

# GANDHI – A Biography for children and beginners

[ A BIOGRAPHY FOR CHILDREN AND BEGINNERS ]

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To  
My Grandchildren  
And  
All Children in the World

## FOREWORD

Ravindra Varma is a learned scholar, who has been running the Institute of Gandhian Studies at Gopuri, Wardha for several years. He has been introducing the youth, especially the college students and postgraduates to the life and message of Gandhiji. I have had the privilege of addressing a number of such audiences at his Institute in Gopuri, and I have also heard him there and in other places talking about Gandhiji. His knowledge and study of Gandhian ideology is deep, and to the best of my knowledge he has been trying his level best to live according to the Gandhian ideology. This gives depth to whatever he says or writes.

He has written three books on Gandhiji or I might say that he has written one book which is divided into three parts. Part one gives a narrative of Gandhiji's life story describing a shy mediocre student at Rajkot, who goes to England and comes back as a Barrister.

Circumstances take him to South Africa. He goes as a young man to earn money, and to find name and fame, and also to see a new country. This first book describes Gandhiji's struggle to establish himself in which he makes outstanding success as a lawyer. As a seeker of truth, and full of love for the oppressed Indians and black population in the midst of racial prejudice, he has to fight and overcome many hurdles to preserve the self-respect of Indians and also to serve the blacks in every way he can. He also serves the whites during the Boer War.

His fight against colour prejudice starts from the day of his arrival in South Africa and continues throughout his stay in that country. Discovery of the mighty weapon of Satyagraha which can enable the downtrodden and the weak also to stand up for their own rights, is the first great achievement which makes the shy young man a great leader. He shows to the Indians the way of fighting prejudice by bringing about a change of heart among the oppressors through self-suffering. His experiments and his studies in non-violence lead him to establish his first Ashram at Phoenix.

He fought many battles against racism. His struggle was based on truth and non-violence, and he worked to bring about a change of heart among the oppressors who were the white rulers in South Africa.

He had gone to South Africa for one year, but he was there for almost 25 years, and at last left in 1914 after signing an agreement with General Smuts, the Prime Minister of South Africa, which ensured minimum justice for the Indians in that country.

The First World War started while he was nearing England where he had gone to meet Gopal Krishna Gokhale his political Guru, who in the meantime had gone to France. He returned to India early in 1915. In England he got Pleurisy. The cold climate did not suit him.

Gandhiji landed at Bombay in mid January 1915 with Kasturba, and had a rousing reception. His reputation had reached India before him. He decided to go to Pune to meet Gopal Krishna Gokhale and from there he went to Shanti Niketan where his party had arrived in the meantime from South Africa. He introduced many healthy changes in self-help at Shanti Niketan.

Gokhale's death soon afterwards led to Gandhiji founding the Satyagraha Ashram at Ahmedabad from where he spread the message of Satyagraha and provided leadership for the struggle, first in Bihar for justice to Indian Indigo planters and then in Khera and Bardoli regarding land revenue, and finally for India's freedom struggle.

It was a new way of fighting for justice, and for one's rights in which the physically weak could have as much opportunity to show their valour as the physically and intellectually strong. High and low, rich and poor, men and women all joined him, and a new moral and spiritual awakening was seen in India which finally led to the end of foreign rule in India.

But unfortunately the British agreed to the partition of India before they quit India, which resulted in endless suffering to millions of people in India and Pakistan. If the last Viceroy Lord Mountbatten had listened to Gandhiji's advice, and the British had left India to Indians, or God and Indians were allowed to settle the Hindu-Muslim question by themselves, History might have been quite

different. Much suffering and bloodshed could have been avoided. But Mountbatten wanted to be the hero, who solved the Indian problem, and the result was the dead line of 15th August 1947. Partition of India became a reality, and the creation of Pakistan with mass migration led to bloody riots and terrible suffering for millions on both sides.

Gandhiji stood like a beacon light bringing peace and sanity wherever he went. Instances of his work in Calcutta, Noakhali and Bihar illustrated his ability to bring about change of heart among the fighting Hindus and Muslims through his own self-suffering, and establishment of peace between the two communities.

His effectiveness, and total dedication to peace and non-violence to bring about sanity and change of heart among the fighting Hindus and Muslims through his own self-suffering, was not acceptable to certain communal-minded Hindu sections, and as a result of that Gandhiji became the victim of the three bullets of Godse while on his way to prayers on 30th January 1948. With God's name on his lips he made a perfect exit and thus ended a perfect life.

