same year he led the textile workers of Ahmedabad in a strike against the mill-owners. The following year, he agitated for reduction of land tax in Kaira district where crops had suffered from the failure of rains. The local officers were perturbed by Gandhi's activities but the Government was anxious not to precipitate a show-down. Gandhi himself took care to localize these conflicts and sought solutions which secured a modicum of justice to the workers and peasants without creating a national crisis.

Early in 1918, the war seemed to be going badly for the Allies; a German thrust was expected on the western front, and the Viceroy summoned prominent

leaders of Indian opinion to a War Conference in Delhi. Gandhi supported the resolution on recruitment with a single sentence in Hindi: "With a full sense of my responsibility, I beg to support the resolution."

After the War Conference, Gandhi threw himself heart and soul into a recruiting campaign. There was something comic in this votary of non-violence touring the villages of his home province of Gujarat to secure recruits for the British Indian army to fight in the battle fronts of Europe. Not infrequently, unable to get bullock-carts for their journeys in the interior of the Gujarat countryside, Gandhi and his colleagues had to march on foot twenty miles a day. The strain was too much for him and at last a severe attack of dysentery laid him low.

Meanwhile the war came to end, and Gandhi learnt that the Seditious Committee Report had been published and the Government of India proposed to introduce legislation to curb civil liberties. He had been almost alone among Indian leaders who had argued for unconditional support to Britain in her hour of need in the hope of a worthy gesture at the end of the war. He felt that he had received stone for bread. He had done his best to keep out of political agitation during the war. Now he felt an irresistible call to fight a wrong perpetrated in peace.

11. ROWLATT BILLS

The Government of India rushed the Rowlatt Bills, through the Imperial Legislative Council in March 1919 in the teeth of the opposition of all the elected Indian members. Gandhi heard the debate in the Imperial Legislative Council and saw how the eloquent logic of Indian councilors had been wasted on the official benches. "You can wake a man," he wrote later, "only if he is really asleep; no effort that you may make will produce any effect upon him if he is merely pretending sleep". The conviction grew upon him that the Government of India was impervious to popular feeling. A Government which really cared for public opinion would not have enacted a measure -whatever its merits -which had been opposed by every shade of public opinion.



A Newspaper Report of the debate in the Imperial Legislative Council on Rowlatt Bills which precipitated Gandhi's clash with the Government

The constitutional opposition to Rowlatt Bills having proved fruitless, Gandhi felt that recourse must be had to Satyagraha to secure the repeal of the Rowlatt Bills. Already in February 1919, he had drafted and circulated a pledge of resistance to Rowlatt Bills: "In the event of those bills becoming law and until they are withdrawn, we shall refuse civilly to obey these laws and such other laws as a committee to be hereafter appointed may think fit, and further affirm that in this struggle we shall faithfully follow truth and refrain from violence to life, person and property."

Now that the Government had put the first Rowlatt Bill on the statute-book, Gandhi—though he had not yet fully recovered from his illness—picked up the gauntlet. He toured the country to educate the people in the implications of the Satyagraha pledge and founded a new organization, the Satyagraha Sabha. He called for a day of "hartal", when all business was to be suspended and people were to fast and pray as a protest against the hated legislation.

The idea of a "hartal" as a measure of mourning or protest was not a novel one in India, but as a one-day national strike, it was a masterly stroke. The hartal in Delhi was observed owing to a misunderstanding on March 30 instead of April 6, and it was also marred by some rioting. Gandhi promptly condemned the excesses of the mob as well as those of the local officials who, he said, had used a hammer to crush a fly. Tension mounted in the Punjab where the local leaders felt that Gandhi's presence would assist in maintaining peace. But the Government did not let Gandhi reach the Punjab; while he was on his way to Delhi, he was taken out of his compartment at a small station and put in another train bound for Bombay, where he was released,. He would have again left for Delhi, had he not discovered that in his absence disturbances had broken out in the city of Bombay, Ahmedabad, Nadiad and other places in his own province which was the least expected to forget his doctrine of non-violence. He came to the conclusion that he had underrated the latent forces of violence. He decided to retrace his steps, to give up the idea of seeking re-arrest, restrict and finally suspend Satyagraha. He observed a three-day fast to atone for his "Himalayan miscalculation" in launching a mass movement without making sure that the people were ready for it.

Meanwhile, events in the Punjab had moved to a tragic climax. At Amritsar, two local leaders were arrested on April 10. A crowd which had gathered to demand their release ran amuck, attacked two banks and murdered five Europeans. On the day of the Baisakhi festival, Amritsar's Jallianwala Bagh, where a public meeting was held, became the scene of a holocaust. Under the orders of General Dyer, 1,650 rounds were fired in ten minutes; nearly 400 persons were killed, and 1,200 injured. The Governor, Sir Michael O'Dwyer and

his advisers made themselves believe that British rule was in danger. Martial Law was imposed on several districts in the Punjab. A draconian regime followed. The Government appointed a committee of Inquiry headed by Lord Hunter to enquire into the genesis of the Punjab disturbances. The Indian National Congress decided to boycott the Hunter Committee and appointed a non-official committee consisting of eminent lawyers, such as C.R. Das, M. R. Jayakar, Abbas Tyabji and Gandhi. It was as a member of this non-official committee that Gandhi learnt the truth about the martial law regime in the Punjab. He discovered shocking instances of high-handedness based on incontrovertible evidence which he himself scrupulously sifted. The fanciful image of the British Empire as a merciful dispensation of Providence that he had cherished seemed to crumble to the ground.

Gandhi's alienation from the Raj was not yet complete. He argued that the Punjab had been wronged by a few erratic officers and hoped that the Government would, when it knew the truth, make amends. In this hope he was disappointed. The British officers responsible for misrule in the Punjab were not recalled immediately; indeed they were lionized by the European community. The report of the Hunter Committee, when it came out, struck Gandhi as little better than "thinly disguised whitewash". After hearing the debate on the Punjab tragedy in the British Parliament, one Indian correspondent wrote to Gandhi: "Our friends revealed their ignorance; our enemies their insolence."

Reluctantly and almost painfully, Gandhi was driven to the conclusion that the system of government which he had been trying to mend needed to be ended. Gandhi's links with the British Empire would not have snapped so dramatically were it not for another strand in Indian politics, represented by the "Khilafat" movement. Indian Muslims were agitated over the terms Turkey was likely to get from the victorious Allied Powers and over the fate of Muslim holy places in the Middle East. Gandhi feared that the pent-up Muslim frustration might burst the dykes and turn into violent channels. Hence he offered to lead the Muslim community on the Khilafat issue, if it accepted his technique. It is significant

that Gandhi's programme of non-violent non-cooperation with the British Government was endorsed by the leaders of the "Khilafat" movement even before it was approved by the Indian National Congress in September 1920.

12. NONVIOLENT NON-CO-OPERATION

PUBLIC MEETING
AND
BONFIRE OF FOREIGN CLOTHES
Will take place at the Maidan near Elphinstone Mills
Opp. Elphinstone Road Station
On **SUNDAY** the 9th Inst. at 6-30 P. M.
When the Resolution of the Karachi Khilafat Conference and
another Congratulating Ali Brothers and others will be passed.
All are requested to attend in Swadeshi Clothes of Khadi. Those who
have not yet given away their Foreign Clothes are requested to send them
to their respective Ward Congress Committees for inclusion in the
GREAT BONFIRE.

A Poster brought out during the Non-Co-operation Movement

The programme of "non-violent non-cooperation" included the boycott of councils, courts and schools, set up by the British and of all foreign cloth. With some naiveté Gandhi claimed that his movement was not unconstitutional: In his dictionary, constitutional and moral were synonymous terms. The British saw that the success of "non-cooperation" would paralyse their administration. Lord Chelmsford, the Viceroy, tried to kill with ridicule "the most foolish of all foolish schemes", which would "bring ruin to those who had any stake in the country". A number of eminent "moderate" politicians joined official critics in underlining the risks of mass non-cooperation as proposed by Gandhi.

That a political programme had no chance of success without an adequate organization to implement it, Gandhi had realized at the age of twenty-five, when he had founded the Natal Indian Congress to fight for the rights of Indians in Natal. The Indian National Congress, had, therefore, to be refashioned, if it was to prove an efficient instrument of non-violent non-cooperation. Gandhi saw that what the country needed was not a forum for an annual pageant and feast of oratory, but a militant organization in touch with the masses. Under the new constitution, the Congress was given a broad-based pyramidal structure by formation of village, taluka, district and provincial committees, with the All India Congress Committee and the Working Committee at the apex. The Congress was thus reorganized not only on a more representative basis, but in such a way that it could function efficiently between its annual sessions. It

ceased to be a preserve of the upper and middle classes; its doors were opened to the masses in the small towns and villages whose political consciousness Gandhi himself was quickening.

Gandhi was swept to the top of Indian politics in 1919-20 because he had caught the imagination of the people. He was loved and respected as the Mahatma, the great soul; with voluntary poverty, simplicity, humility and saintliness, he seemed a rishi (sage) of old who had stepped from the pages of an ancient epic to bring about the liberation of his country. Nay, to millions he was the incarnation of God. It was not only for his message that people came to him, but for the merit of seeing him. The sacred sight of the Mahatma—his darshan—was almost equivalent to a pilgrimage to holy Banaras. The unthinking adoration of the multitude sometimes made Gandhi feel sick. "The woes of the Mahatma", he wrote, "are known only to the Mahatma". But this adoration was the mainspring from which was drawn the immense influence he exercised over Indian public life.

Gandhi had struck some of the inner chords of Indian humanity; his appeal for courage and sacrifice evoked a ready response because he was himself the epitome of these qualities. It was because he was, to use Churchill's epithet, a "naked fakir", because his life was one of austerity and self-sacrifice that a great emotional bond grew between him and the Indian people. The number of such "fakirs" was to multiply fast. Among those who gave up their lucrative careers and queued up for prison under Gandhi's leadership were Motilal Nehru, Rajendra Prasad, C.R. Das, Vallabhbhai Patel, and C. Rajagopalachari. Life acquired a new meaning for them. Abbas Tyabji, a former Chief Justice of Baroda, wrote from a village that he was feeling twenty years younger. "God?" he exclaimed, "what an experience! I have so much love and affection for the common folk to whom it is now an honour to belong. It is the fakir's dress that has broken down all barriers."

It is of this period that Jawaharlal Nehru has written in his autobiography that the movement absorbed him so wholly that he "gave up all other associations and contacts, old friends, books, even newspapers except in so far as they

dealt with the work in hand... I almost forgot my family, my wife, my daughter."

