

## **II. b) India**

# IN GANDHIJI'S MIRROR

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*In Gandhiji's memory*

*Pyarelal and Sukhlal Nayyar*

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## At the Feet of the Master

Gandhiji came into my life in rather extraordinary circumstances. I was studying in the High School at Lahore and G. K. Gokhale had returned from South Africa. He was to address a public gathering in Bradlaugh Hall to appeal for help in the South African Indian Satyagraha struggle, which Gandhiji was conducting, and I attended the meeting with two of my cousins. We were punished for attending a 'political meeting' without obtaining permission in 'due form' from the hostel authorities. We were given the choice of tendering an apology, which we refused, maintaining that the fault lay not with us but with the Superintendent who was at the time absent from the hostel; we had no choice but to go up to his chief for leave. Against our will, we were turned into rebels and initiated unawares into Satyagraha. Little did we realize then that our experience was a portent of things to come and what we were being driven into the whole of India would one day experience under Gandhiji's inspiration.

The meeting was a grand affair. Lala Lajpat Rai was in the chair. He made an impassioned speech, full of his usual fire, which sent everybody's blood coursing through the veins. What impressed me most, however, was Gokhale's description of how Gandhiji himself had not only courted imprisonment but how, under his inspiration, his wife and children also had gone to prison, with thousands of Indian men, women and children in the spirit of the martyrs of old.

Six years elapsed before I had my first physical glimpse of Gandhiji. I was then studying for my degree examination in Government College at Lahore. One summer evening, in April 1919, a number of us were relaxing after college hours on the terrace of our hostel when we heard the sound of firing in the distance, followed by the loud noises of a yelling, shouting crowd. Bareheaded and barefooted we issued forth in the direction of the firing. On reaching The Mall, the smart, main thoroughfare

of the city, we were engulfed in a vast concourse of people running helter-skelter in our direction with a body of armed mounted police in hot pursuit. Recklessly the horsemen rode among the crowd, regardless of whether anyone was maimed or overrun. Some of the crowd, mostly youth, had blood-bespattered clothes as a result of the firing. The crowd had heard that Mahatma Gandhi had been arrested while on his way to the Punjab. They were marching in peaceful procession to lodge a protest and lay a petition for the release of the Mahatma before Sir Michael O'Dwyer, the Lieutenant Governor of the Punjab. Ordered to stop and disperse, they had refused. The authorities saw in the behaviour of the crowd the rising tide of 'insubordination'. What followed was an attempt on their part to curb it and teach the people a lesson which, as Sir Michael later put it, 'they would not forget for fifty years'.

On 13 April 1919 came the massacre at Jallianwala Bagh in the city of Amritsar. It was followed by the proclamation of Martial Law in large parts of the Punjab. The press was muzzled. Daily the news trickled through the gagged silence of unspeakable humiliations being heaped upon the people under cover of Martial Law. Curfew was imposed. Men and women were made to creep on their bellies if they wished to cross what came to be known as the 'crawling lane' in Amritsar, where an English woman had earlier been attacked by an excited crowd. Respectable men were tied to flogging posts and publicly flogged; even children of a tender age did not escape the lash for technical breaches of Martial Law. The Principals of several colleges in Lahore were ordered by Colonel Frank Johnson, of the South African empire-building fame and the officer-in-charge of the administration of Martial Law, to rusticate a certain percentage of their students for 'participation in unlawful activities' regardless of whether they had participated in any such activity or not. The students of one college were made to walk sixteen miles in the hot sun daily to report themselves to the military authorities at a particular spot and to salute the Union Jack under duress in order to 'correct their sentiment' towards British power.

Black despair choked the soul of the youth. What was particularly anguishing to us was that some of the principals who were treated as our spiritual leaders carried out the Martial Law orders and threw their charges to the wolves, instead of protecting

their innocent students. From our childhood we had been taught that the power of the spirit is an all-conquering force which nothing on earth could subdue. What was spirituality worth if it could not stand up to temporal power when that power turned oppressive and abused its might? Was spirituality only a beatitude which availed only in the hereafter, but was of no consequence in mundane affairs?

The annual session of the Indian National Congress that year was to be held during Christmas week at Amritsar. I was then studying for my Master of Arts in English Literature in Government College, Lahore, and decided to attend the Congress session as a student visitor. It was a raw winter evening, made worse by a heavy downpour when I reached Amritsar. From the station I trudged through the mud and the slush to the house of a friend. While I was climbing the stairs, a party of our illustrious national leaders came up from behind. It included Swami Shraddhanand, head of Gurukul Kangri, Haridwar, draped in his ochre sannyasi's robes, Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya, founder of Banaras Hindu University, and popularly known as the 'silver-tongued' orator of the Indian National Congress—and Gandhiji. I hid myself behind a door-leaf on the staircase landing. From there I heard a conversation which constituted a landmark in my life.

It had been decided to acquire the site of Jallianwala Bagh for the nation and to turn it into a memorial to the martyrs who had fallen in General Dyer's massacre on the fateful 13th of April 1919, and the deputation had come to meet the leading cloth merchants to expedite the collection for the memorial fund. During the discussion Swami Shraddhanandji exhorted them in the name of the ancient *arya sanskriti* (culture) of Bharatvarsha; Malaviyaji, with his characteristic winsomeness, appealed in the name of *dharma* (duty), *artha* (worldly gain), *kama* (happiness) and *moksha* (salvation). All these would be theirs if only they loosened their purse-strings. But somehow it did not cut ice with the hard-headed, hard-boiled Amritsar businessmen. When Gandhiji's turn came to speak, he neither coaxed nor cajoled. Discarding all rhetoric and sentimental appeal, in level tones he told them that in the name of the nation they had made a solemn resolve in his presence. That made him party to it. A target had been fixed; it must be reached. If they failed to do

their duty he would sell his Ashram and make up the amount that had been pledged. He would not let a national resolve to which he had been witness be violated. There was a ring of iron determination behind these simple words that was unmistakable. The businessmen at once saw that here was a different kind of client who said what he meant and meant what he said. The required amount was subscribed on the spot and a never-to-be forgotten lesson in the sanctity of national resolves was burnt into them.

A battle royal was waged in the Congress during that session over the Montford Scheme of reforms. In the draft resolution the reforms were described as 'inadequate, unsatisfactory and disappointing'. Lokamanya Tilak advocated acceptance of the scheme in order to prove its inadequacy. 'Whether we like to use it or not', he explained, 'has been deliberately omitted in the resolution because it goes without saying that every statute of Parliament will be obeyed in this country. If we are loyal subjects of the British nation, every act that is passed by Parliament is binding on us.' Gandhiji objected to the use of 'the ambiguous middle'. Joining issue with the Lokamanya that a loyal subject was bound to obey every statute of Parliament, irrespective of the right or wrong of it, he said: 'I am here to declare that I shall obey the orders and statutes of the King Emperor only so long as they appeal to my head and heart, but it is no part of my duty to obey any order or law against which my conscience rebels. I shall disobey all such orders or laws and take the penalty.' If a thing was 'disappointing', he went on, it had to be rejected outright. That would be manlier. If, on the other hand, they accepted it, it should be to give it a fair trial. He was opposed to acceptance with 'mental reservations'. In the plenary session he delivered a speech in Hindustani which breathed the fire of conviction. 'I shall challenge that position and I shall go across from one end of India to the other and say we shall fail in our culture, we shall fall from our position, if we do not respond to the hand that is extended to us.' And with that he passionately flung down his white cap on the rostrum to plead bareheaded with the Lokamanya. The end was a dramatic, eleventh hour compromise. The substance of Gandhiji's amendment was accepted.

Although Gandhiji's plea was for moderation, the spirit behind it was paradoxically that of a rebel, more thorough-going and revolutionary than any that India had ever produced. The extremist plea for wrecking the reforms, on the other hand, carried with it a declaration of unquestioning loyalty to the Crown. The words 'moderate' and 'extremist' lost all meaning to me thereafter. I have since found that the temperance in the language of moderation when backed by a grim 'Do or Die' determination constitutes a more serious challenge to entrenched power than a fire-breathing revolutionary's flamboyant threats. Similarly, non-violent resistance and non-cooperation, backed by the non-violent organization of a well-disciplined people, poses a greater threat to an autocrat or an oppressor than the terrorist's cult of the revolver and the bomb. By the same token, there is nothing more revolutionary than creative suffering, or more reactionary than blind brute force.