The youth of India will greatly benefit by reading Ravindra Varma's book which is in three parts – Part-I gives the narrative of Gandhiji's life. Part-II consists of a series of anecdotes from Gandhiji's life. Part-III concentrates on his philosophy of life, the development of his concept of Satyagraha based on truth and non-violence as the law of life. The discovery of Satyagraha provided the remedy to the weak and strong alike to fight injustice and get back their legitimate rights from the oppressor without causing bitterness or enmity. Satyagraha he showed, leads to winning over the opponent so that he willingly gives up the path of injustice, and mutual differences are settled by change of heart.

Gandhiji's death of January 30th, 1948, shocked the whole world and sanity prevailed in India for quite some time. There were no reprisals or killings by Hindus or Muslims of one another as was feared. His martyrdom made India and Pakistan to turn the search light inward at that time.

Gandhiji's teachings, however, are still to become a part and parcel of India's way of thinking and solving the problems of communalism, poverty and

unemployment. The downtrodden are still to get justice, and peace and prosperity have yet to reach all. We need opportunities for development for all and there has to be an end to the exploitation of the weak by the strong.

We have a long way to go to eradicate poverty, unemployment, illiteracy and exploitation. We can do so only by going back to Gandhiji's message of Satyagraha and sustainable development by using human hands and tools to supplement their strength.

May God give us the wisdom to choose the right path. Pursuit of power by itself is not going to end our problems. Pursuit of service of the weak by the strong and putting an end to corruption and exploitation of the weak by the strong with a firm hand alone can and will do so. Similarly we must avoid machines which make human hands mere cogs in the machine and take away all joy of creativity which is the reward of making things with one's own hands making use of tools where necessary. Gandhiji's favourite example was the Singer Sewing machine which takes away drudgery but not the joy of creativity.

A study of Gandhiji's message can show us the right path, and Ravindra Varma's three books can prove very helpful to the youth of India. I have narrated above the message of the 1st book. Book 3 concentrates on the implications and application of Gandhian technique and the ideology of Satyagraha, non-violence, non-cooperation and the importance of bringing about change of heart in the opponent through self-suffering.

Book 2 narrates several anecdotes that illustrate the way Bapu dealt with problems, which are very interesting.

I congratulate Ravindra Varma for the service he has rendered to the younger generation in India by writing these three books and hope they will be widely read and their message understood and accepted by our people.

Sevagram

June 19, 2000

**Dr. Sushila Nayar**

## **PREFACE**

It is not easy to list the number of books that have been written on the life or message of Mahatma Gandhi. They have appeared in almost all the main languages of the world.

The first of these was written while Gandhi was still finding himself in South Africa. This was written by a South African missionary, Rev. Doke. Since then many outstanding biographies have been written by philosophers like Romain Rolland, and illustrious authors like Louis Fischer. Biographies written by D.G. Tendulkar and Shri Pyarelal span many volumes and are invaluable mines of information. They will continue as classic sources of inspiration.

I do not attempt to cite other books and authors for fear of exposing myself to the charge of being invidious. But I have learned much from many of them.

This small book does not lay claims to being comprehensive or exhaustive. It is meant only to serve as an introduction, particularly to benefit children and beginners, and to inspire them to make a deeper study, and to instil the desire to know more, and to benefit from the life and message of Mahatma Gandhi.

**Ravindra Varma**

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I do not know how to thank Dr. Sushila Nayar for graciously finding time to go through the manuscripts of the three books in these series, making invaluable suggestions, and writing a foreword to them. I was amazed at the care and meticulousness with which she went through the manuscripts even in the midst of the many demands on her time.

New Delhi

**Ravindra Varma**

1

Einstein was not the only one to see that Gandhi was a unique and incredible kind of human being. All those who came in contact with him including those who were ranged against him perceived that there was something unique about Gandhi. General Smuts whom he 'fought' in South Africa, successive representatives of the British Crown whom he 'fought' in India, the planters in Champaran, the mill-owners, the landlords, the orthodox fundamentalists whom he 'fought', on the question of untouchability or communalism,—all saw this uniqueness. He fought, but he loved even those whom he fought. He did not fight them out of anger or hatred or jealousy; he fought them because he loved them, and did not want them to persist in doing what was harmful and injurious to themselves as to others.