From the autumn of 1920, the non-cooperation movement gathered momentum. The attitude of the Government at first was one of caution. It was reluctant to launch a drastic repression, as it did not want to alienate moderate Indian opinion. Soon after his arrival in India in April, 1921, Lord Reading, the new Viceroy, met Gandhi. In a private letter to his son, the Viceroy confessed to a feeling of excitement, almost a thrill, in meeting his unusual visitor and described his religious and moral views as admirable, though he found it difficult to understand his practice of them in politics.

Throughout 1921, the tension between the Congress and the Government was steadily mounting. There was no meeting of minds between Gandhi and Reading. The Ali Brothers, the principal leaders of the Khilafat, were arrested in September 1921 on a charge of inciting the army to disloyalty; their offence was repeated by a number of Indian leaders including Gandhi. This was a challenge which was difficult for the Government not to accept. The official optimism that the movement would melt away by internal differences or popular apathy proved to be misplaced. Nearly thirty thousand non-cooperators were arrested. The Government was reluctant to touch Gandhi until a favourable opportunity came.

Indeed as late as December 1921, Lord Reading seemed willing to hold a round table conference with Gandhi and other Indian leaders to reach an understanding and to avoid unseemly scenes during the visit to India of the Prince of Wales. Lord Reading was, however, hardly in a position to make any substantial political concessions. Meanwhile, Gandhi was under increasing pressure from his adherents to launch a civil disobedience campaign. The Ahmedabad Congress in December 1921 invested him with authority to launch a mass movement. Mass civil disobedience was, in the words of Gandhi, "an earthquake, a sort of general upheaval on the political plane—the Government ceases to function... the police stations, the courts, offices, etc., all cease to be Government property and shall be taken charge of by the people." He

proposed to proceed cautiously. His plan was to launch civil disobedience in one district; if it succeeded he proposed to extend it to the adjacent districts, and so on, until the whole of India was liberated. But he gave a clear warning that if violence broke out in any form in any part of the country, the movement would lose its character as a movement of peace, "even as a lute would begin to emit notes of discord the moment a single string snaps."



Bombay Chronicle report on the Ahmedabad Congress, December 1921

A riot which disfigured Bombay during the visit of Prince of Wales in November 1921 had led Gandhi to postpone civil disobedience. Nevertheless, two months later, under growing pressure from his colleagues, he decided to launch a no-tax campaign in Bardoli taluka in Gujarat. He communicated the step he contemplated, with his reasons for it, in a letter to the Viceroy. This was taken by the Government of India as an ultimatum. A head-on collision between the Government on the one hand and the nationalist forces on the other seemed imminent. Gandhi's letter to the Viceroy was dated February 1, 1922. Three days later, there was a clash between a procession and the police at Chauri Chaura, a small village in the United Province, in which the police station was set on fire and 22 policemen were killed.

Gandhi viewed the Chauri Chaura tragedy as a red signal, a warning that the atmosphere in the country was too explosive for a mass movement. He decided to retrace his steps, to cancel the plans for civil disobedience in Bardoli, to suspend the aggressive part of the non-cooperation campaign, and to shift the emphasis to the 'constructive' programme of hand-spinning, communal unity, abolition of untouchability, etc. His action shocked and bewildered his closest

colleagues. Their reaction is best expressed in Romain Rolland's words: "It was dangerous to assemble all the forces of a nation and to hold the nation panting before a prescribed movement, to lift one's arm to give the final command, then at the last moment, let one's arm drop and thrice call a halt just as the formidable machinery has been set in motion. One risks ruining the brakes and paralysing the impetus." The Viceroy, Lord Reading, cheerfully confided to his son that Gandhi "had pretty well run himself to the last ditch as a politician by extraordinary manifestation in the last month or six weeks before his arrest".

13. ARREST AND IMPRISONMENT

The Government seized the opportunity for which it was waiting. On the evening of March 10, 1922, Gandhi was arrested in his ashram. The trial was held before Broomfield, District and Sessions Judge of Ahmedabad. The British judge behaved with great consideration, nodding respectfully to the accused in the dock before taking his seat. He acknowledged that Gandhi was in a different category from any person that he had ever tried or was likely to try. Gandhi made his task easy by pleading guilty. He was sentenced to six years' imprisonment.



Report On the Suspension of Mass Civil-Disobedience after the Chauri Chaura Incident

An observer noted that Gandhi was not only serene but 'festively joyful' during the 100-minute trial. "So far as the sentence is concerned," he told the judge "I certainly consider that it is as light as any judge would inflict on me; and so far as the whole proceedings are concerned, I must say that I could not have expected greater courtesy." He was lodged in the Yeravda prison in Poona. He was not allowed to sleep in the open. He was denied a pillow but he devised one with books and spare clothes. Among the 150 and odd books he read during this term were Henry James' The Varieties of Religious Experience, Bernard Shaw's Man and Superman, Buckle's History of Civilization, Wells' Outline of History, Goethe's Faust and Kipling's Barrack Room Ballads. He kept up his

daily routine of morning and evening prayers, and spinning. His literary and religious studies which had been neglected in the midst of other activities were resumed. There is no doubt that in spite of occasional pinpricks, prison life proved for Gandhi, as Tagore once put it, "arrest cure".

14. REACTION AND RECOVERY



C. R. Das



Motilal Nehru

Soon after Gandhi's imprisonment, signs of a serious rift appeared among his followers. Some prominent Congressmen including Motilal Nehru and C.R. Das declared themselves in favour of lifting the boycott of the councils. They formed the Swaraj Party to contest elections to the provincial and central legislative councils and to "carry the fight into the enemy's camp". Vallabhbhai Patel, Rajagopalachari and others who were opposed to any change in the original non cooperation programme came to be known as 'No-Changers'. During the whole of 1923, Congress politics were extremely fluid. There were a number of resignations from the Working Committee and the All India Congress Committee, bona fides were questioned; 'points of order' were raised, and the constitution of Congress discussed threadbare. In September 1923, at a special session of the Congress, it was decided that the Swarajists should be allowed to put up candidates at the election, which were scheduled in November. The Swarajists had barely two months to fight the elections, but they succeeded in capturing a solid bloc of seats in the Central Legislative Assembly, a substantial representation in provincial legislatures and even a majority in the Central Provinces Council. Motilal Nehru led the party in the Central Assembly, while C. R. Das took up the leadership of the party in Bengal Council.



C. Rajagopalachari



Rajendra Prasad

In February, after he had served only two years in jail, Gandhi, after an operation for appendicitis, was released. He did not, as his faithful No-Changers hoped, throw his weight in their favour. On the contrary, he did everything to avoid a split in the party. He made a series of gestures to the "rebels"—the Swarajists—and let them dominate the political stage. The Viceroy wrote home: "Gandhi is now attached to the tail of Das and Nehru, although they try their utmost to make him and his supporters think that he is one of the heads, if not the head."

If the rift in the Congress ranks on Council entry was one disappointment to Gandhi, after his release from jail, the division between Hindus and Muslims was another and greater. The Hindu-Muslim unity of the heyday of non-cooperation movement was now a mere memory. Trust had given way to distrust,. Apart from the riots which periodically disfigured several towns, there was a new bitterness in politics and in the press. There were not a few who put down the new tension to the non-cooperation movement and its alliance with the 'Khilafat' cause, and blamed Gandhi for having played with the masses and roused them prematurely. "The awakening of the masses," wrote Gandhi, "was a necessary part of the training. I would do nothing to put the people to sleep again." However, he wanted this awakening to be diverted into constructive channels. The two communities had to be educated out of the mental morass into which they had slipped. His doctrine of non-violence held the key not only to the political freedom of the country but also to peace between the communities. Hearts could never be united by breaking heads. A civilized society which had given up violence as a means of settling individual

disputes could also eschew violence for reconciling differences between groups. Disagreements could be resolved by mutual tolerance and compromise.

In September 1924, Gandhi went on a twenty-one day fast to "purify" himself and "to recover the power to react on the people." The fast had a soothing effect, but only for a while; India had not yet seen the last of communal wrangles. The problem had really been reduced to the struggle for fruits of political power between the professional classes of the two communities. It was a scramble for crumbs which the British offered to political India. Gandhi had declared that "majorities must set the example of self-sacrifice." The blank cheque which he later offered to the Muslims was ridiculed by them and resented by the Hindus, but it epitomized his approach to this squabble for seats in legislatures and jobs under the Government. Unfortunately in the course of the negotiations, the Hindus tended to deal with Muslims as the British Government dealt with nationalist India: they made concessions but it was often a case of too little and too late.

During the next three years, while national politics were dominated by communal issues and controversies in legislatures, Gandhi retired from the political scene; to be precise, he retired only from the political controversies of the day to devote his time to the less spectacular but more important task of nation-building "from the bottom up". He toured the country extensively from one end to the other, using every mode of transport from railway trains to bullock-carts. He exhorted the people to shake off the age-old social evils such as child-marriage and untouchability, and to ply the spinning wheel. Primarily advocated as a solution of the chronic under-employment in the villages, the spinning-wheel in Gandhi's hands became something more than a simple tool of a cottage industry. In his efforts to "sell" the spinning wheel to the people, he romanticized it. He put in forward not only as a panacea for economic ills but also for national unity and freedom. It became a symbol of defiance of foreign rule; Khadi, the cloth made from yarn spun on the spinning wheel, became the nationalist garment, the 'livery of freedom', as Jawaharlal Nehru once picturesquely described it.



Subhash Chandra Bose

By 1929 Indian politics began to recover from the malaise which had affected them after the collapse of the non-cooperation movement seven years before. This recovery was assisted by discontent among industrial workers, peasants and middle class youth. The trade unions became militant bodies. The peasantry was in distress because of an unprecedented economic depression; there was a dramatic no-tax campaign in Bardoli in Gujarat, Gandhi's home province, under his able lieutenant, Vallabhbhai Patel. The Swaraj Party which had professed an alternative to the Gandhian programme was deeply disillusioned by 1928; dissensions and defections had emasculated it.

In November 1927, the British Government announced the appointment of a royal Commission headed by Sir John Simon, to report on the working of the Constitutional reforms of 1919, and on the possibilities of further advance towards self-government. The commission included representatives of the British political parties, but no Indian. The "all-white" commission came to be looked upon in India as an inquisition by foreigners into India's fitness for self-government. The Indian National Congress decided to boycott the commission "at every stage and in every form". Even moderate and Muslim politicians, whose cooperation the Government had taken for granted, were unanimous in denouncing the commission.