To everybody's surprise Gandhiji opposed the demand for the trial and punishment of General Dyer. Dyer, he pleaded, had but carried out orders. In the execution of his orders he had committed a gross error of judgement, thereby proving himself unfit for the post he held. They could ask for his removal on that score, but not seek revenge—'Forgiveness adorns the brave.' Their fight must be directed not against the individual but the system of which he formed part and which needed to be changed.

Even more important was Gandhiji's utterance on the resolution condemning the excesses committed by the mob. Napoleonic in its brevity and force, every word of it is imprinted on my memory in letters of flame. Characterizing it as the most important resolution before the house, Gandhiji told the audience that the key to success in the future lay in their hearty acceptance of the truth underlying that resolution and acting accordingly. 'To the extent to which we fail to recognize the eternal truth underlying this resolution, we are bound to fail. . . . I agree that there was grave provocation given by the Government. The Government went mad, but our people also went mad. I say, do not return madness with madness but return madness with sanity and the situation will be yours.' His voice was full-chested and so distinct that it could be heard clearly to the farthest end of the vast gathering in that pre-mike era.

Some time after my return from the Congress session I went to Gandhiji's temporary residence at Lahore to seek an appointment through the good offices of a friend. Martial Law trials were then in full swing and Gandhiji's residence was at all hours besieged by the friends and relatives of those who were involved in the prosecutions. One such deputation was in conference with him when I reached. It was considered to be a hopeless case, as there was a murder charge against the accused. 'Has your man really done anything or is he falsely implicated—utterly innocent?' Gandhiji asked, and then added, 'Let me have the full facts of the case and a clean confession if your relation has done anything wrong. I shall then see what I can do.'

Everybody was aghast. What hope was there after such a confession for an accused charged with political murder, and that too, of an Englishman in that climate of reprisals and revenge? One might as well sign one's own death warrant. Gandhiji saw their utter despair. Consoling he said to them: 'I for one would like to save from the gallows even the worst murderers. In my Ashram there are several members who were implicated in cases of political violence. They made a clean breast of it. Converted to non-violence, they are today my trusted co-workers.'

There was something in his voice, a calm assurance of strength, joined to a boundless compassion and unearthly detachment that was strangely soothing; a quiet dignity and sense of kindness, suggestive of an access to some hidden reservoir of power which feared no obstacle, knew no defeat and could find a fourth dimensional way, as it were, even through an impenetrable granite wall. It was the deep calling unto the deep. So far as I remember, the deputation found strength to follow Gandhiji's advice and their man was also saved.

When at Amritsar Gandhiji opposed the demand for the impeachment of General Dyer and pressed for condemnation of the popular excesses, many had wondered. I now saw that both stemmed from the same great principle—one must make a clear distinction between the wrong and the wrong-doer, fight the one with one's last breath and forgive the other. The stand that Gandhiji had taken in respect of General Dyer at Amritsar also gave him the courage and strength to ask successfully for the pardon of the accused at Lahore.

Here was what I had been looking for—a glimpse of the power of the spirit which is its own seal and sanction, which no power on earth can subdue and which never fails. The deliverer had come to call upon a prostrate people to stand, shed their fears and walk with their heads erect. I had found my Master. Thereafter I was his man.

The interview that I had sought of Gandhiji came a couple of days later. He had just had his bath and was on the way to a midday meal. Wrapped in a white Kashmiri *pashmina* shawl, he sat bolt upright. There was majesty in his simplicity. The deep mellifluous voice held one spellbound. The eyes reflected an infinity of kindness, compassion and peace. The body was thin to the point of emaciation, but the prominent barrel chest gave a sense of tremendous power. The broad, smooth brow showed not a wrinkle. The countenance was radiant, the skin silken smooth and the complexion clear. I told him how a deep dissatisfaction with current values in which I had been brought up had possessed me, that what I saw around me seemed to make no sense, and finding the meaning of life had become the question of questions to me.

He followed every word with an interest and concentration that set me completely at my ease. When I had finished he remarked with a reassuring smile that such questioning was by no means peculiar to me. It happened to everybody some time or other in life. There was nothing to worry about. Finally he said, 'Come to my Ashram when I reach there. In the peaceful atmosphere of the Ashram you will be able to work out answers to your questions.' But when I asked him whether I should not discontinue my studies and straightaway proceed to his Ashram, to my surprise, he said, 'No. You should finish your studies first. It would have been different if you had not undertaken them. It is not wisdom to leave in the middle what one has once taken up.'

In the autumn of that year I gave up my studies in response to Gandhiji's call for non-cooperation and went to the Ashram at Sabarmati. The movement that he had launched was in full swing and Gandhiji was on tour when I reached there.

'Can you write?' he asked me as soon as we met. 'I have never done it—I mean for the press,' I replied. 'That does not matter.'



he said. 'Write a thesis on the theory and practice of non-cooperation in English and another in Hindustani on any subject of your choice, say for instance, "Why I came to Gandhi". And I want both to be in my hands before 3.00 p.m. today,' he added. I sat down immediately to scribble out the first, napped over it for half an hour, tore it up, rewrote it and delivered it to him along with the Hindustani piece at 1 p.m. The next day he again left the Ashram on one of his whirlwind tours and I buried myself in the Ashram routine, forgetting all about the thesis.

One afternoon, while I was bending over my chores, I got a letter. It was in Hindustani—from Gandhiji, saying that he had gone through my thesis and had liked it. It ended with the sentence, 'I want to make use of your brains'. A couple of days after this I received a wire from Gandhiji asking me to join him immediately on his tour at No 1 Daryaganj, Dr M. A. Ansari's residence in Delhi. Two days later I found myself seated in Gandhiji's presence, facing a barrage of questions concerning minute, intimate details about all the members of the Ashram that constituted his wider family. I was then sent for a wash to make myself comfortable after the long railway journey. Later in the day I was again called. He had my thesis before him. He had decided to publish it in *Young India*, he said. Had I read Thoreau? I had not, I replied. I had derived my inspiration from the English writers, particularly the Romantic poets and from Tolstoy. I was not much of a reader, I explained; I found it tedious to read a book through; reading was only as a catalytic aid to my thinking. He said that was all right, and sent my piece for publication in his weekly, *Young India*, 'as an able contribution by a young Punjabi student who has non-co-operated lately'.

The next day the party was to visit Rohtak in the afternoon. I stayed behind. On his return Gandhiji asked why I had not come. I had not been invited; nobody had asked me, I replied. He forthwith gave peremptory instructions to his entourage in regard to me for the future. Later in the evening I was again summoned. Someone in the party must have been remiss, he said, referring to the afternoon's incident, but I should have made it my concern to save the erring from the consequence of his mistake. When I pleaded my innate shyness he said, 'Shyness or modesty that stands in the way of performing one's duty should be guarded against and regarded as a species of subtle pride.'

On the same day Gandhiji introduced me to Seth Jamnalal Bajaj as 'the young man I spoke to you about'. The affectionate, warm-hearted Jamnalalji at once took me under his wing and, as a token of his affection, made me eat a piece of corn-meal cake and, when I hesitated, clinched the matter by saying, 'In the matter of eating and drinking you should be guided by me; in everything else, follow Bapu.'

That evening Mahadev Desai left for Ahmedabad to look after *Young India*, and my long schooling under Gandhiji began: moisture on the outside of a glass must be wiped before handing it to anyone; after washing one's hands do not push open a door with them while serving meals, for they get contaminated again; before offering a cup of milk it should be stirred with a spoon to bring to the surface any dirt that might have settled at the bottom; the rationale and importance of dotting one's i's and crossing the t's as the key to legibility; how to make a bed; how to clean a commode; how to hand someone a pen or a knife; how to scan a newspaper thoroughly in the shortest time—these were some of the little things that I was to learn in the next few days. Not a small part of my training consisted of unlearning what I had previously learnt at school or college: 'Call for facts, do not speculate in the void; it is a waste of energy, a sign of mental laziness. Do not cite epigrams, distrust them; learn to think for yourself, thought is more precious than language and judgement most precious of all. If the judgement is faulty everything else is worth nothing', and so on. Later he began to chafe me for being thin-skinned and to impress upon me the importance of having a 'rhino hide'. Once he politely told me that I was a street Arab, that one needed to be a *bhogi* (one who knows how to enjoy the good things of life), 'like myself, and not a *yogi* (unlearned in the art of living), to be able to serve well.'