Yet, he was felled down by an assassin, by one of his own countrymen, one of his co-religionists. On hearing that Gandhi had been assassinated, George Bernard Shaw, the well-known British playwright and litterateur said that the assassination showed how dangerous it was to be too good. Gandhi wanted to be wholly good. To be wholly good one not only has to renounce what is not in the good of all, but also be active in the defense of what is in the good of all, through means that were consistent with the good of all.

How can one be wholly good? Ours is a world of attractions and temptations. One sees and experiences suffering, and wants to seek freedom from suffering. One feels tempted to believe that the easiest way to escape suffering is to seek pleasure; to possess what can give pleasure: to seek the power that can enable one to acquire and retain possessions; to dominate so that one may forestall and thwart possible challenges to one's possessions.

Yet, Gandhi wanted to be wholly good, wholly truthful, wholly loving. He did not seek possessions. He did not seek power. What he wanted to do in life, what he wanted to do with life was to "realize" the power that was latent in all human beings – the power to know or see god, or the law that governs the

universe, or the truth of the universe. He learned that he could see truth only by divesting himself of ego- centricity, or by 'reducing oneself to zero', as he said. One could move out of ego-centricity only when one began to love all else in the universe – animate and inanimate. It is only when one loves all that one sees in the universe that one learns to identify oneself with 'creation', and the Law or Truth or God that rules 'Creation'.

Gandhi never claimed uniqueness. In fact, he protested against being described as unique. He insisted that he was a common man; that there was nothing uncommon about him. He was not a prophet, not a Mahatma. He believed, and said again and again that there was nothing he had done which other human beings could not do. He often said that he had nothing new to teach the world. The principles of Truth and Love that he had placed before humanity were "as old as the hills". All that he had done was to try to prove their value, the need for them and their validity in every field of human activity – in personal life or social life.

It is easy to see that Truth and love are the laws on which the Universe, and human society are built. The laws of nature are unalterable. Since they are unalterable and sovereign, what is in conflict with them will not endure. One has to conform to the laws if one wants to build something that may endure, to achieve something beneficial or enduring. The identification and pursuit of the law or truth were therefore essential in all fields of life. It was the quest for this truth, and the desire to live in the light of this truth that made Gandhi what he became.

Gandhi felt the call of truth even in his childhood. But it took many years and many ordeals and experiments before he could learn to discover and apply it in all walks of life. The story of his life is the story of his "experiments with Truth". It reflects the way he grew with his experiments in his personal life, and in the life of the society of which he was a member.

Gandhi claimed to be a common man; the common man was at the centre of his concern. He wanted to show what the common human being could achieve, and how. He wanted the common human being to be free, since he believed that

without freedom there could be no self-fulfillment. He wanted a social, economic and political order – national and international order – that provided the opportunity for self-fulfillment, and preserved the right and power of the common man to defend his freedom. It is this transparent love for the common human being that made Gandhi what he meant to the common man. It was, therefore, no wonder that when Gandhi died, human beings all over the world felt that something had been wrenched off from them, that something in them had ceased to exist, something for which they had yearned, and would continue to yearn.

How did Gandhi, the shy young child from Porbander and Rajkot become the symbol of the hope of the common man everywhere?

That is the story we will read in the chapters that follow.

## 2

Gandhi was born in Porbandar, on the 2nd of October 1869. Porbandar is one of the many princely States in Kathiawad (Saurashtra) which is now in the state of Gujarat. Gandhi's father belonged to a family that was well known and highly respected in Porbandar as well as in neighbouring states like Rajkot and Junagarh. The family was not known for its wealth or scholarship. But two of the members of the family had occupied the high position of "Dewan" or Chief Minister of the state of Porbandar. They had earned a high reputation for their honesty and wisdom, and their knowledge of the arts of administration and the affairs of the court of the Ruler. They were also known for their loyalty as well as their tact in handling citizens and situations. They were men of culture and high principles in public and private life.

These principles sometimes got them into trouble with the Ruler or highly placed members of the royal family and court. But they conducted themselves with such exemplary courage and rectitude that their views and acts were vindicated, and the reputation of their rectitude spread to other parts of Saurashtra.

Gandhi's grandfather, Uttamchand Gandhi was an able administrator. But he ran into trouble with the Queen-mother-Regent because he refused to do what her maids asked of him. The Regent then dispatched the army and got Uttamchand's house shelled. But Uttamchand did not budge. He preferred to leave her service and move to Junagarh. There he had the audacity to salute the Nawab with his left hand.