A challenge from Birkenhead, the Conservative Secretary of State, stung Indian leaders to seek an agreed solution of the constitutional problem. An All-Party committee headed by Motilal Nehru drafted a constitution for a self-governing India. The "Nehru Report" adopted Dominion Status as the basis of its recommendations: it represented the lowest measure of agreement among the Congress, the "Liberals" and the other political groups. The younger wing of the Congress led by Subhash Chandra Bose, the brilliant young leader from Bengal, and Motilal Nehru's own son, Jawaharlal, repudiated Dominion Status. A rift was avoided at the Calcutta Congress in December 1928 by a compromise

formula framed by Gandhi. A resolution was passed endorsing the Nehru Report on the condition that, if by December 31, 1929, it was not accepted by the Government, the Congress would fight for complete independence, if necessary, by resorting to non-violent non-cooperation.

The Calcutta Congress opened the way for Gandhi's return to politics. If the British Government did not concede that demand of the Congress—and there was little prospect of their doing so—the Congress was committed to a non-cooperation movement and it was obvious to all that Gandhi alone could conduct it. In May 1929, as the result of the British General Election, a Labour Government headed by Ramsay Mac Donald came into office. The Viceroy, Lord Irwin, visited England and, on return to India towards the end of October 1929, issued a statement that it "is implied in the declaration of 1917 that the natural issue of India's constitutional progress, as there contemplated, is the attainment of Dominion Status". The statement had a favourable reception in India, but a storm broke over Irwin and the Labour Government in England. The British press and Parliament subjected the announcement to a protracted postmortem. The official spokesmen were on the defensive, explained away the statement, and asserted that there had been no radical departure from past policy. The breach between the Government and the Congress thus remained unhealed. No more success attended an eleventh-hour effort at an understanding between Gandhi and the Viceroy through an interview arranged at Delhi on December 23, just before the Congress session at Lahore.

15. DECLARATION OF COMPLETE INDEPENDENCE

The Lahore session proved a momentous one. At Gandhi's instance, the All India Congress Committee had elected Jawaharlal Nehru as its president. The Congress, instinct with new hope and energy, needed a young man at the helm. The forty-year-old Jawaharlal whom Gandhi described "pure as crystal... truthful beyond suspicion... a knight sans peur et sans reproche" was to be in fullness of time the Mahatma's political heir. There was a bond of deep affection between the two men in spite of the twenty years and widely differing intellectual backgrounds which separated them.

The year of grace which the Calcutta Congress had granted had drawn to a close. Dominion Status had not been conceded; the offer of the minimum national demand embodied in the Nehru Report lapsed. At midnight on December 31, 1929, as the New Year dawned, the Indian National Congress unfurled the flag of independence on the bank of the river Ravi. The Congress called upon its members in central and provincial legislatures to resign their seats and authorized the launching of a civil disobedience campaign.

In January 1930, Gandhi wrote that he was "furiously thinking night and day" The first step he took was to call for the celebration of an "Independence Day" on January 26. On that day, in the towns and villages of India, hundreds of thousands of people took a pledge that "it was a crime against man and God to submit to British rule." Gandhi was encouraged by the latent enthusiasm in the country revealed by the observance of the Independence Day; he felt the country was ripe for a mass movement. He suggested the inauguration of the movement with the breach of Salt Laws. The salt tax, though relatively light in incidence, hit the poorest in the land. But salt did not quite seem to fit into the plan of a national struggle for liberation. And when Gandhi announced that he would walk the 241 miles from his ashram in Ahmedabad to Dandi on the Arabian Sea, the first impulse of the Government, as of the Congress intellectual, was to ridicule the "kindergarten stage of political revolution", and

to laugh away the idea that the King-Emperor could be unseated by boiling sea-water in a kettle.



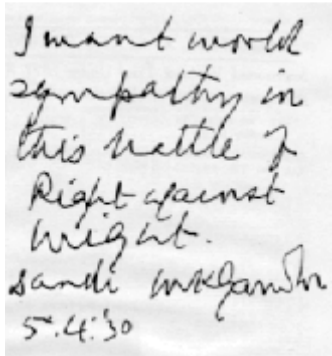
Gandhi and Nehru



Newspaper report on the commencement of Dandi March 12, 1930

Events were to show that those who had scoffed at Salt Satyagraha and failed to see any connection between salt and swaraj (independence) had underrated Gandhi's knack for organizing the Indian masses for corporate action. Gandhi was arrested on May 5. Just before his arrest he had planned a more "aggressive" phase of his non-violent rebellion by raiding and taking possession of the salt depots at Dharasana. The raid took place a fortnight after Gandhi's arrest. There were 2500 volunteers. Before they advanced, Sarojini Naidu, the poetess, led them in prayer and appealed to them to be true to Gandhi's teaching and to abstain from violence. Round the depot, a barrier of barbed wire had been erected and a ditch dug. As the first column of volunteers advanced, police officers ordered them to disperse. The volunteers advanced in silence even though scores of policemen fell on them and rained blows upon them. Not one man so much as raised his arm to fend off the blows. Webb Miller, an American correspondent, who witnessed the scene, wrote: "In eighteen years of reporting in twenty two countries, I have never witnessed such harrowing scenes as at Dharasana. Sometimes the scenes were so painful that I had to turn away momentarily. One surprising feature was the discipline

of volunteers. It seemed they were thoroughly imbued with Gandhi's non-violent creed."



A message from Gandhi



Gandhi and fellow satyagrahis on the march.



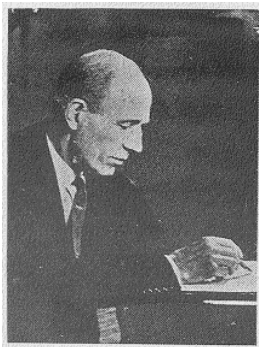
Newspaper report of Gandhi's arrest and imprisonment without trial, May 5, 1930

The Satyagraha campaign was extended by the Congress to include breach of salt as well as forest laws, the non-payment of taxes and the boycott of foreign cloth, banks and shipping. The Government replied by issuing "ordinances" which conferred extraordinary powers on the executive authority for arrest and prosecution of Congress workers.

16. GANDHI-IRWIN PACT

The Viceroy, Lord Irwin, was at this time directing the sternest repression which Indian nationalism had known, but he did not really relish the role. The British civil service and the commercial community were in favour of even harsher measures. But Premier Ramsay MacDonald and Secretary of State Benn were eager for peace, if they could secure it without weakening the position of the Labour Government; they wanted to make a success of the Round Table Conference and they knew that this body without the presence of Gandhi and the Congress could not carry much weight. In January 1931, at the closing session of the Round Table Conference, Ramsay MacDonald went so far as to express the hope that the Congress would be represented at the next session. The Viceroy took the hint and promptly ordered the unconditional release of Gandhi and all members of the Congress Working Committee. To this gesture Gandhi responded by agreeing to meet the Viceroy.

"The Two Mahatmas" -as Sarojini Naidu described Gandhi and Irwin—had eight meetings which lasted for a total of 24 hours. Gandhi was impressed by Irwin's sincerity. The terms of the "Gandhi-Irwin Pact" fell manifestly short of those which Gandhi had prescribed as the minimum for a truce. Some of his colleagues considered the Gandhi-Irwin Pact a clever manoeuvre, and suspected that Irwin had led the Mahatma upon the garden path of the Viceroy's House.



Lord Irwin; and cartoonist's view of the Gandhi-Irwin parleys, February-March 1931

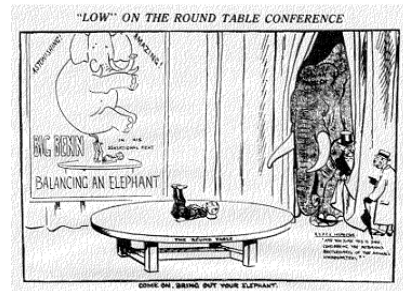
On the other hand, it is fair to record that British officials in India, and Tory politicians in England, were outraged by the idea of a pact with a party whose avowed purpose was the destruction of the British Raj. Winston Churchill publicly expressed his disgust "at the nauseating and humiliating spectacle of this one-time Inner Temple lawyer, now seditious fakir, striding half-naked up the steps of the Viceroy's palace, there to negotiate and parley on equal terms with the representative of the King Emperor".

Gandhi's motives in concluding a pact with the Viceroy can be best understood in terms of his technique. The Satyagraha movements were commonly described as "struggles", "rebellions" and "wars without violence". Owing, however, to the common connotation of these words, they seemed to lay a disproportionate emphasis on the negative aspect of the movements, namely, opposition and conflict. The object of Satyagraha was, however, not to achieve the physical elimination or moral breakdown of an adversary, but, through suffering at his hands, to initiate those psychological processes which could make it possible for minds and hearts to meet. In such a struggle a compromise with an opponent was neither heresy nor treason, but a natural and necessary step. And if it turned out that the compromise was premature and the adversary was unrepentant, there was nothing to prevent the Satyagrahi from returning to non-violent battle.

17. ROUND TABLE CONFERENCE



Gandhi at the Round Table Conference
in London



David Low on the Round Table
Conference, 1931

On August 29, 1931, Gandhi sailed for England in the SS Rajputana to attend the Second Round Table Conference. He went as the sole representative of the Indian National Congress. All the delegates were nominees of the British Government; they had a sprinkling of able individuals, but most of them were drawn from the princely order, the landlords, the titled gentry and the leaders of communal groups and vested interests.

What with its composition and what with its procedure, which the British Government controlled, the conference side-tracked its energies into secondary issues and particularly the communal problem. Gandhi was prepared to give a "blank cheque" to Muslims and other minorities to remove their legitimate fears, provided they were willing to press the national demand for freedom. Most of the Hindu delegates were not ready for this gesture, and the Muslim nationalists were not represented at the conference.



Gandhi in Lancashire, September 1931

Gandhi pleaded for an honourable and equal partnership between Britain and India, held not by force but "by the silken cord of love" He found the odds against him. There was a financial crisis and a change of government in Britain; in the new Ministry, the Conservatives were heavily represented. The British public was preoccupied with domestic issues; for it, the financial crisis was a more urgent issue than the niceties of an Indian Constitution. Inevitably, even if imperceptibly, there was a change in emphasis. Sir Samuel Hoare, the new Secretary of State, told Gandhi that he sincerely believed that Indians were unfit for complete self-government.