On another occasion Gandhiji gave us a passage from Milton's *Areopagitica* and asked us to point out a flaw which he had found in the writer's argument. The writer in that passage had argued that intellect is the mind's eye. To suppress a book is, therefore, worse than to kill the author; for death only puts out the light of the eye, but to suppress a book is to put out the light of the mind which is God's most precious gift to man. 'It is an overstatement of the case,' he explained afterwards, 'and that is bad advocacy. Besides, the work suppressed may not be the

writer's best or last. If he lives, he may produce another and perhaps a better work. I had expected a writer of Milton's calibre to be more careful in his thinking.'

Mahadev's absence was a great deprivation to me. At our very first meeting he had constituted himself into an elder brother to me—a role which he continued to fill till death took him away. In his absence, Devadas, as 'the senior partner of the firm', became my friend, philosopher and guide and took upon himself to initiate me into my duties. I was raw and inexperienced. His advice came in handy. I still remember one piece: 'If you want to tempt Bapu to eat a particular fruit, speak of it in superlative terms. With his South African standards, he is very fastidious in the matter of fruit.' It took me quite a lot of patient study and observation to discover that Gandhiji's simplicity was a very complex art. 'Simplicity is not so simple a thing as most people imagine', he remarked on another occasion.

In 'If' Rudyard Kipling has given us a pen-picture of his ideal man. He is one who can keep his head 'when all about you are losing theirs and blaming it on you'; one who can trust himself even when all men doubt him, but 'make allowance for their doubting too'; one who can wait 'and not be tired by waiting, or being lied about won't deal in lies'; or 'being hated give way to hating, and yet not look too good, nor talk too wise'.

It would be difficult to give a more apt description of the Gandhiji that I have known, than is contained in Kipling's lines. Calm in the midst of storms, awake when others were lulled into false security, alert to danger when on the surface all seemed fair, seeing from the luminous height of his serenity ways out of the world's mazes, inexpressibly anguished by the sufferings of others but indifferent to his own—by dint of the magic of his detachment he transmuted his anguish into a relentless drive for self-denial, self-purification and self-surrender. Never once did I hear from his lips an uncharitable expression or a harsh judgement about an opponent, a critic or even a maligner. It was not forgiveness, but whole-hearted acceptance by him of their standpoint as *their* truth which for the time being held the same place in their growth as his truth in his own, and thus entitled to equal respect.

Gandhiji's stay in Delhi lasted only a few days. Towards the close, he performed the opening ceremony of Tibbia College. I

noticed that before going to the meeting he wrote out his speech in full, in English. I grasped the significance of this when later, on his return from the meeting, he expressed great satisfaction that he had succeeded in giving full expression in Hindustani to all that he had to say. He was at that time struggling with his Hindustani, and during railway journeys his 'Munshi', *A Hindustani Self-Instructor* was his unfailing companion. Whenever Gandhiji could steal a minute—while taking his meals or even in the lavatory—he would turn to it.

We were still in Delhi when a Hindu Mahasabha deputation waited on Gandhiji. They requested him to preside over a *Go Raksha Parishad* (Cow-Protection Conference). Their ideology was of the orthodox, militant type. Gandhiji declined their invitation, saying that, although he attached great importance to the subject, his ideas on *Go Raksha* were peculiar to himself and differed from theirs. 'So long as there is the bone of a single slaughtered cow to be found in India or a cow that is mere skin and bone, cow protection is a misnomer—mere make-believe. My cow-protection goes far beyond yours; it requires the uttermost purity, self-sacrifice, austerity, hard study and penance on our part. I see no place for these in your programme.'

Shortly afterwards, a Congress deputation came and discussed with him the question of untouchability. They were about to hold a conference, but their draft resolutions did not include any resolution about the abolition of untouchability. The Congress had not yet adopted it as an integral part of its programme, and some of the deputationists could not understand its importance in terms of the independence struggle. They thought it a minor social issue which should not be allowed to disrupt their united political front. But Gandhiji was adamant. 'You do not know who it is that you are pitted against', he told them. 'The moment they—the British—find that the game of setting up Hindus against Muslims is played out, they will use the "suppressed" classes issue in pursuance of their policy of "divide and rule".' This was ten years before the creation of separate franchise for the Harijans after the second Round Table Conference made the Harijan question the question of questions in our struggle for freedom and the main obstacle in the realization of our goal.

Still another group discussed with Gandhiji the question of



what a physically weak man must do in terms of non-violence to protect the honour of a sister who was threatened by a ruffian. 'What does a dog do when you try to pull it away from a piece of nourishment that it has picked up?' Gandhiji asked in reply, and added, 'It is cloven in two but will not let go its hold. Should not a man do as much to protect the honour of his sister?' He uttered these words with a passion that shamed into silence all dialectical sparring after that.

It was here, again, that I had a glimpse of Gandhiji's overwhelming kindness of spirit and unfailing alertness even in the midst of heavy preoccupations. One day he had been busy with an endless stream of visitors and deputations from early morning till late in the afternoon. His room on the first floor was crowded to the full. Suddenly at 4 p.m. he got up in the middle of a heated argument and made for the flight of stairs leading to the ground floor. I followed him, mystified. Noticing my puzzlement, he said: 'You know there was a post-card in yesterday's mail from Swami Satyadev to say that he would be coming to see me at 4.15 today.'

'Yes, sir', I replied. The Swamiji was then engaged in the propagation of Hindi as our *lingua franca* under Gandhiji's guidance.

'And he also wrote that he was coming to Delhi for an eye operation for the removal of the cataracts', Gandhiji continued. 'This means that he has lost his vision and will be unable to come upstairs by himself. You ought to have waited for him at the foot of the stairs to escort him. But I noticed that it had not occurred to you.'

Just at that moment the Swamiji arrived and, taking him by the hand, Gandhiji led him to his room upstairs.

From Delhi we went to Lucknow where a session of the Khilafat Conference was to be held. It was at Lucknow that I was first introduced to Pandit Motilalji as 'the writer of that article on the theory and practice of non-co-operation'. I felt greatly flattered when the fastidious Panditji greeted me with an appreciative smile, remarking that the article was 'extremely well done'.

In the days that followed I noticed several things. One was Gandhiji's marvellous capacity to go on working day after day with only three or four hours' sleep—sometimes without any

sleep at all. The second was his precision and thoroughness in the littlest of little things. The third was his meticulous regard for cleanliness and neatness and his impatience with slovenliness in any shape or form—in thinking, writing, dress or daily life. The fourth was his military discipline and clock-work regularity, which he rigorously enforced in his own case and expected from those around him. The fifth was his habit, so far as possible, of doing everything for himself. If he wanted a paper to be looked up or a spittoon to be brought, he did it himself; he even mended his own clothes. He preferred writing to dictating. One day I counted 56 letters which he had written in his own hand. Each of them he carefully read from the date line to the final detail of the address before handing them for dispatch. At the end of it he was so exhausted that, pressing his throbbing temples between his two hands, he flung himself down on the hard floor just where he was sitting, without even spreading the bedding he was leaning against. He simply pushed it aside.

Gandhiji wrote with a steel nib from a country-made glass ink-pot which cost half an anna, and he used a red piece of khadi as a satchel in which to file his papers. His diet consisted of goat's milk, raisins and fruit and was measured out with a druggist's exactness and care. Once when I surreptitiously increased the number of raisins in his menu gradually from nineteen to twenty-three, he gave a sermon on the danger of blind affection. The menu for the next meal was regulated carefully according to how his system had responded to the previous meal, the amount of sleep he had or expected to have and the physical and mental strain already undergone or in prospect. He insisted on his desk being kept always clear. The daily post was distributed among his assistants as soon as it arrived and woe to the person who referred a letter to him more than two days old. Sometimes he would pick out for us letters containing knotty conundrums and himself check the replies. He deprecated finesse or a dialectician's tricks in the replies, and wanted the answers to be straight, clear and to the point. 'They must squarely meet the correspondent's difficulty', he insisted. But in case of disputatious correspondents who wrote to lay traps, he appreciated a clever, diplomatic reply or even a good retort, provided it was free from sting. Any reply of more than five or ten lines was rejected and consigned to the

waste-paper basket. The address was no less minutely scrutinized. Not to know, or not to be able to find with the help of a Bradshaw and the Posts and Telegraphs Guide the exact location of an out-of-the-way place in India was regarded as a culpable failure. Vagueness about train timings or routes was treated as another egregious failure. Deciphering bad handwriting provided a test of patience, perseverance, and resourcefulness. When the name of the place in an address baffled decipherment, Gandhiji recommended imitating the illegible handwriting as closely as possible! On another occasion, when the sender's name could not be deciphered, he suggested that it should be cut out from the original letter and pasted on to the address cover, adding, 'Postal people at the addressee's place will be able to make it out better!'