He was asked to explain why he had shown such disrespect to the Nawab. He explained that his right hand had been pledged to Porbandar. The Nawab was pleased to see such loyalty, and tried to get Uttamchand reinstated as Diwan of Porbandar when the Queen-mother passed away, and the successor ascended the throne. But Uttamchand declined, and his son Karamchand was appointed Diwan at the young age of 24.

Karamchand too was a man of high principles and courage. He too incurred the displeasure of the Ruler of Porbandar, and moved to Rajkot. He was appointed Diwan in Rajkot. There, he could not bear the contemptuous manner in which the British Political Agent talked of the Ruler. He protested, and the British officer retaliated by ordering his arrest and detention. But Karamchand refused to relent or apologize, and the Political Agent had to retract and release Karamchand Gandhi.

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, who later came to be known as Mahatma Gandhi, was born as the son of this Karamchand Gandhi and his wife, Putlibai. Putlibai also came from the trading community. She had not received much education. But she was very knowledgeable about social affairs and matters of court, and could participate intelligently in the talks and discussions that took place among the ladies of the Royal Court. She was a devout Hindu, and used to visit the Haveli or temple regularly. Gandhi used to accompany her to the temple, although, he admitted, he was not attracted by the pomp and show and the goings on in the temple. But what left a lasting mark on Gandhi's mind was the genuine piety of his mother, her profound faith in God, and her unswerving determination to take and adhere to even the hardest of vows in the pursuit of her religious beliefs. To cite an instance, in the rainy season, she would vow not to take her meals till she saw the sun, and would often have to go without food because the sun disappeared behind clouds by the time her children who had spotted the fugitive shouted to her, and she came out to see the sun herself.

Both Karamchand Gandhi and Putlibai were deeply religious although they were not scholars. They were Hindus, perhaps orthodox in many respects. But *sadhus* and religious men of many faiths (Hindu, Jain, Muslim and Parsi) visited their house and engaged in religious discussions. All the members of the family and the children including young Mohandas listened to these discussions with deep interest and reverence. These discussions and the atmosphere of piety in the house must have sown the seeds of faith and tolerance in the mind of young

Mohandas. In later years, they became the foundation of Gandhi's firm belief that all religions deserved equal respect.

There were also days on which the family listened to readings from the great Hindu devotional classics like the Bhagavata and the Ramayana. Mohandas came under the spell of the devotion and dedication to God that throbbed in these verses. He learned to look upon Tulsidas's rendering of the Ramayana as the most moving devotional classic in Hinduism, – perhaps in any religion.

Around this time, Gandhi chanced to see a copy of the *Shravana Pitribhakti Nataka* on his father's table. Though he was not given to reading books, this book attracted him. He read it with great interest, and the picture of Shravana carrying both his blind parents on his shoulders imprinted itself on young Gandhi's mind. The thought arose in him that he should be as loyal to his parents as Shravana was, and should serve them with as much dedication and self- surrender as Shravana. The visit of a travelling troupe that exhibited pictures from Shravana's life intensified this desire to serve his parents with devotion and joy.

Another portrayal that created a lasting impression on Gandhi's mind was that of Raja Harishchandra who had dedicated his life to truth. The ordeals through which the king had to pass and the agony, sacrifices and suffering that he had to undergo to stick to Truth melted Gandhi's heart.

He could not banish the picture of Harishchandra from his mind.

Gandhi had always felt a great fascination for Truth. The story of Harishchandra reinforced this attraction and the determination to cling to Truth at any cost.

### 3

Gandhi started going to school in Porbandar. Later when the family moved to Rajkot, he joined the Alfred High School at Rajkot. He was conscientious, but not fond of studies. He was shy. He would hardly mix with other students in school, and the moment school was over, he would run back home. He was not fond of games but liked to go for long and brisk walks. He had the highest respect for his teachers, and never wanted to do anything that would give them pain.

Yet, there were occasions in school (and outside) when his innate loyalty to truth was put to test. Once when he was in the class, the Inspector of Schools visited his school. The English teacher was keen to prove that his students had been taught well. He gave the students a dictation test in the presence of the Inspector. Young Gandhi could not spell the word 'kettle' correctly. The teacher saw this. He tried to prompt Gandhi to look at what the student next to him had written and to correct himself. But Gandhi could not bring himself to do this. He could not believe that his teacher who should have been concerned with the truthfulness and character of his students was himself prompting him to cheat or engage in untruth.