18. IN LONDON

Meanwhile Gandhi was, as he put it, "doing the real round table work, getting to know the people of England". He had accepted Muriel Lester's invitation to stay in Kingsley Hall in the East end, in order to be "among the same sort of people to whom I have given my life" Every morning the light appeared in his room at four for the morning prayer. He had his morning walk in the main streets of the East End; he visited his neighbours in Bow; he made friends with the children. "Uncle Gandhi" became a popular figure. He explained to the children why he had chosen to stay in the East End and why he wore his meagre dress. He advised them to return good for evil. There was an interesting sequel to this advice, when the father of a four-year-old girl told the Mahatma that he had a bone to pick with him. "And what is it?" asked Gandhi. "Well my little Jane comes every morning to me, hits me and wakes me up and says: Now, don't you hit back, for Gandhi told us not to hit back". On October 2, Gandhi's birth day, the children presented him with 'two woolly dogs, three pink birthday candles, a tin plate, a blue pencil and some jelly sweets'—gifts which he especially treasured and took to India.



Gandhi with Romain Rolland in Switzerland on his way back to India

One of the most pleasant surprises of the tour was the courtesy and even affection Gandhi received from the cotton operatives of Lancashire, which had been hit the hardest by the boycott of British goods in India. He listened with obvious attention and sympathy to the tale of woe of those who were jobless. Many of them saw the background of the boycott which he had sponsored, when he told them: "You have three million unemployed, but we have 200

million unemployed for half the year. Your average unemployment dole is seventy shillings. Our average income is 7s. 6d. a month."

Gandhi's homely logic and transparent sincerity left an indelible impression on some of those whom he met. They formed clearer impressions of him than the loin cloth and goat's milk version with which the popular press regaled them. While his opinions might appear utopian or revolutionary, he could no longer be dismissed as "humbug", the appellation with which Truth had heralded his arrival in England.

Meanwhile, the news from India had been far from reassuring. The compromise which had been patched up between the Congress and the Government before Gandhi's departure for England had virtually broken down. Gandhi was anxious to return home; he declined invitations to prolong his itinerary in Europe and to visit America, but he decided to spend a few days in Switzerland with his biographer, Romain Rolland. In Rome, where he spent a day, he walked through the Vatican galleries; in the Sistine Chapel he was spell-bound: "I saw a figure of Christ there. It was wonderful. I could not tear myself away. The tears sprang to my eyes as I gazed."

19. RESUMPTION OF STRUGGLE

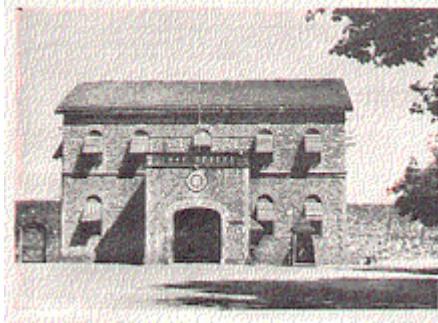
On December 28, 1931, Gandhi landed at Bombay. Within a week he was in jail and civil disobedience was resumed; the Indian National Congress was outlawed and the Gandhi-Irwin Pact had gone to pieces.

While Gandhi was on the high seas, the arrests of Jawaharlal Nehru and Abdul Ghaffar Khan, two of his ablest lieutenants, had created a crisis. Most of the British officers in India had really been unhappy at the rapprochement which Irwin had attempted with Gandhi; they won over his successor Lord Willingdon to a tougher policy towards the Mahatma. Gandhi sought an interview with the Viceroy to smooth away difficulties but was rebuffed. The Government of India was not in a conciliatory mood. Indeed it struck with lightning speed to deprive the Indian National Congress of its leaders, organization and resources. Despite the suddenness and severity of the repression, 61,551 persons came forward and were convicted for civil disobedience in the first nine months of the movement in 1932; this figure was a little higher than that of the earlier campaign in 1930-31.

20. CAMPAIGN AGAINST UNTOUCHABILITY

A new twist to the civil disobedience movement came in September 1932 when Gandhi, who was in Yeravda Jail, went on a fast as a protest against the segregation of the so-called "untouchables" in the electoral arrangement planned for the new Indian constitution. Uncharitable critics described the fast as a form of coercion, a political blackmail. Gandhi was aware that his fast did exercise a moral pressure, but the pressure was directed not against those who disagreed with him, but against those who loved him and believed in him. He did not expect his critics to react in the same way as his friends and co-workers, but if his self-crucifixion could demonstrate his sincerity to them, the battle would be more than half-won. He sought to prick the conscience of the people and to convey to them something of his own inner anguish at a monstrous social tyranny. The fast dramatized the issues at stake; ostensibly it suppressed reason, but in fact it was designed to free reason from that mixture of inertia and prejudice which had permitted the evil of untouchability, which condemned millions of Hindus to humiliation, discrimination and hardship.

The news that Gandhi was about to fast shook India from one end to the other. September 20, 1932, when the fast began, was observed as a day of fasting and prayer. At Shantiniketan, poet Tagore, dressed in black, spoke to a large gathering on the significance of the fast and the urgency of fighting an age-old evil. There was a spontaneous upsurge of feeling; temples, wells and public places were thrown open to the "untouchables". A number of Hindu leaders met the representatives of the untouchables; an alternative electoral arrangement was agreed upon, and received the approval of the British Government before Gandhi broke his fast.



Yeravada Jail, where Gandhi undertook
'untouchability' fast in September 1932

More important than the new electoral arrangement was the emotional catharsis through which the Hindu community had passed. The fast was intended by Gandhi "to sting the conscience of the Hindu community into right religious action". The scrapping of separate electorates was only the beginning of the end of untouchability. Under Gandhi's inspiration, while he was still in prison, a new organization, Harijan Sevak Sangh was founded to combat untouchability and a new weekly paper, the Harijan, was started. Harijan means "children of God"; it was Gandhi's name for the "untouchables".

After his release Gandhi devoted himself almost wholly to the campaign against untouchability. On November 7, 1933, he embarked on a country-wide tour which covered 12,500 miles and lasted for nine months. The tour evoked great enthusiasm for the breaking down of the barriers which divided the untouchables from the rest of the Hindu community, but it also provoked the militancy of the orthodox Hindus. On June 25, while Gandhi was on his way to the municipal hall in Poona, a bomb was thrown at his party. Seven persons were injured, but Gandhi was unhurt. He expressed his "deep pity" for the unknown thrower of the bomb. "I am not aching for martyrdom," he said, "but if it comes in my way in the prosecution of what I consider to be the supreme duty in defence of the faith I hold in common with millions of Hindus, I shall have well earned it."

Gandhi's fast had aroused public enthusiasm, but diverted it from political to social issues. In May 1933, he suspended civil disobedience for six weeks. He revived it later, but confined it to himself. A year later he discontinued it: this

was a recognition of the fact that the country was fatigued and in no mood to continue a campaign of defiance. These decisions disconcerted many of his adherents, who did not relish his moral and religious approach to political issues, and chafed at his self-imposed restraints. Gandhi sensed the critical mood in the Congress party and in October 1934, announced his retirement from it. For the next three years, not politics but village economics was his dominant interest.

21. A NEW DEAL FOR THE VILLAGE

Ever since Gandhi had entered Indian public life in 1915, he had been pleading for a new deal for the village. The acute pressure on land and the absence of supplementary industries had caused chronic unemployment and under-employment among the peasants whose appalling poverty never ceased to weigh upon Gandhi's mind. His advocacy of the spinning wheel really derived from its immediate value as a palliative. Since eighty-five per cent of the population of India lived in villages, their economic and social resuscitation seemed to Gandhi to be a sine qua non for freedom from foreign rule. The growing gap in economic standards and social amenities between the village and the town had to be bridged. This could best be done by volunteers from the towns who spread themselves in the countryside to help revive dead or dying village industries, and to improve standards of nutrition, education and sanitation.

It was not Gandhi's habit to preach what he did not practise; he decided to settle in a village. His choice fell upon Segaon which was situated near Wardha. It had a population of six hundred, and lacked such bare amenities as a pucca road, a shop and a post office. Here, on land owned by his friend and disciple Jamnalal Bajaj, Gandhi occupied a one-room hut. Those who came to see him during the rains had to wade through ankle-deep mud. The climate was inhospitable; there was not an inhabitant of this village who had not suffered from dysentery or malaria. Gandhi himself fell sick but was resolved not to leave Segaon. He hoped he would draw his team for village uplift from Segaon itself, but could not prevent his disciples, old and new, from collecting around him. When Dr. John Mott interviewed him in 1937, Gandhi's was the solitary hut; before long a colony of mud and bamboo grew up. Among its residents were Prof. Bhansali, who had roamed in forests naked and with sealed lips, subsisting on neem leaves; Maurice Frydman, a Pole, who became a convert to the Gandhian of a handicraft civilization based on non-violence; a Sanskrit scholar who was a leper and was housed next to Gandhi's hut so that he could

tend him; a Japanese monk who (in the words of Mahadev Desai, Gandhi's Secretary) worked like a horse and lived like a hermit.

Sevagram (as Segacon came to be known) was not planned as an ashram. Gandhi never conceived it as such and did not impose any formal discipline upon it. It became a centre of the Gandhian scheme of village welfare. A number of institutions grew up in and around it to take up the various strands of economic and social uplift. The All India Village Industries Association supported and developed such industries as could easily be fostered, required little capital and did not need help from outside the village. The Association set up a school for training village workers and published its own periodical, the Gram Udyog Patrika. There were other organizations such as the Goseva Sangh, which sought to improve the condition and breed of the Hindustani Talimi Sangh, which experimented in Gandhi's ideas on education.

The educational system in India had always struck Gandhi as inadequate and wasteful. The vast majority of the population could not get the rudiments of education, but even those who went to village primary schools soon unlearned what was taught to them because it had little to do with their daily lives and environment. Gandhi suggested that elementary education suited to the Indian village could best be imparted through handicrafts so as to substitute a coordinated training in the use of the hand and the eye for a notoriously bookish and volatile learning. His ideas found an expression in the scheme of "Basic Education" which stirred the stagnant pools of the Indian educational system and stimulated administrators and educationists along new lines.

Work in the village was an arduous and slow affair; it was plodder's work, as Gandhi once put it. It did not earn banner headlines in the press and did not seem to embarrass the Government. Many of Gandhi's colleagues did not see how this innocuous activity could help India in advancing to the real goal—that of political freedom. On the other hand, the first official reaction to Gandhi's village uplift work was to consider it a well-laid plan to spread sedition among the rural masses; the government of India warned the provincial governments to be on their guard and to start counter-propaganda in the villages.