In the wake of all this came other lessons. First, a delicate consideration for the convenience of hosts: being late at meals was inexcusable *himsa*. At the same time, succumbing to the attention of fond and over-generous hosts was a sign of weakness of character. 'If you really want and insist on your hosts providing you with wholesome, simple diet, they will understand and have respect for you. If you succumb to their hospitality, they will enjoy it but secretly they will have contempt for you, and that rightly.' Gandhiji always expected us to remember, amidst the overflowing kindness and hospitality surrounding us everywhere, that India was a poor country where millions did not enjoy even two square meals. But he regarded being squeamish about drinking milk and eating even expensive fruit when it was easily available, as no less a sign of an unhealthy mental kink.

I noticed that, though an ascetic in his personal habits Gandhiji managed his asceticism with perfect artistry, without ever letting it become burdensome or a source of embarrassment to others. For instance, he always deprecated the 'tea and coffee' habit as being incompatible with simple living. But, knowing that some members of his entourage had that habit, he would on several occasions during railway journeys actually go out and fetch a tray of tea from the railway stall for his companions while they slept.

From Lucknow we went to Gujranwala and from there to Rawalpindi. During the return journey, Dr Saifuddin Kitchlew

was travelling with us. Everybody in the compartment was fast asleep. In the middle of the night Gandhiji woke me up and asked what the next halt was. 'Gujarat', I replied.

'You know Dr Kitchlew is to get down at Gujranwala?'

'Yes.'

'Have you alerted him that he has to detrain at Gujranwala?'

I had not. 'Remember to wake him up at the next halt. He is in the adjacent compartment. He might be over-carried if nobody wakes him up in time. Remember he is our guest.' He again woke up soon after the train had passed Gujarat and made sure that his instructions had been duly carried out.

It was during this journey that news about a tragedy at Nankana Sahib was received and necessitated a visit to the site of that grim happening. In the course of his speech there, Gandhiji laid down a dictum which has since become a classic in the strategy of non-violence. It is not enough, he said, to eschew the use of force; the show of force must also be avoided. Anything that makes the opponent nervous is provocative violence and is therefore itself a species of violence.

Gandhiji had a wonderfully organized mind which he could switch off and on effortlessly at will. At Lahore he was asked by an English daily to give a statement on the Nankana Sahib tragedy when he was just starting for Ludhiana. 'Can your representative accompany me as far as . . .?' he asked. 'But it is only 40 minutes' run', the press chief replied. 'That will be enough for me' said Gandhiji. And sure as anything, five minutes before the train reached the next station, he had dashed off at white heat an open letter addressed to 'Khalsaji' and at the next halt handed it to the astounded press hound duly finished and revised—a classic of its kind. 'One must be able to command one's thinking as an expert horseman does the horse he rides', he remarked afterwards. He attributed this trait of his to *brahmacharya*, which meant much more to him than mere continence—complete control over all the senses and sense organs. 'Ordinarily our thoughts jostle chaotically in our mind. The discipline of *brahmacharya* enables one to order them and to exclude at will every unwanted thought, impulse or feeling. If we could do that we would not know what fatigue is. It is not work that kills, it is the chaos, the friction of ideas jostling in the mind that causes the wear and tear.'

Gandhiji had not yet resumed third class travelling—his state of health did not permit it after his recent illness. Nor did I ever see him at that time sit down to say the morning or evening prayers individually or with the rest while out of the Ashram. That came later, after his release from Yeravda prison in 1924.

Another little incident that occurred during this tour left an indelible impression on my mind. At Lahore, Gandhiji was staying with Lala Lajpat Rai. The lion of the Punjab had not yet fully accepted the non-co-operation programme. Some Punjab leaders came to Gandhiji and offered to take independent action under his leadership. But Gandhiji discountenanced the proposed move. The Punjab was Lalaji's province. He would not encourage or be party to any indiscipline in Lalaji's camp. It would be disloyalty to a colleague and this he had never been guilty of in his life. In the Punjab he would act only with and through Lalaji, he said. They must follow Lalaji's advice when it differed from his own. Lalaji was not present in the room when this conversation took place. But he overheard it from the adjoining room. So deeply moved was he by it that it laid the foundation of an indissoluble friendship between the two. Gandhiji maintained the same rigorous code of loyalty in respect of all comrades throughout his life.

At the end of the tour we returned to the Ashram at Sabarmati. To all appearances it was a dull, drab place, where from dawn till dusk people engaged in what looked like dull, commonplace chores and toiled like day labourers amidst a 'primitive' standard of amenities, till one came to the hard core of the Ashram disciplines on which all its activities were based and from which those activities derived their meaning. They were truth in thought, word and deed, non-violence, non-possession and non-stealing, chastity and its concomitant, control of the palate, swadeshi, self-sufficiency and self-reliance, and fearlessness—the foundation and the end-result of all these observances. All Ashram activities were means for the cultivation of these disciplines which, in their turn, were corollaries of the law of love, otherwise known as Truth. They were also lasting points on which the practice of the law of love is based.

In the Ashram there were several seasoned women Satyagrahis who, equipped with nothing more than a training in the Ashram's

basic discipline, had made history in South Africa; and a group of children, whom Gandhiji had put through their paces by making them run the gauntlet of Martial Law in South Africa as couriers, messengers and errand boys when they were just on the threshold of their teens. Not all who were drawn to the Ashram could see the inner meaning of the Ashram's way of life. Many a young man who came full of enthusiasm turned back disappointed because he found there 'not a trace of political commotion'!

After the evening prayer one day Gandhiji explained to us the importance of the Ashram's disciplines and the role that he envisaged for the Ashram in the national struggle for freedom. He looked forward to the day, he said, when he would call out by name one after another the inmates of the Ashram, trained in those disciplines, and send them to immolate themselves at the altar of non-violence. Unmoved, he would watch them fall before a shower of bullets, without a trace of fear or hatred, but only love in their hearts. And then, when the last one of them had fallen, he would himself follow. It would be a red-letter day in the Ashram's history, he said, when its trees would be the only witnesses left to bear silent testimony to that supreme sacrifice. Then only would the ashramites have proved themselves worthy of the Ashram and the Ashram worthy of its name and of India.

In the evening, accompanied by a number of us, Gandhiji used to go out for a stroll, which usually ended at the gate of Sabarmati Central Prison. Pointing to it one day, he remarked with a laugh, 'This is our other Ashram'. He later explained: 'In our Ashram there are no walls. The only walls we have are those of Ashram disciplines. But, unlike the prison walls, they do not imprison but protect us and release us into greater freedom. It is only when we observe spiritual disciplines voluntarily that we experience real freedom. Armed with them, we can go anywhere, face any emergency and never feel baffled. For instance, our life in the Ashram is supposed to be harder than prison life. We have no possessions of which anyone can deprive us. Imprisoned, we shall miss no delights of the palate or any other physical indulgence, having accustomed ourselves to plain fare and the simple life. We shall fear none because we shall have learnt to walk in the fear of God only, and we shall gladly die bearing

witness to truth; we shall never repudiate it. And since in prison a civil resister voluntarily observes the prison discipline and welcomes the hardships incidental to jail life as a part of suffering for truth, we shall feel happy and free like a bird even behind the prison walls, we shall never weary. When the whole of India has learnt this lesson, India shall be free. For, if the alien power then turns the whole country into a prison, it will not be able to imprison its soul.'

The distance that separated the two 'Ashrams' was hardly ten furlongs. But it took us as many years qualifying to get there and for the two to interchange their respective roles. In 1930 His Majesty's prisons became Ashrams to the Indian nationalists, and the whole country a vast prison. Inspired by Gandhiji's teaching the masses of India rose in a non-violent revolt against alien rule. The British rulers had to come to terms with them. The alternative was the peace of the grave. This the conscience of the civilized world was not prepared at that juncture to tolerate. The ruling power shrank from it and resorted, instead, to subtler methods which, however, did not avail for long.