On another occasion Gandhi had to experience the agony of being taken for a liar. Most students of his school used to go home after the end of regular classes and return for the period of gymnastics. Gandhi too used to do this. One day, by the time Gandhi arrived for gymnastics, the period was over, and boys had gone home. He was marked absent, and was hauled up before the Headmaster, Eduljee. Gandhi explained that he had been nursing his ailing father. Besides, the clouds too had misled him in judging the time. But the headmaster did not believe Gandhi, called him a liar, accused him of lying and imposed a fine. It was not the fine that hurt him, but the thought that he had been looked upon as a liar. That day, Gandhi learnt the lesson that those who wanted to be truthful, and taken as truthful, had to be vigilant and mindful of everything.

There were other experiences that taught Gandhi even more bitter lessons. He became friendly with a boy who had earlier been a friend of his elder brother. Gandhi had been warned against coming under the influence of this boy, Sheikh Mahtab. But he persisted in the belief that he would be able to reform Mahtab. But Mahtab's pleasant ways and persuasive tongue began to lead Gandhi astray in one field after another.

Gandhi's family was strictly vegetarian. But Mahtab convinced Gandhi that no one could be strong and muscular without eating meat, and the Indians would never be able to free themselves from the British unless they took to eating meat, which was the secret of the strength of the British. The argument appealed to Gandhi. Though hesitant, he agreed to try. So a day was chosen. A deserted place was located, and Gandhi shared a non-vegetarian meal with Mahtab. At night, however, Gandhi had strange dreams and nightmares. He felt he could hear the goat bleating from within his belly. In spite of this first experience which had made Gandhi restless, his companion persisted in tempting him, and Gandhi went along. But soon it became clear that the habit was expensive. Neither Gandhi nor his friend had any income of their own to have such special meals at special places. Moreover, it involved lying and deceiving his parents and other members of the family. Gandhi could not reconcile himself to a life of deceit. So he decided to give up the experiment and wait till he had his own income.

Mahtab introduced Gandhi to other habits. He began to smoke. Cigarettes were hard to come by. But once one is in the grip of a habit, one looks for ways of getting what one wants. So Gandhi too started picking up cigarette butts thrown away by his uncle and smoking them secretly. But this did not assure a steady supply. So Gandhi began to pilfer small coins from the bags of his servants. When this too became difficult or inadequate he felt frustrated. He was overcome by deep despair. Sheikh Mahtab shared his feelings, and they both decided that they would end their lives rather than live in agony and despair.

They had heard that Dhatura seeds could help them in their design. So they collected these seeds from the jungle and met at a temple to end their lives by consuming the seeds. Gandhi even swallowed two or three seeds. But then courage failed, and he decided that it was better to live and improve his condition rather than to end his life.

To raise some money, Gandhi and his elder brother made bold to clip off a tiny bit from his brother's golden bracelet. This was too much for Gandhi's conscience. He began to see where he was going and where he would reach if he did not turn back. He was not only living a life of untruth but also deceiving his father who had unquestioning faith in him. He could not continue to steal and cheat and deceive his father. He would choke if he did. There was only one way out. He had to confess to his father and regain a clear conscience. He decided to write out a confession, admit his guilt, assure his father that he would never repeat the crime and ask to be punished for what he had done. Gandhi's father was on his sick bed when Gandhi handed over the letter to him and sat near him waiting to be admonished, and perhaps punished. Karamchand sat up in bed, read the letter. Tears rolled down his cheeks, and he lay down. Gandhi too was in tears. He felt that his father's tears of forgiveness and faith had cleansed him. He learned a lesson that he never forgot. When one realises that one has committed a mistake, one should lose no time in accepting or confessing one's mistake, declaring one's firm resolve not to repeat such mistakes, relinquishing whatever one had gained, and cheerfully suffering any punishment that the mistake calls for. It is this lesson and Gandhi's faith in the power of confession that prompted Gandhi to make public confessions of his shortcomings and mistakes in later life.

4

Gandhi's father was not in good health, and was growing old. He was keen to see his two young sons married before he passed away. So he decided that the younger son, Mohan's marriage should also take place at the same time as that of the elder son.