22. THE NEW CONSTITUTION

Indian politics were in the doldrums during the years 1934-35, but as the time came for elections to the provincial legislatures in accordance with the Act of 1935, political excitement rose to a high pitch. From the point of view of the Indian National Congress, the new Constitution was the inadequate and unsatisfactory. The scheme of the Indian Federation gave a sizeable representation to the princely states, and since their representatives, because of the absence of elective bodies, were likely to be the nominees of the princes, (who in turn were dependant for their very existence on the British Government) Indian nationalists viewed the new Constitution with a feeling bordering on dismay. In the provinces a wider field was permitted to Ministers responsible to elected legislatures, but even here the Governors had been invested with over-riding and preventive authority.

Because of these limitations, there was a large and vocal section in the Congress led by Jawaharlal Nehru which did not want to have anything to do with the new Constitution. Nevertheless, the Congress decided to contest the elections, which were held early in 1937. It acquitted itself very well indeed, and was in a position to form ministries in six out of eleven provinces. A section of the Congress even favoured acceptance of office and its hands were strengthened by the moral support it received from Gandhi. The Mahatma felt that with all its deficiencies, the new Constitution could promote the programme of village uplift. He saw no reason why Congress ministries in the provinces could not encourage village industries, introduce prohibition, reduce the burden on the peasantry, promote the use of hand-spun cloth, extend education and combat untouchability.

The acceptance of office by the Congress party was facilitated by a statement issued by the Viceroy, Lord Linlithgow, which did not change the legal position or the powers of the Governors, but breathed a spirit of conciliation to which the Congress responded by deciding to form ministries.

For a political party which had remained so long in opposition, to get into the seat of power was a novel, and even a hazardous experience. The left wing in the Congress, which opposed formation of ministries, had in fact stressed the possibilities of internal dissensions and scramble for loaves and fishes among Congressmen. Gandhi found himself inundated with requests for jobs and minister ships; he expressed his surprise and distress at this trend, because to him the legislatures and ministerships were only one and a limited medium of serving the country. He felt that for the majority of Congressmen the work lay in the villages in the constructive fields of social and economic reform. The caucus system, the struggle for power and pressure politics, which are accepted as part of political democracy, were repellant to Gandhi. As an 'experienced servant and general', he deprecated the struggle for "the spoils of office", and the dissipation of energy in factional rivalries.

23. HINDU-MUSLIM ANTOGONISM

During these years Gandhi was also much distressed by the rise in communal tension. To some extent this increased tension was attributable to the elections to the legislatures. The religious minorities were allowed to elect their representatives only from a purely communal electorate, from which adherents of all other religions were excluded. It was only natural that Muslim candidates should raise religious issues which could make the widest and easiest appeal to a largely illiterate electorate. It so happened that from 1937 onwards it suited the All India Muslim League, under the leadership of M.A. Jinnah, to whip up religious feeling. The League had done badly in the elections, but it sought to retrieve its position by launching a tirade against the Congress and Gandhi. Gandhi was alleged to be 'Enemy Number One' of the Muslim community and the British Governors were accused of conniving at a systematic oppression of the Muslim minority by the Hindus. Vague and exaggerated accusations were made about "atrocities" on the Muslims.

The Muslim League's antagonism to the Congress acquired a progressively sharper edge. Jinnah began even to question the suitability of a democratic system of government for India, in 1940 came out with the theory that Hindus and Muslims were two separate nations and the Muslim nation needed a 'homeland' of its own in the north-west and north-east of the sub-continent.

Gandhi's reaction to the two-nation theory and the demand for Pakistan was one of bewilderment, almost of incredulity. Was it the function of religion to separate men or to unite them? He described the two-nation theory as an "untruth"; in his dictionary there was no stronger word. He discussed the attributes of nationality. A change of religion did not change nationality; the religious divisions did not coincide with cultural differences. A Bengali Muslim, He wrote, "speaks the same tongue that a Bengali Hindu does, eats the same food, has the same amusements as his Hindu neighbour. They dress alike. His (Jinnah's) name could be that of any Hindu. When I first met him, I did not know he was a Muslim."

To divide India was to undo the centuries of work done by Hindus and Muslims. Gandhi's soul rebelled against the idea that Hinduism and Islam represented antagonistic cultures and doctrines, and that eighty million of Muslims had really nothing in common with their Hindu neighbours. And even if there were religious and cultural differences, what clash of interests could there be on such matters as revenue, industry, sanitation or justice? The differences could only be in religious usage and observances with which a secular state should have no concern.

24. NON-VIOLENCE IN VIOLENT WORLD

The separatist ideology was to receive a fillip from the outbreak of the Second by Nehru in international affairs, Gandhi sympathized with the victims of Fascist and Nazi aggression. Gandhi's own life had been one long struggle against the forces of violence. For more than thirty years he had been experimenting with technique-Satyagraha-which, while eschewing violence, was designed to resolve conflicts.

Gandhi's ideas on non-violence had matured over many years. In the Boer War and the First World War he had raised ambulance units and enlisted soldiers for the British Empire. The fact that he not handled a gun himself did not, in his opinion, make a material difference. As he confessed later: "There is no defence for my conduct only in the scales of non-violence (ahimsa). I draw no distinction between those who wield 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. But even after introspection during all these years, I feel that in the circumstances in which I found myself I was bound to adopt the course I did."



Non-violence in a violent world : A Cartoonist's view

The Indians whom Gandhi led in the battle fronts of the Boer War or exhorted to join the British Indian army in 1914-18 did not believe in non-violence; it was not repugnance to violence, but indifference or cowardice which had kept them

from bearing arms. Believing as he did in those days in the British Empire, as a benign institution, Gandhi also thought that as citizens of the Empire, Indians had duties as well as rights; one of these duties was to participate in the defence of the Empire.

In the twenty years which spanned the First and Second World Wars, Gandhi's faith in the British Empire had been irrevocably shaken. At the same time his own belief in the power of non-violence had grown. As the threat of war grew and the forces of violence gathered momentum in the late thirties, he felt more strongly than ever that at that moment of crisis in world history, he had a message for India and India had a message for the bewildered humanity. Through the pages of Harijan, his weekly paper, he expounded the non-violent approach to military aggression and political tyranny. He advised the weaker nations to defend themselves not by seeking protection from better armed states, but by non-violent resistance to the aggressor. A non-violent Abyssinia, he explained, needed no arms and succour from the League of Nations; if every Abyssinian man, woman and child refused cooperation, willing or forced, with the Italians, the aggressor would have to walk over the dead bodies of their victims and to occupy the country without the people.

It may be argued that Gandhi was making a heavy overdraft upon human endurance. It required supreme courage for a whole people to die to the last man, woman and child, rather than surrender to the enemy. Gandhi's non-violent resistance was thus not a soft doctrine—a convenient refuge from a dangerous situation. Nor was it an offer on a silver platter to the dictators of what they plotted to wrest by force. Those who offered non-violent resistance had to be prepared for the extreme sacrifice.

25. CRIPPS MISSION

Gandhi was thus firmly anchored to pacifism when the war broke out in 1939, but many of his closest colleagues and the rank and file in the Indian National Congress could not bring themselves to accept the feasibility of defending the country against aggression without resort to arms. Twice during the war—after the fall of France in 1940, and the collapse of the British position in South East Asia in 1941—when there was a possibility of a rapprochement between the Congress and the Government for a united war effort, Gandhi stepped aside rather than be a party to organized violence. The rapprochement did not come. The only serious British effort for a compromise was made in the Spring of 1942 with the dispatch of the Cripps Mission to India; it proved abortive.

For nearly two and a half years, Gandhi had resisted pressure from a section of his following for the launching of a mass movement. It became clear that the British Government first under Chamberlain, and then under Churchill, was reluctant to assure Indian freedom in the future, or to offer a practical token of it in the present. Gandhi had endeavoured to restrain the radical wing of the Congress party, and diverted its discontent into "individual Satyagraha", a subdued form of civil resistance confined to "selected individuals"



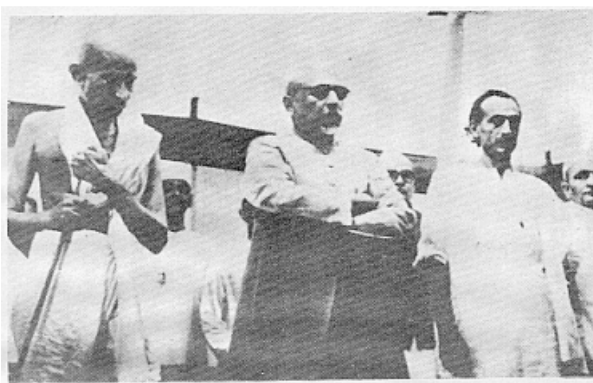
Gandhi with Sir Stafford Cripps, March 1942

After the failure of the Cripps Mission, Gandhi noted with concern that in the face of grave peril posed by the Japanese advance in South East Asia, the mood

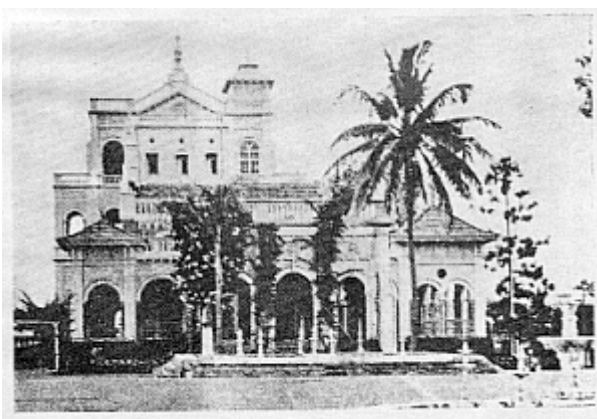
of the people of India was not one of resolute defiance, but of panic, frustration and helplessness. If India was not to go the way of Malaya and Burma, something had to be done, and done quickly. He came to the conclusion that only an immediate declaration of Indian independence by the British Government could give the people of India a stake in the defence of their country.