1948

## When Gandhiji Returned Empty-Handed

'I admit that I have come back empty-handed, but I have the satisfaction that I have not lowered or in any way compromised the honour of the flag that was entrusted to me. It has been my constant concern and prayer that I may not in an unguarded moment betray myself into an act of weakness or the trust that has reposed in me.' In these memorable words Gandhiji summed up the result of his mission on his return from the second Round Table Conference. Some time afterwards, a British statesman who had shown a keen desire to be friendly towards Gandhiji, Lord Sankey, expressed regret that during his stay in England Gandhiji had surrounded himself with 'churchmen, cranks and faddists' instead of making the best of his opportunity by cultivating the friendship of leading figures in British politics. It only showed a lack of perception of the essence of Gandhiji's mission and of his approach. If he had gone out for a 'political deal', Sankey's criticism would be justified. Gandhiji's object, however, was to win British understanding and sympathy and convert the British people so that they might undo the wrong done to India and begin a new chapter in the history of Indo-British relations. If a century-old feud between England and India could be composed without resort to carnage and bloodshed, it would be a glorious triumph for the principle of non-violence and a forerunner of the establishment of world peace.

Gandhiji had therefore to explain India to the British, and explain India's non-violent struggle, the background of that struggle—British exploitation, in which all of them directly or indirectly participated—and the consequent appalling poverty, disease and degradation of the people of India. 'Do you wish to prosper by stealing the bread from the mouth of the Indian spinner and weaver and their hungry children? It is for them I speak', he said to the Lancashire mill operatives. And they understood the Indian boycott of Lancashire goods and their



womenfolk presented him their infants-in-arms to be blessed. He spoke to the East-Enders, their pastors and guardians about the self-purification and constructive side of India's non-violent struggle, the curse of the drink and drug evil which the British Government were trying to defend and perpetuate, and the fight against it of India's men, women and children through the method of self-suffering. He told them of India's starving millions who had only salt as their condiment and what the salt tax meant to them. He told them of India's struggle to purge the evil of untouchability, which the Congress had adopted as a plank in its programme and the reparation which Hindu society was trying to make for its past sins. Finally, he made the British realize their kinship with India's famished millions by living in their midst, and by that symbolic gesture identifying himself with them. They saw incarnated in the example of his life the ideals of simplicity, voluntary poverty, purity and dedication to God's work, and understood that these formed the basis of India's non-violent struggle which was charged with enmity to none and goodwill towards all.

To keep alive the bond of identity with the poor, Gandhiji spun regularly every day without fail. The whole day he was unceasingly busy and returned to Kingsley Hall sometimes after midnight. Once he actually arrived there at 2.30 a.m., sat down for his half hour's daily sacrificial spinning and was again up at 4 for the morning prayers and the day's endless round as usual. As he had refused to adjust his watch to the official time when the clocks were advanced by half an hour, it meant slicing off another half hour from his scanty sleep.

Gandhiji sent us to help our hosts in the kitchen and it was a privilege for us, and a joy to them, to jointly peel potatoes, cut vegetables and clean dishes. We joined them in their silent prayers and he himself watched their Saturday evening entertainments when they sang and danced together. 'Mr Gandhi, won't you join us in our country dances', he was asked on one occasion. He laughingly replied, 'Yes, certainly'; and then added, pointing to the stick in his hand, 'this shall be my partner', and everybody joined in the laugh. On another occasion he rebuked one of our party when she, with a new convert's zeal, expressed a puritanic horror of the dancing. 'You must realize', he told her, 'this is their innocent recreation. We need to have an

understanding and appreciation of the way of life of those with whom we want to mix. You should not forget that folk-dancing is an ancient, established English institution, an integral part of English national life.'

Gandhiji visited the English in their slums and encouraged us to mix with them in street-corner six-penny luncheon-restaurants, milk bars, playhouses and places of recreation. He asked us to tramp at least sixteen miles a day (which alas, we could ill afford to do for lack of time!), to make friends with British bobbies, to study British institutions, the museums, libraries and art galleries; above all, British national habits—their punctuality, corporate and individual discipline and their way of life in general. He himself worked hard and unremittingly, slept little and lived only on a diet of fruit, raw vegetables, dates and an ounce or so of almond paste. He closely scrutinized the price of every thing he ate—even a pear or a plum that he partook of. Never shall I forget the trouncing I received when, in all innocence, I purchased a small phial of honey for six pence for Gandhiji. He gave me a lecture for over half-an-hour, narrating how he economized on every farthing; how, as a student, he had only bread, cocoa and an apple for his evening meal, and how the only example of wastefulness which he still remembered with remorse was the loss of a penny at a grocer's counter when he forgot to ask for the balance of a two-penny piece after the purchase of his daily ration of an apple. When I pleaded ignorance of prices in a new place, I received this further rebuke: 'This should have made you all the more careful. You should have realized that you were purchasing on behalf of a representative of the poor. A representative of the poor has to be a trustee for them. Ignorance or carelessness in a trustee is criminal.' And he poured out his soul's anguish over what he had himself seen of the condition of 'the skeletons of Orissa', how it haunted him in his waking hours as well as in his sleep and how his faith in the ultimate goodness of God alone sustained him. His voice grew husky and tears stood in his eyes as he uttered these words. Sir Purshotamdas Thakurdas and Sir Prabhashanker Pattani, who witnessed the scene, sat transfixed with amazement at his soul's agony and I had burnt into me a lesson for life.

The significance of all this was not lost on the East-Enders.



They instinctively recognized Gandhiji as one of themselves and realized that he symbolized the struggle of the common man which was as much theirs as India's. Churchmen were made to see that India's non-violent struggle represented the gospel of Jesus in action, and as men of religion it was their duty not to subserve the temporal power but to serve as a reproving rod when that power forgot its duty or abused its might. Undaunted, they must stand for truth and justice only and therefore for India's righteous cause.

Gandhiji exemplified his utter indifference to the pomp and circumstance of royalty when he refused to alter his mode of dress, even to substitute a newly washed shawl for the one he was wearing when he attended the Buckingham Palace ceremonial reception. He satisfied himself with only turning his shawl inside out! He was equally outspoken with the King. The latter told Gandhiji that he was a 'good man' when they met in South Africa and up to 1918, but then something went wrong. Gandhiji maintained a dignified silence. When, however, the King asked him, 'Why did you boycott my son?' he replied, 'Not your son, Your Majesty, but the official representative of the British Crown.' Further, when the King proceeded to tell him that a rebellion could not be tolerated and had to be put down to keep the King's Government going, Gandhiji did not allow the statement to go unchallenged even though it proceeded from the lips of the King Emperor. With his characteristic courtesy but firmness he rejoined, 'Your Majesty will not expect me, your guest, to enter into a political argument with you.'

Gandhiji was equally plainspoken with Mussolini. The latter ingratiatingly asked him whether he would not like free India to have Il Duce's Italy as a friend. Ignoring the bait, Gandhiji replied that the free India of his conception would not only like to be friendly and at peace with Italy alone but with the whole world. The Fascist dictator then asked with a veiled sneer whether he expected to win independence for India through non-violence, and what he thought of the Fascist militarist state which Italy had built. With disconcerting frankness Gandhiji told him that, as he saw it, the dictator was only building a house of cards.

Then there was the episode of the 'Gyda Interview', published in *Gironale L'Italia*. It was a pure fabrication. Romain Rolland,

whose guest Gandhiji was at Villeneuve, had feared some such trick and warned him not to see anybody in Italy without the presence of a trustworthy third-party witness. There was no question of Gandhiji planning civil disobedience in advance, as alleged by Senator Gyda, for Gandhiji was trying, not without hope, to find out whether something could still not be rescued from the wreckage of the second Round Table Conference. The reply, when it came, left ample room for optimism. But Simla was not prepared to take any chances, and before the *S.S. Pilsna* touched Indian shores, the British had queered the pitch by arresting Pandit Jawaharlal, Badshah Khan and Mr T. A. K. Sherwani. Within a week of Gandhiji's arrival, most Congress leaders were once more behind prison walls and Ordinance Rule was in full swing.

As an illustration of Gandhiji's anxiety to be scrupulously correct over every little act in terms of *ahimsa*, an incident may be mentioned. Two English detectives, Rogers and Evans, were detailed by the British Government to look after Gandhiji's security. They came to develop a deep regard and affection for him personally and won his heart by their competence, goodwill and devotion to duty. When parting, Gandhiji asked, and Sir Samuel Hoare gladly acceded to his request, for the two to be allowed to accompany him as far as Brindisi. At the farewell there, Gandhiji told Rogers and Evans that he would be sending them British-made silver watches as tokens of their friendship.

On reaching Bombay the crisis that had been precipitated by the new Viceroy, Lord Willingdon, refusing to discuss the question of the arrest of Congress leaders at once engulfed Gandhiji. The Working Committee of the Congress outlined a plan of non-violent struggle which included the boycott of English goods. While it was still deliberating over that resolution, Gandhiji sent me to purchase the promised watches for the English detectives. 'And they must be British made', he charged me. After scouring the whole of Bombay I returned in the afternoon with a crateful of silver watches, but they were all Swiss made. British watches were nowhere available. But Gandhiji insisted: 'They must be British made'. The draft of the resolution for the boycott of British goods that the Working Committee had discussed in the morning lay before him and its adoption in the afternoon sitting of the Working Committee

was, more or less, a certainty. What was the point, under the circumstances of his insistence on 'British made', I asked. 'Don't you see the resolution has not yet been adopted', he replied. 'There must not therefore be on my part even a suggestion of discrimination against British goods.'

'But you know that, by all human calculation, that resolution is going to be adopted.'

'All the more reason why I should give expression to my love for the British while I may,' he rejoined.

So I set out on my expedition again and in the evening succeeded in obtaining two British silver watches, probably the only such watches to be had in Bombay. He autographed them at the back and I had the autograph engraved. Then only were the watches sent to be presented to the detectives on his behalf.

On the political side, Gandhiji left no stone unturned either. He did all that was possible for anyone to do. In a personal note sent after hearing his first speech in the Federal Structure Committee, Sir Geoffrey Corbett, Secretary of the Indian Delegation, wrote: 'As I listened to the words of wisdom that dropped from your lips yesterday, I felt proud to belong to a delegation of which you are a member.' Referring to these extempore and very often unpremeditated utterances of Gandhiji in the Conference, the Special Representative of the *New York Times* wrote that it had introduced them to a way of speech which would become familiar to the world before the Conference was over. But the dice was too heavily loaded against Gandhiji. The Tories had made up their minds not to relax the hold on India and, with that end in view, had especially sought and obtained the India portfolio in Ramsay MacDonald's Government. They were not going to be deprived of their prize.

Traps were laid for Gandhiji in the Conference which the opponents of India's freedom probably did not expect him to surmount. After signing the 'Minorities Pact', when Dr B. R. Ambedkar presented his claim for separate electorate for Harijans, a gleeful whisper went round in high die-hard circles that Gandhiji was finished. The stage had been carefully set. Even before the event, cabled instructions began pouring in from distant America for press correspondents to confront the self-proclaimed 'champion' of the 'untouchables' with the contradiction between his claim and his opposition to the Harijans' demand for

adequate political representation. The premature jubilation became confusion when Gandhiji turned the tables completely upon them the next day in the Conference. By mercilessly dissecting the so-called Pact, which he showed was in reality an unholy plot, he so indicted the British Government for its complicity in it that it has never been able to exculpate itself.

General Smuts was at that time in England. He had come to preside over the Faraday Centenary Celebration and offered to prolong his stay in England if he could bring strength to Gandhiji's elbow and be of help. He exhausted his good offices, even seeing the King at Sandringham, but he returned disappointed. The wall of opposition in high places was impenetrable! Before that Smuts had paid a visit to 88 Knight's Bridge to see Gandhiji. Gandhiji was at that time away, but he had sent me in advance to receive the General and detain him till his arrival. I gave our distinguished visitor the latest news on developments. His comment was: 'These people [British statesmen] do not know their man. I know him, having fought him for eight years. I have told them that ultimately they have got to settle with him. He alone can deliver the goods.'

The fact is that on no account was the British Government prepared to part with power. Professor Lee Smith, who was Postmaster General in the Labour Cabinet, told Gandhiji frankly just before the end of the Conference, 'You can't have more at present. This represents the measure of your power today according to our assessment.' David Lloyd George was even more frank. He said, 'If you want more, you have to make good your claim by civil disobedience and non-co-operation in which, on my part, I promise full sympathy and support.'

What more could Gandhiji do? What could anybody do? And what difference would it have made in any case? Although his labours in the Conference failed in their immediate objective, the good seed sown by his work outside the Conference continued to bear fruit.

What difference does it make?—the sceptic may ask. What weight can the dissent of a few 'eccentrics' carry with those who shape the policies of the state? To argue thus would be to betray ignorance of the dynamics of social change. These minute variations in the consciousness of the ordinary people, under the impact of intelligent, innocent suffering have a highly infectious

quality. Soon, rather than late, they are inevitably reflected in the thinking of men at the helm of affairs. Imponderable in themselves, they transform the milieu and create compulsions that change the course of events silently and unseen, just as slight movements of the ship's rudder, hardly perceptible to the eye, change the direction of a ship's motion. What Gandhiji did on this occasion laid the foundation of what culminated at the time of the transfer of power in 'a treaty of peace without war; a victory without the sting of defeat'.

1944

## The Way of Satyagraha

At the end of five days of heart-to-heart talks with Muslim friends, often continuing till midnight, and shorter talks with the Bhayats—and having failed with them—Gandhiji put his signature to the letter to the Thakore Saheb submitting seven names from the list of the Sardar's representatives. His hand shook as he did so. He never dreamt at the time that within thirty-six hours of the dispatch of his letter his faith in God and *ahimsa* would be put to test. Ever since his arrival here on his mission of peace Gandhiji had made it a point to hold daily the congregational evening prayer on the Rashtriya Shala grounds. The practice was kept up during the fast.

On the evening of the 16th instant a report was brought to Gandhiji that the Bhayats and Mussalmans of Rajkot were going to hold a black flag demonstration at the evening prayer. There was also a report that a garland of shoes had been got ready for the occasion. He made light of the fears of those who brought the report. He had full faith in the Mussalman and Bhayat leaders who had had friendly discussions with him during the last five days. But in case the worst came to the worst he would welcome it, he said. Accordingly, he gave peremptory instructions that anybody approaching him, no matter with what intent, should be given free access and not obstructed in any way.

Gandhiji motored as usual to the Rashtriya Shala prayer ground. Almost simultaneously, the demonstrators, too, numbering about 600, arrived on the scene with black flags and placards bearing inscriptions, some of which were highly offensive. They lined the fence enclosing the prayerground from the main road. The Sardar happened to be away at Amreli that day and so missed the show.

Gandhiji bowed to the demonstrators, as is his wont, before he sat down for the prayer, which was conducted as usual.

Throughout the period the prayer was in progress, the processionists kept up an unseemly demonstration of shouting and yelping. The creation of disturbances at prayer time, under the very eyes of the Bhayats and Mussalman representatives who had sat with him in conference only the other day, was for Gandhiji the 'unkindest cut of all'. The prayer over, he rose to go. The demonstrators had by now begun to pour in through the entrance of the narrow passage leading to the prayer ground. Gandhiji, instead of going by car as usual, decided to walk through the crowd so as to give the demonstrators full chance to say or do to him whatever they pleased. At the entrance the crush was too great to allow further progress. The pushing and jostling by the demonstrators at the rear on either side of the gangway was growing apace. The dust and the din added to the confusion. Friends tried to form a protective cordon. But Gandhiji waved them off. 'I shall sit here or go alone in their midst', he told them. Suddenly he was seized by an attack of indescribable pain in the region of the waist, and felt as if he would faint. This is an old symptom that seizes Gandhiji whenever he receives an acute mental shock. For a time he stood in the midst of that jostling crowd motionless and silent, his eyes shut, supporting himself on his staff, and tried to seek relief through silent prayer, a remedy that has never failed him on such an occasion. As soon as he had sufficiently recovered, he reiterated his resolve to go through the demonstrators all alone. He addressed a Bhayat, who stood confronting him and who, he subsequently learned, was besides a police officer in plain clothes: 'I wish to go under your sole protection, not that of my co-workers'. Some Bhayats had already noticed his condition. They now bade the rest to make way for him, and leaning on the shoulder of the Bhayat friend in question, Gandhiji walked to the waiting car. 'This is the way of Satyagraha', he remarked as the car drove off, 'to put your head unresistingly into the lap of your "enemy", for him to keep or make short work of you just as he pleases. It is the sovereign way, and throughout my half-a-century of varied experience it has never once failed me.'

Two Mussalman representatives from the Civil Station came to see Gandhiji soon after, according to previous appointment. 'You were less than fair to yourself and to us in exposing

yourself to such a risk. Anything may happen in a motley crowd', they remarked, with reference to the happenings of the evening. In reply, Gandhiji described for them how such risk-taking had become part and parcel of his life. There were at least half a dozen occasions in South Africa and in India when he had risked his life like that, and he had never regretted doing so. In all the cases the assailant or the would-be assailants had ended by becoming his friends. 'But should the worst happen after all', he concluded, 'what privilege can be greater for a Satyagrahi than to fall with a prayer in his heart for those whom he wanted to serve but who under a delusion took him for an "enemy"?''