26. QUIT INDIA

The "Quit India" resolution passed by the All-India Congress Committee brought it into a head-on collision with the Government in August 1942. The Viceroy, with the strong backing of the British Cabinet, struck hard. Gandhi, Nehru and almost all the Congress leaders were imprisoned; the severest repression was launched against the Congress—its funds were frozen offices sealed and publicity media plugged. This "blitzkrieg" had violent repercussions. In the last speech before the All-India Congress Committee before his arrest, Gandhi had made non-violence the basic premise of the struggle which he proposed to launch; this advice remained unheeded between the frenzy of the people and the hammer blows of the Government. In several parts of the country, in Bihar, in U. P., in Bengal and in Bombay, the fury of the people burst the dykes and turned on the instruments and symbols of British rule. "The Congress Party", Churchill told the House of Commons, "has now abandoned the policy which Mr. Gandhi had so long inculcated in theory and has come into the open as a revolutionary movement." In India and abroad official propaganda attributed violence to a plot carefully laid by Congress leaders. Gandhi was even accused of being pro-Axis, and assisting a Japanese conquest of India. Official propaganda held the field for a time, but not for long. "It is sheer nonsense," Smuts, Gandhi's old antagonist in South Africa, told a press conference in London in November 1942, "to talk of Mahatma Gandhi as a fifth columnist. He is a great man. He is one of the great men of the world."



Gandhi with Azad and Kripalani at the



historic "Quit India" meeting of the All India Congress Committee, August 1942

The Aga Khan Palace near Poona, where Gandhi was interned from August 1942 to May 1944

Mahadev Desai, who had served as Gandhi's secretary for 25 years, died of a heart attack within a week of his imprisonment and Kasturba, the Mahatma's wife, passed away in 1944 after a long illness. Early in 1944, his health began to cause concern to the Government. He had contracted malaria and had been running a high temperature. The tide of the war had already turned in favour off the Allies, and the risks of his release seemed to the Government immeasurably less than those of his possible death in jail.

After his release in May 1944, Gandhi tried to break the political deadlock. Neither Churchill, who still headed the British Cabinet, nor Jinnah, who had the commanding voice in the counsels of the Muslim League, seemed eager for a political détente. The British seemed reluctant to part with power, and the Muslim League evidently was waiting for an opportunity for driving a harder bargain. A formula suggested by C. Rajagopalachari, which Gandhi discussed with Jinnah, conceded the substance of the Muslim League's demand for Pakistan, but the offer was turned down by the League leader.

27. SIMLA CONFERENCE

In the summer of 1945, a conference was convened at Simla by the Viceroy, Lord Wavell, who had recently returned from England with the approval of the Newspaper report of the outcome of the Simla Conference British Cabinet to a proposal for reconstituting the Executive Council in consultation with Indian leaders. Gandhi was not a delegate to the conference, though he was consulted by the Viceroy and the Congress working committee.



Gandhi on the Way to Viceregal Lodge, Simla, July 1945

The conference broke down on the insistence of Jinnah that his party should have an exclusive right to nominate Muslim members of the Viceroy's Executive Council. This was something which the Congress could not concede without repudiating its national composition.



Newspaper Report Of The Outcome Of The Simla Conference

The Simla Conference failed to break the deadlock, but two important events took place in the wake of the conference which made a new initiative possible. With the surrender of Japan on August 15, 1945, the Second World War came to an end, and the Labour Party came to power in Britain. Lord Wavell visited

London, and on return to India, announced on September 19, 1942, that the British Government was still working "in the spirit of the Cripps Offer of 1942" and intended to convene a constitution-making body. Elections to the central and provincial legislatures, which were in any case overdue, were announced. Indian politics were again deeply stirred and entered a period of intense excitement, interminable negotiations and bitter controversy.

28. CABINET MISSION

Early in 1946, the Labour Government dispatched an all-party parliamentary delegation to India to meet Indian leaders and convince them of the British desire for an early settlement of the Indian constitutional issue. However, it was only in March 1946 that with the arrival of three Cabinet Ministers, Lord Pethick-Lawrence, Sir Stafford Cripps and Mr. A. V. Alexander, a crucial stage was reached in the negotiations between the British Government and the Indian political parties. The negotiations were conducted on behalf of the Congress by Abul Kalam Azad who was assisted by Nehru and Patel. Gandhi was, however, frequently consulted. The negotiations were bogged down on the basic question whether India was to remain united or to be split up to satisfy the Muslim League's demand for Pakistan. The Congress opposed to the partition of the country, but was prepared to go to the farthest limit in conceding cultural, economic and regional autonomy to various regions. A conference at Simla failed to resolve the Congress-League differences. The Cabinet Mission then offered a compromise plan in their statement of May 16, 1946. They sketched a three-tier constitutional structure for India. On the top was to be a Union of India embracing British India as well as the Indian States, but dealing only with foreign affairs, defence and communications. The bottom tier was to consist of Provinces and States in which were to vest all residuary powers. The intermediate tier was to comprise "groups" to be formed by Provinces (if they chose) to deal with certain common subjects. The Muslim League avowed its acceptance of the Cabinet Mission Plan, but this acceptance was more apparent than real, The League and its leaders made no secret of their hope and design that the new constitution would be used to effect a partition of the country. "Let me tell you," Jinnah told the Muslim League Council on June 5, 1946 "that Muslim India will not rest content until we have established full, complete and sovereign Pakistan." It was this apparent contradiction in the League's stand, which made Gandhi and his colleagues in the Congress uneasy about the "grouping of provinces", which the League wanted to make compulsory and a

stepping-stone to Pakistan. The controversy on this issue wrecked the Cabinet Mission Plan.



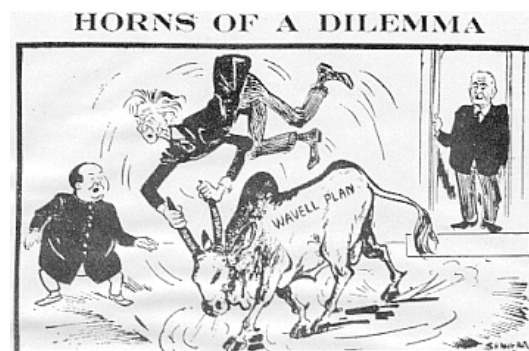
Gandhi with Lord Pethick-Lawrence,
Leader of the Cabinet Mission, April 1946

The three-tier constitution was a delicate mechanism with numerous checks and balances. Without the fullest cooperation between the major parties it was impossible to draft a new constitution, much less to work it. This cooperation was, however, lacking. The Cabinet Mission Plan was a compromise but it did not really bring the two parties together. The result was that questions presumed to have been settled by the Cabinet Mission were reopened soon after the return of its three members to England. Controversy rose to a fever pitch on two crucial issues, that of the "grouping" of provinces and the composition of the "interim government".

29. COMMUNAL CONFLAGRATION

At a time when tension was mounting, it was imperative that the country should have a strong and stable government at the centre. The Cabinet Mission had failed in the formation of a national interim government. In July 1946, the Viceroy, Lord Wavell, once again took the initiative and called upon Jawaharlal Nehru to form the Government. Jinnah, who was approached by Nehru, refused to cooperate, was bitterly critical and announced that August 16 would be observed by the Muslim League as "the Direct Action Day". On that day Calcutta witnessed a communal riot, the scale and intensity of which had never been known in living memory. "The Great Calcutta Killing" touched off a chain reaction of violent communal explosions in East Bengal, Bihar and the Punjab.

As the news of disturbances in Bengal came through, Gandhi cancelled all his plans and decided to leave for the riot-affected areas. In East Bengal he noticed how fear, hatred and violence had come to pervade the countryside. He toured the villages, saw things at first hand, and tried to lift the issue of peace from the plane of politics to that of humanity. Whatever the political map of the future, he pleaded, it should be common ground among all parties that standards of civilized life would not be thrown overboard.

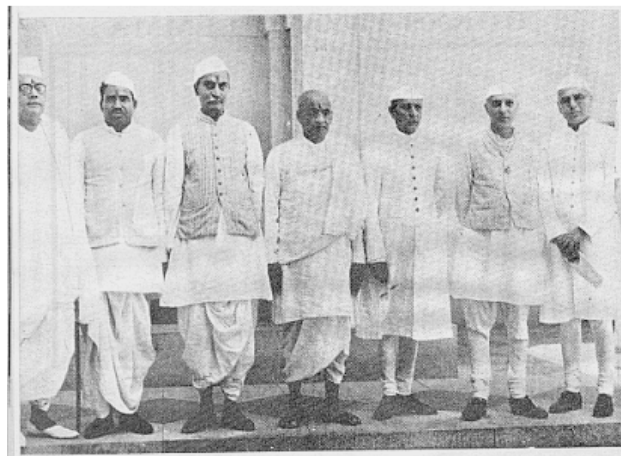


Shankar On The Muslim League Reaction To The Wavell Plan

Gandhi's presence acted as a soothing balm on the villages of East Bengal; he eased tensions, assuaged anger and softened. In March 1947, he left for Bihar where the Hindu peasants had wreaked a terrible vengeance on the Muslim minority for the misdeeds of the Muslim majority in East Bengal. In Bihar,

Gandhi's refrain was the same as in East Bengal: the majority community must repent and make amends; the minority must forgive and make a fresh start. He would not accept any apology for what had happened, and chided those who sought in the misdeeds. Of the rioters in East Bengal, a justification for what had happened in Bihar. Civilized conduct, he argued, was the duty of every individual and every community irrespective of what others did.

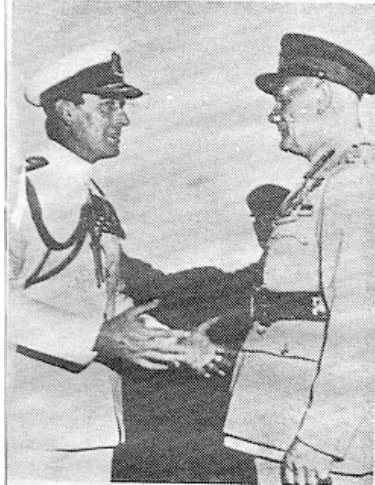
Alarmed by the increasing lawlessness, Lord Wavell brought the Muslim League into the Interim Government. The formation of the coalition between the Congress and the League fanned political controversy instead of putting it out. The Constituent Assembly had been summoned to meet on December 9, 1946, but the Muslim League refused to participate in its deliberations. The constitutional impasse looked complete when in the last week on November in an eleventh hour bid to bring the parties together, the British Government invited Wavell, Nehru, Jinnah, Liaquat Ali and Baldev Singh to London. The discussion proved abortive, but the British Government issued a statement to clarify the points at dispute. Though this clarification largely met its objections, the Muslim League did not lift its boycott of the Constituent Assembly.



The Interim Government Formed In September 1946

The year 1947 dawned with the darkest possible prospects on the political horizon. To check the drift to chaos, Clement Attlee, the British Premier, came to the conclusion that what was needed was a new policy and a new Viceroy to carry it out. He announced in the House of Commons on February 20, 1947 that

the British Government definitely intended to quit India by June 1948, and if by that date the Indian parties did not agree on an all-India constitution, power would be transferred to "some form of Central Government in British India or in some areas to the existing Provincial Governments." Simultaneously it was announced that Lord Mountbatten would succeed Lord Wavell as Viceroy.