1939



**Unfolding of Satyagraha in India (1915-1924)**  
From the Preface to *Satyagraha in South Africa*

Date	Place/name	Issue	Result
1.1915	Viramgam	Unfair customs imposed by British	Customs line removed (upon "hint" of Satyagraha)
2.1917	Bombay, but affects all India & S.A.	Indian Emigration Act	End of indentured labor on May 31 (hint + public agitation)
3. April-Aug., 1917	Champaran (Bihar State)	Exploitation of farmers (ryots) compelled to grow indigo, even after artificial dye made it valueless	Repeal of tinkathia system on Aug. 10 (Satyagraha offered)
4. Jan., 1918	Ahmedabad (Gujarat)	Textile mill workers' strike	Successfully concluded (S. included fast)
5. Jan-June, 1918	Kheda (Gujarat)	Govt. refused to grant relief of land revenue taxes despite excessive rain	Success (despite imperfect S. leading to suffering of peasants)
6. 1919	All-India: Rowlatt Act Satyagraha	Obnoxious bill in effect extended martial law, despite India participation in war effort	Suspension ("Himalayan blunder"), but this 'black act' later repealed.
7. 1920-	Punjab & All India	Khilafat struggle, Punjab atrocities, and finally SWARAJ	[we all know]

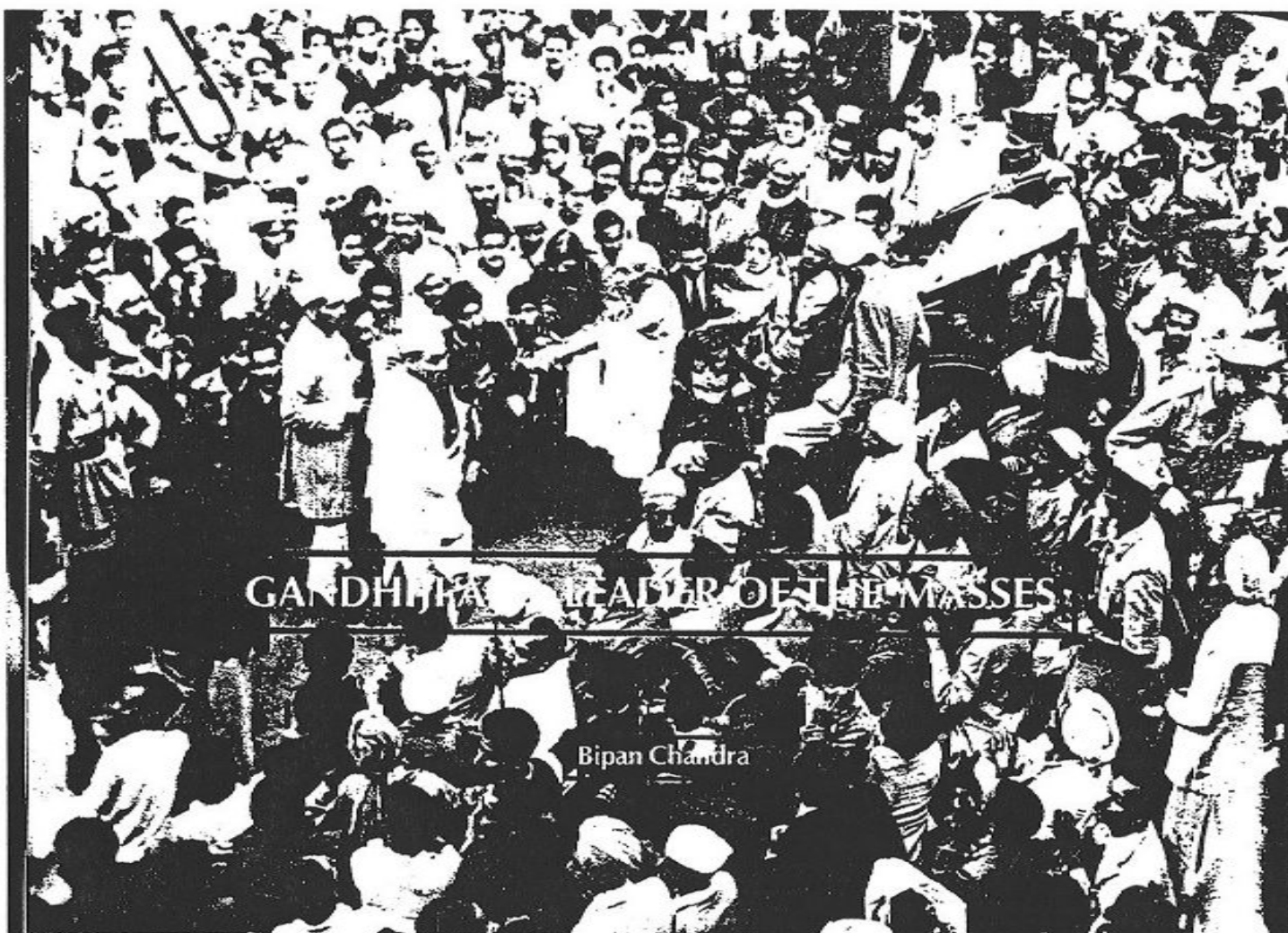
Vykom Temple Rd. S. 1924 (mostly Travancore)

Bardoli: Peasants vs. Govt. (Bombay) 1928

SAH 1930

Quit India 1942





## GANDHIJI: LEADER OF THE MASSES

Bipan Chandra

ONE of the most important and complex problems faced by a mass political party and, in particular, by a mass movement is that of a correct relation between the roles of the masses and the leaders. This problem also takes the form of relation between spontaneity and organization or popular consciousness and its transformation.

A movement by definition must have a leadership, but it becomes a mass movement only when people join it. A mass movement has to be based on the urges of the masses and on popular consciousness. It has to rely on their self-activity. At the same time, leadership or what Antonio Gramsci calls 'headquarters' or directing centre is essential to a mass movement. There has, therefore, to be a "unity between spontaneity and conscious direction". In other words, a mass movement involves the dual or dialectical process in which the con-

sciousness and the spontaneous self-activity of the masses are integrated with the ideological, organizational and political direction of the leadership. The success or failure of a mass movement depends on correct evolution of this process.

Similarly, political work in a mass movement has to be based on the people's consciousness, on their lived experience, on their spontaneously arising discontent with their existing social condition. Leaders have to respond to this popular consciousness, but they have also to further arouse, educate and guide it. The broader social reality—the whys and wherefores of the social condition—have to be grasped with the aid of intellectual tools. The leadership has to grasp and spread a complex understanding of complex forces.

Leadership is also necessary to forge a right type of and effective organization for politics and mass

struggle, to mobilize and unite atomized and dispersed people—especially in an agrarian society—and to evolve correct strategy and tactics which would correspond to the specific historical situation. Without the emergence of such a leadership no sustained popular struggle for transforming the social conditions may develop even if there exist social contradictions, popular discontent, a desire among the people to change the social condition. Or a spontaneous struggle may break out which is, in the absence of such leadership, doomed to defeat from the beginning.

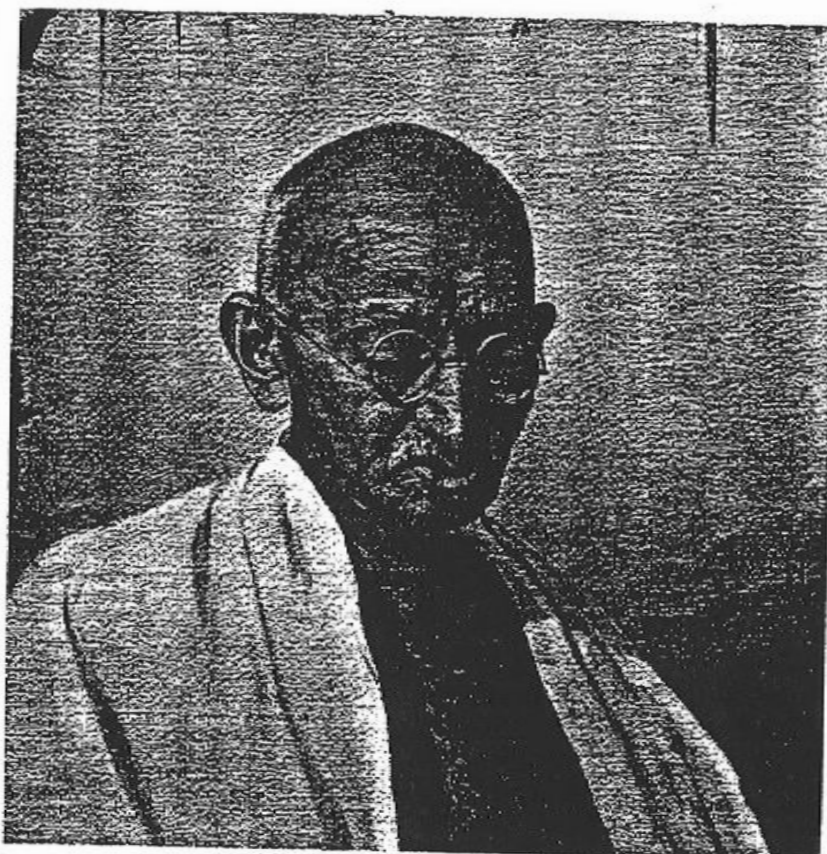
### Gandhiji: People's Leader

In India, while the late 19th century intellectuals, known as Moderates and nationalists, successfully evolved a complex understanding of colonial economy and the early 20th century leaders, known as the Extremists, gave birth to politics of struggle