Lord Mountbatten,
The New Viceroy, With Lord Wavell



Gandhi With Lord And Lady
Mountbatten

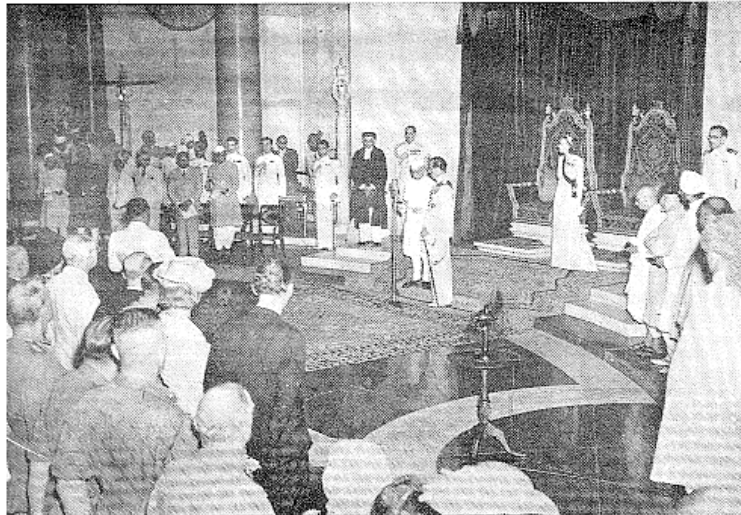
The British withdrawal had been decided and dated by the February 20th statement. Lord Mountbatten arrived in India in March and one of his first acts as Viceroy was to invite Gandhi for a discussion. The Mahatma interrupted his peace mission in Bihar and travelled to New Delhi. During the next few weeks it became evident that a solution of the political deadlock would be sought through the division of India. The Muslim League led by Jinnah was adamant, but there was also a re-orientation of the Congress attitude towards partition. Hitherto the Congress had insisted that partition should, if at all, follow and not precede political liberation, that there could be "no divorce before marriage". But the few months of stormy courtship in the Interim Government had cured Nehru, Patel and other Congress leaders of the desire for a closer union with the Muslim League. In the spring of 1947, the choice seemed to them to be between anarchy and partition; they resigned themselves to the latter in order to salvage three-fourths of India from the chaos which threatened the whole.

30. PARTITION OF INDIA

The stage was thus set for the June 3 Plan under which power was to be transferred by the British to two successor states on August 15, 1947. What Gandhi has feared had come to pass. India was to be divided, but partition was not being imposed; it had been accepted by Nehru, Patel and a majority of the Congress leaders. Gandhi had serious doubts on the wisdom of this decision. The very violence, which in the opinion of his Congress colleagues and that of the British Government provided a compelling motive for partition was, for him an irresistible argument against it; to accept partition because of the fear of civil war was to acknowledge that "everything was to be got if mad violence was perpetrated in sufficient measure".

Partitions having become a fait accompli, Gandhi's efforts from now on were directed to mitigating its risks. He paid brief visits to Kashmir, the Punjab and Bengal. In Calcutta, just before the transfer of power, his presence had a magical effect; the communal tensions and hatreds of the preceding twelve months vanished almost overnight. When there was a recrudescence of trouble a fortnight later, he went on a fast which electrified the town, moved the Muslims and shamed the Hindus. The leaders of all communities pledged themselves to peace and begged Gandhi to break the fast. The Calcutta fast was rightly acclaimed as a miracle; in the oft-quoted words of the London Times, it did what several divisions of troops could not have done.

Gandhi now felt free to turn to Punjab which was witnessing one of the major migrations of population in history. Seized with fantastic hopes and fears, the villages and town of the Punjab had been dreading, and at the same time, preparing for a battle of the barricades. The administrative paralysis caused by the reshuffling of administrative cadres on a communal basis, and the infection of the police and military with communal virus had, by the end of August, led to a situation in which it was impossible for the Hindu minority to stay in West Punjab and the Muslim minority to stay in the East Punjab.



Jawaharlal Nehru Being Sworn In As the First Prime Minister of Independent India

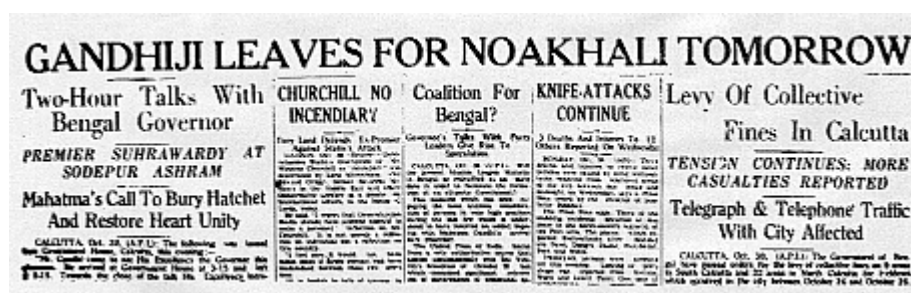
As the interminable caravans of refugees with their tales of woes crawled to their destinations, violence spread. When Gandhi arrived in Delhi early in September, he found it paralysed by communal tension. The Government, led by Nehru, had acted energetically and impartially. Gandhi was not content with a peace imposed by the police and the military; he wanted violence to be purged from the hearts of Hindus and Muslims. It was an uphill task. Delhi had a number of refugee camps, some of which housed Hindus and Sikhs from West Pakistan, while others sheltered Muslims fleeing from Delhi for a passage across the border.

31. MISSION OF PEACE

The tales of woe that Gandhi heard burned themselves into his soul, but he did not falter in his conviction that only non-violence and love could end this spiral of hate and violence. In his prayer speech every evening, he touched on this problem. He stressed the futility of retaliation. He wore himself out in an effort to re-educate the people; he heard grievances, suggested solutions, encouraged or admonished his numerous interviewers, visited refugee camps, remained in touch with local officials.

On January 13, 1948, he began a fast; "my greatest fast," he wrote to Miraben, his English disciple. It was also to be his last. The fast was not to be broken until Delhi became peaceful. The fast had a refreshing impact upon Pakistan. In India there was an emotional shake-up. The fast compelled people to think afresh on the problem on the solution of which he had staked his life. On January 18, representatives of various communities and parties in Delhi signed a pledge in Gandhi's presence that they would guarantee peace in Delhi.

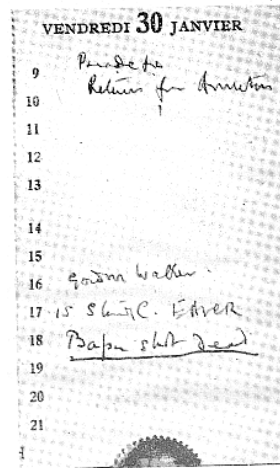
After this fast the tide of violence showed definite signs of ebbing. Gandhi felt free to make his plans for the future. He thought he should visit Pakistan to promote the process of reconciliation between the two countries and the two communities.



Newspaper Report On Riots In East Bengal



Gandhi In Noakhali



January 30, 1948: A Page From
Jawaharlal Nehru's Diary Recording
Gandhi's Assassination

Even as he had grappled with communal violence, the real problems of India, the social and economic uplift of her people, had never been absent from his mind. Political freedom having become a fact, Gandhi's mind was switching more and more to constructive work, and to the refurbishing of his non-violent technique.

32. THE END

However, he was not destined to pick up the threads of his constructive Programme. He had a narrow escape on January 20, 1948, when a bomb exploded in Birla House in New Delhi where he was addressing his prayer meeting. He took no notice of the explosion. Next day he referred to the congratulations which he had received for remaining unruffled after the explosion. He would deserve them, he said, if he fell as a result of such an explosion and yet retained a smile on his face and no malice against the assailant. He described the bomb-thrower as a misguided youth and advised the police not to "molest" him but to convert him with persuasion and affection. "The misguided youth" was Madan Lal, a refugee from West Punjab, who was a member of a gang which had plotted Gandhi's death. These highly-strung Youngman saw Hinduism menaced by Islam from without and by Gandhi from within. Madan Lal having missed his aim, a fellow conspirator from Poona, Nathu Ram Godse, came to Gandhi's prayer meeting on the evening of January 30, whipped out his pistol and fired three shots. Gandhi fell instantly with the words 'He Rama' (Oh! God).

33. GANDHI AND NON-VIOLENCE

Gandhi did not claim to be a prophet or even a philosopher. "There is no such thing as Gandhism," he warned, "and I do not want to leave any sect after me." There was only one Gandhian, he said, an imperfect one at that: himself. The real significance of the Indian freedom movement in Gandhi's eyes was that it was waged non-violently. He would have had no interest in it if the Indian National Congress had adopted Satyagraha and subscribed to non-violence. He objected to violence not only because an unarmed people had little chance of success in an armed rebellion, but because he considered violence a clumsy weapon which created more problems than it solved, and left a trail of hatred and bitterness in which genuine reconciliation was almost impossible.

This emphasis on non-violence jarred alike on Gandhi's British and Indian critics, though for different reasons. To the former, non-violence was a camouflage; to the latter, it was sheer sentimentalism. To the British who tended to see the Indian struggle through the prism of European history, the professions of non-violence rather than on the remarkably peaceful nature of Gandhi's campaigns. To the radical Indian politicians, who had browsed on the history of the French and Russian revolutions or the Italian and Irish nationalist struggles, it was patent that force would only yield to force, and that it was foolish to miss opportunities and sacrifice tactical gains for reasons more relevant to ethics than to politics.