against colonialism, it was in the Gandhian phase that a better understanding and practice of the dialectic between the masses and the leaders or between spontaneity and organization were evolved. It was above all Gandhiji who reached out to the masses, mobilized them, and based the national movement on the basic formulation that the masses are the subjects and not objects of politics.

Throughout his life, from his South African days onwards, Gandhiji grappled with the problem of masses-leaders dialectic. And the bedrock of his politics was immense faith in the capacity of the masses to fight—in their fearlessness, self-sacrificing spirit, courage, capacity to fight, and moral strength. When a large section of Congress leaders tended to get demoralised by the successful government suppression of the Civil Disobedience Movement during 1933-34, Gandhiji urged them not to give way to despair: "The nation has got energy of which you have no conception but I have". At the same time, he said, a leadership should not "put an undue strain on the energy". (*Collected Works*, Vol.57, p.454). When in June 1942, the American Journalist Louis Fischer asked him how he hoped to organize a movement against the mighty British Empire, Gandhiji replied: "I will appeal to the people's instincts. I may arouse them". (*Collected Works*, Vol.76, p.450).

Gandhiji realized that a mass movement had to be based on the active participation of the people—it could not be sustained only by the highly motivated cadre of the movement. It was only with "the might of the dumb millions" that the British rulers could be challenged. (*Collected Works*, Vol.76, p.397). Consequently, he maintained that it was not the winning of a demand that was important but how it was won. Crucial in this respect was the activation and participation of the people. In 1939, he gave up the gains of the Gwyer Award on Rajkot State which he had won by his indefinite fast.



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Gandhiji's conception of the relationship between the leaders and the led produced two important consequences. It led to very healthy and democratic relations between the different levels of leaders themselves and full freedom to express differing or opposite views.

When asked why he had done so, he acknowledged his error in gaining a point by a wrong method, going above the heads of the people. If he had persisted, he told the people of Rajkot, "Your energies would have been rusting, and your hands would have been crippled". (*Collected Works*, Vol.69 pp.273-5).

#### People Supreme

Gandhiji was quite clear in his mind that leaders could not create movements on their own; movements were created by the people. The people moved towards a movement on their own; leaders could lead it only when they correctly gauged the people's mood. Explaining the shift in Congress policy towards the Princely states during 1938-39 from non-intervention to intervention, Gandhiji wrote in the *Harijan* of 28 January 1939: "The policy of non-intervention by the Congress was, in my opinion, a perfect piece of statesmanship when the people of the Indian States were not awakened. That policy would be cowardice, when there is all-round awakening among the people of the States and a determination to go through a long course of suffering for the vindication of their just rights" (*Collected Works*, Vol.68, pp.326-7).

In a brilliant passage in the *Harijan* of 5 February 1939, Gandhiji formulated his perception of the political relationship between leaders, mass awakening and a mass movement: "Yet the awakening of millions does take time. It cannot be manufactured. It comes or seems to come mysteriously. National workers can merely hasten the process of anticipating the mass mind". (*Collected Works*, Vol.68, p.381).

Gandhiji repeatedly asserted that no leadership could manipulate the people any way they wanted and that people and their politics had an autonomy of their own to which leaders had to relate in a positive manner. Thus, for example, when a British correspondent said in 1942 that Gandhiji could, if he wanted, enthuse the Indian masses to actively support the Allied cause in World

War II even if India was not made free by the British, Gandhiji replied: "My influence, great as it may appear to the outsiders, is strictly limited. I may have considerable influence to conduct a campaign for redress of popular grievances because people are ready and need a helper. But I have no influence to direct people's energies in a channel in which they have

no interest". (*Collected Works*, Vol.76, p.300).

This aspect of Gandhiji's profound grasp comes out clearly in another episode. Many people urged him to create another situation favourable to struggle and start another mass movement against the British in order to avoid partition of India. Gandhiji replied: "I have never created a situa-





tion in my life. I have one qualification which many of you do not possess. I can almost instinctively feel what is stirring in the heart of the masses. And when I feel that the forces of good are dimly stirring within, I seize upon them and build up a programme. And they respond. People say that I had created a situation; but I had done nothing except giving a shape to what was already there. Today I see no sign of such a healthy feeling".

The relation that leaders' political activity bears to the activity of the masses was at the heart of Gandhiji's differences with Subhas Bose during 1939. Bose believed that if the leaders were determined they could arouse the masses to participate in a mass anti-imperialist movement to be organized in the course of next 6 months. Gandhiji believed that the masses were not yet ready. When Bose asked Gandhiji not to stand on his prestige and accept his political diagnosis and strategy, Gandhiji wrote back: "My prestige does not count. It has no independent value of its own.... India will rise or fall by the quality of the sum total of the acts of her many millions. Individuals, however high they may be, are of no account except in so far as they represent the many millions". (*Collected Works*, Vol. 69, p. 97).

#### Leaders' Role

At the same time, Gandhiji also clearly understood that leadership was essential to any mass movement. He often compared the mass movement to an army in which both generals and soldiers played an essential role. No mass movement could be waged without a strong leadership which commanded the essential loyalty and obedience of the rank and file. On the one hand, he emphasized the role of free expression and democratic functioning within the Congress Party, on the other hand, he stressed the role of discipline. A mass movement, he said, was like waging a war—a satyagrahi must act like a soldier of the non-violent army.



Ordinary people could become a political and historical force only through discipline. The people must exercise the democratic right of choosing and changing their leaders. But they must not expect a leader to accept their uninformed dictation. A leader must lead; he must not agree to be pushed from behind by the crowd. People should expect him to sometimes take unpopular decisions.

Gandhiji's understanding of the relation between leaders and followers and spontaneity and organization can also be seen in the style and conduct of the mass movements that he organized. He carefully prepared each movement politically and ideologically. He was meticulous in gauging the extent of the people's readiness for struggle. The tempo of the movement was developed in close correspondence with the rising tempo of the people's feelings, and the higher-level leaders, the lower-level leaders and activists (cadre) were gradually unified into a homogenous and well-disciplined mass. Every effort was made to politically isolate the colonial rulers not only from the supporters of the Congress but also from non-Congress groups and persons. The nature of demands put forward was basically geared to the widest possible mobilization of the people.

A few very important aspect of Gandhian politics was the effort to win over or neutralize sections of British society. The British people were never portrayed as the enemy. A sharp distinction was made between the colonial rulers and the British people. In this case a disjunction was sought to be created between the British people and their political rulers who were maintaining or supporting colonialism in India.

#### Gandhian Movement

Gandhiji's conception of the relation between the leaders and the led produced two important consequences. It led to very healthy and democratic relations between the different levels of leaders themselves. These relations were not based on bureaucratic hierarchy and subordination. They were based on equality, comradeship, mutual regard, division of functions and authority which was not hierarchical, and full freedom to express differing or opposite views. The view, put forward by some neo-colonial historians, that these relations were of the patron-client variety is not sustained by the detailed historical research.

What is more important, the movement was able to release the initiative and innovative faculty of the lower-level activists and base itself on them. The higher-level leaders were usually arrested in the very beginning of a mass movement. They had prepared the people politically and ideologically and laid down the main items of the agitation in the period before the launching of the movement. But once the movement began, there was no organization from the top. The success of the movement depended on the organizational and agitational creativity and strength of the people below who were not arrested. And as they would be clapped in jail, others would come forward as leaders and organizers. Thus, there was full scope for initiative, innovation and creativity at the mass level of the movement; and this was built into the very structure of a Gandhian movement. □