Gandhi's total allegiance to non-violence created a gulf between him and the educated elite in India which was temporarily bridged only during periods of intense political excitement. Even among his closest colleagues there were few who were prepared to follow his doctrine of non-violence to its logical conclusion: the adoption of unilateral disarmament in a world armed to the teeth, the scrapping of the police and the armed forces, and the decentralization of administration to the point where the state would "wither away". Nehru, Patel and others on whom fell the task of organizing the

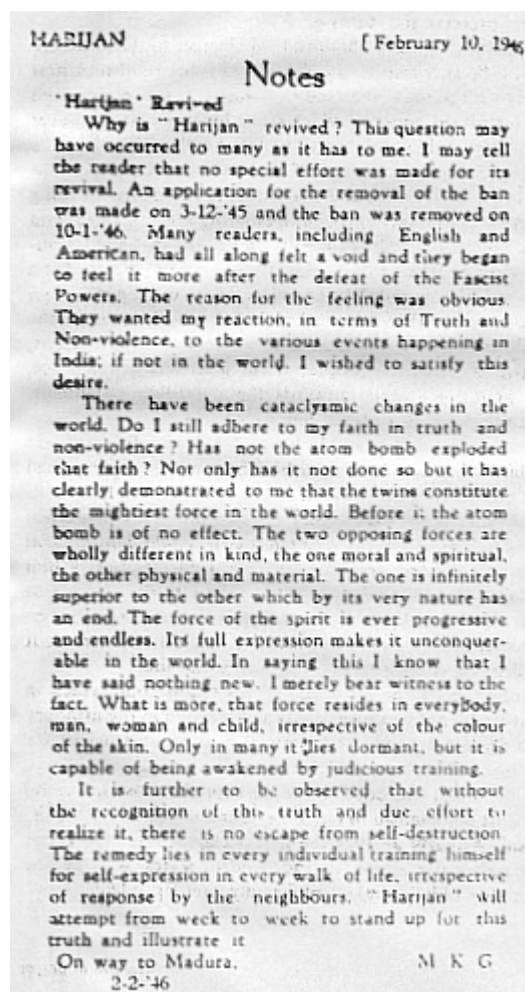
administration of independent India did not question the superiority of the principle of non-violence as enunciated by their leader, but they did not cope rider it practical politics. The Indian Constituent Assembly include a majority of members owing allegiance to Gandhi or at least holding him in high esteem, but the constitution which emerged from their labours in 1949 was based more on the Western parliamentary than on the Gandhian model. The development of the Indian economy during the last four decades cannot be said to have conformed to Gandhi's conception of "self-reliant village republics". On the other hand, it bears the marks of a conscious effort to launch an Indian industrial revolution.

Jawaharlal Nehru—Gandhi's "political heir"—was thoroughly imbued with the humane values inculcated by the Mahatma. But the man who spoke Gandhi's language, after his death, was Vinoba Bhave, the "Walking Saint", who kept out of politics and government, Bhave's Bhoodan (land gift) Movement was designed as much as a measure of land reform as that of a spiritual renewal. Though more than five million acres of land were distributed to the landless, the movement, despite its early promise, never really spiralled into a social revolution by consent. This was partly because Vinoba Bhave did not command Gandhi's extraordinary genius for organizing the masses for a national crusade, and partly because in independent India the tendency grew for the people to look up to the government rather than to rely on voluntary and cooperative effort for effecting reforms in society.

Soon after Gandhi's death in 1948, a delegate speaking at the United Nations predicted that "the greatest achievements of the Indian sage were yet to come" "Gandhi's times," said Vinoba Bhave, "were the first pale dawn of the sun of Satyagraha." Forty years after Gandhi's death, this optimism would seem to have been too high-pitched. The manner in which Gandhi's techniques have sometimes been invoked even in the land of his birth in recent years would appear to be a travesty of his principles. And the world has been in the grip of a series of crises in Korea, the Congo, the Vietnam, the Middle East, and South Africa with a never-ending trail of blood and bitterness. The shadow of a

thermo-nuclear war with its incalculable hazards continues to hang over mankind. From this predicament, Gandhi's ideas and techniques may suggest a way out. Unfortunately, his motives and methods are often misunderstood, and not only by mobs in the street, Not long ago, Arthur Koestler described Gandhi's attitude as one "of passive submission to bayonetting and raping, to villages without sewage, septic childhood's and trachoma." Such a judgement is of course completely with the same tenacity with which he battled with the British Raj. He advocated non-violence not because it offered an easy way out, but because he considered violence a crude and in the long run, an ineffective weapon. His rejection of violence stemmed from choice, not from necessity.

Horace Alexander, who knew Gandhi and saw him in action, graphically describes the attitude of the non-violent resister to his opponent: "On your side you have all the mighty forces of the modern State, arms, money, a controlled press, and all the rest. On my side, I have nothing but my conviction of right and truth, the unquenchable spirit of man, who is prepared to die for his convictions than submit to your brute force. I have my comrades in armlessness. Here we stand; and here if need be, we fall." Far from being a craven retreat from difficulty and danger, non-violent resistance demands courage of a high order, the courage to resist injustice without rancour, to unite the utmost firmness with the utmost gentleness, to invite suffering but not to inflict it, to die but not to kill.



The Mahatma On The Atom Bomb. A Page from the Harijan.

Gandhi did not make the facile division of mankind into "good" and "bad". He was convinced that every human being—even the "enemy" -had a kernel of decency: there were only evil acts, no wholly evil men. His technique of Satyagraha was designed not to coerce the opponent, but to set into motion forces which could lead to his conversion. Relying as it did on persuasion and compromise, Gandhi's method was not always quick in producing results, but the results were likely to be the more durable for having been brought about peacefully. "It is my firm conviction," Gandhi affirmed, "that nothing enduring can be built upon violence." The rate of social change through the non-violent technique was not in fact likely to be much slower than that achieved by violent methods; it was definitely faster than that expected from the normal functioning of institutions which tended to fossilize and preserve the status quo.

Gandhi did not think it possible to bring about radical changes in the structure of society overnight. Nor did he succumb to the illusion that the road to a new order could be paved merely with pious wishes and fine words. It was not enough to blame the opponent or bewail the times in which one's lot was cast. However heavy the odds, it was the Satyagrahi's duty never to feel helpless. The least he could do was to make a beginning with himself. If he was crusading for a new deal for peasantry, he could go to a village and live there, If he wanted to bring peace to a disturbed district, he could walk through it, entering into the minds and hearts of those who were going through the ordeal, If an age-old evil like untouchability was to be fought, what could be a more effective symbol of defiance for a reformer than to adopt an untouchable child? If the object was to challenge foreign rule, why not act on the assumption that the country was already free, ignore the alien government and build alternative institutions to harness the spontaneous, constructive and cooperative effort of the people? If the goal was world peace, why not begin today by acting peacefully towards the immediate neighbour, going more than half way to understand and win him over?

Though he may have appeared a starry-eyed idealist to some, Gandhi's attitude to social and political problems was severely practical. There was a deep mystical streak in him, but even his mysticism seemed to have little of the ethereal about it. He did not dream heavenly dreams nor see things unutterable in trance; when "the still small voice" spoke to him, it was often to tell how he could fight a social evil or heal a rift between two warring communities. Far from distracting him from his role in public affairs, Gandhi's religious quest gave him the stamina to play it more effectively. To him true religion was not merely the reading of scriptures, the dissection of ancient texts, or even the practice of cloistered virtue: it had to be lived in the challenging context of political and social life.

Gandhi used his non-violent technique on behalf of his fellow-countrymen in South Africa and India, but he did not conceive it only as a weapon in the armoury of Indian nationalism. On the other hand, he fashioned it as an

instrument for righting wrongs and resolving conflicts between opposing groups, races and nations. It is a strange paradox that though the stoutest and perhaps the most successful champion of the revolt against colonialism in our time, Gandhi was free from the taint of narrow nationalism. As early as 1924, he had declared that "the better mind of the world desires today, not absolutely independent states, warring one against another, but a federation of independent, of friendly interdependent states".



Gandhi's Prayer Ground At Sevagram Ashram, Wardha

Even before the First World War had revealed the disastrous results of the combination of industrialism and nationalism, he had become a convert to the idea that violence between nation-states must be completely abjured. In 1931, during his visit to England, a cartoon in the Star depicted him in a loin cloth besides Mussolini, Hitler, de Valera and Stalin, who were clad in black, brown, green and red shirts respectively. The caption, "And he ain't wearing any blooming' shirt at all" was not only literally but figuratively true. For a man of non-violence, who believed in the brotherhood of man, there was no superficial division of nations into good and bad, allies and adversaries. This did not, however, mean that Gandhi did not distinguish between the countries which inflicted and the countries which suffered violence. His own life had been one struggle against the forces of violence, and Satyagraha was designed at once to eschew violence and to fight injustice.

In the years immediately preceding the Second World war, when the tide of Nazi and Fascist aggression was relentlessly rolling forward, Gandhi had reasserted his faith in non-violence and commended it to the smaller nation

which were living in daily dread of being overwhelmed by superior force. Through the pages of his weekly paper the Harijan, he expounded the non-violent approach to military aggression and political tyranny. He advised the weaker nations to defend themselves not by increasing their fighting potential, but by non-violent resistance to the aggressor. When Czechoslovakia was blackmailed into submission in September 1938, Gandhi suggested to the unfortunate Czechs: "There is no bravery greater than a resolute refusal.

To bend the knee to an earthly power, no matter how great, and that without bitterness of spirit, and in the fullness of faith that the spirit alone lives, nothing else does."

Seven years later when the first atomic bombs exploded over Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Gandhi's reaction was characteristic: "I did not move a muscle. On the contrary, I said to myself that unless now the adopts non-violence, it will spell certain suicide for mankind." The irony of the very perfection of the weapons of war rendering them useless as arbiters between nations has become increasingly clear during the last forty years. The atomic stockpiles which the major nuclear powers have already built up are capable of destroying civilization, as we know it several time over and peace has been precariously preserved by, what has been grimly termed, "the balance of atomic terror." The fact is that with the weapons of mass destruction, which are at hand now, to attack another nation is tantamount to attacking oneself. This is a bitter truth which old habits of thought have prevented from going home. "This splitting of the atoms has changed everything" bewailed Einstein, "save our modes of thinking and thus we drift towards unparalleled catastrophe."

Non-violence, as Gandhi expounded it, has ceased to be a pious exhortation, and become a necessity. The advice he gave to the unfortunate Abyssinians and Czechs during the twilight years before the Second World War, may have seemed utopian thirty years ago. Today, it sounds commonsense. Even some hardheaded military strategists such as Sir Stephen King-Hall have begun to see in Gandhi's method a possible alternative to suicidal violence.

Gandhi would have been the first to deny that his method offered an instant or universal panacea for world peace. His method is capable of almost infinite evolution to suit new situations in a changing world. It is possible that "applied nonviolence" is at present at the same Stage of development "as the invention of electricity was in the days of Edison and Marconi." The lives-and deaths-of Chief Lithuli and Dr. Martin Luther King have proved that there is nothing esoteric about non-violence, limiting it to a particular country or a particular period. Indeed Tagore, the great contemporary and friend of Gandhi, prophesies that the West would accept Gandhi before the East "for the West has gone through the cycle of dependence on force and material things of life and has become disillusioned. They want a return to the spirit. The East has not yet gone through materialism and hence has not become so disillusioned."