Gandhi's marriage took place when he was thirteen years of age. He was still a student in the Alfred High School at Rajkot. Kasturba to whom he was married was also of the same age. She had never been to school. Both of them were too young to understand or take up the responsibilities of married life. In later years, Gandhi saw this, and spoke of how thoughtless and dangerous it was to push young children into marriage or for young children to enter into marital life. But at the time Gandhi married, he only knew that his father wanted him to marry, that there would be much pomp and many festivities; that he would be at the centre of all these, and would have an enjoyable experience that he would remember all his life. He also knew that he would, acquire a new playmate or companion, a companion of the other sex with all the mysteries, attractions and social prestige that it held.

On the very first night that he spent with his young bride he experienced the stirrings and attractions of the body. In later years, he wondered who had coached whom in how to cope with what happens to the mind and the body when a young bride and bridegroom are thrown together at a tender age. He realised that he was greatly attracted by the pleasures that the body could give. He found that he was in the grip of lust, and would eagerly wait for nightfall and seek joy in the company of his young wife.

Sheikh Mahtab, who was still close to Gandhi, perhaps divined these new stirrings in Gandhi. He nearly got Gandhi to embark on a life of lust. He took him to visit the lodgings of prostitutes. But Gandhi was saved by something within him. He sat dumb and frozen on the bed till the prostitute herself rained abuses on him and drove him out. Gandhi was saved. Yet later in life he confessed that even though there was no action on his part, the intention to sin

was present, and so he should confess that he was guilty in terms of morality. However, he decided that he would never betray or deceive his wife.

Gandhi was devoted to his wife, Kasturba. But he also believed that as her husband, he had unquestioned authority over her. He would take decisions for her. She could not go anywhere, not even to the temple, without his permission. He was her master. But Kasturba showed that she also had a mind and will of her own. She would go to the temple and visit her friends without seeking Gandhi's permission. Gandhi was jealous, and therefore suspicious. It was only much later in life, after he ceased to be a slave of the body and bodily attractions, that he realised that a wife was not a piece of property to be possessed by him. He then realised that a woman had all the rights that a man had. She was, therefore, entitled to a personality and will of her own. The wife was a companion and an equal partner of the husband, and not a toy or slave. Later in life, Gandhi even said that he had learnt many lessons from his wife, Kasturba – especially in Ahimsa (non-violence) and the way to resist with love.

But that was where Gandhi reached many years later. While in school, and in the years immediately after his marriage, Gandhi was attracted to the bodily pleasures of married life. He would wait for classes to end to run back to his wife. This affected his studies. Worse still, it began to distract his mind even when he was serving his sick father, keeping vigil at his bedside or massaging his feet, before he fell asleep.

One night, the inevitable happened. Gandhi was massaging the feet of his ailing father while his mind was full of the thoughts of Kasturba and the pleasures of their bed. Karamchand's brother, young Gandhi's uncle, offered to massage Karamchand's feet so that Gandhi could go and sleep. Gandhi agreed and ran to his room. He had hardly bolted the room when someone knocked on the door and asked Gandhi to hurry back to his father's bed since he was 'seriously' ill.

He knew what it meant, and hurried back into his father's room only to find that his father had breathed his last during the few minutes that had taken him to go to the side of his wife. Gandhi was overcome with remorse and shame. There was no way of making amends. He had hoped that he would be serving

his father even when his breath departed from the body. He had missed the opportunity because of his desire for bodily pleasures. He let the bitter lesson sink in.

His father's death raised many questions for the family. Gandhi had completed his education in the High School at Rajkot. There was no college in Rajkot then. So he had moved on to the Samaldas College at Bhavnagar. But there he found studies very difficult. All subjects were taught in English. He found that his knowledge of English was not adequate. He did not know what to do. The family needed his support. He had his own wife. One suggestion was that he should look for work or go to Bombay to study. Some friends of the family had a different idea. It would be good if someone from the family could maintain the tradition of serving as the Diwan of Rajkot or Porbandar. Only young Gandhi could attempt this. But times had changed. No one could aspire to be Diwan unless he had sound education. So why should not Gandhi go to England and qualify for the Bar? It would be a prestigious qualification, and would open new avenues. The idea appealed to Gandhi. It was an opportunity and an escape. England had its own attractions at that time. To be educated in England was to receive a passport to the circles of the elite.

But there were many hurdles. The money had to be found. Elders, particularly Gandhi's mother, had to give her consent. His uncle said he would not stand in the way if his mother agreed. His brother agreed to make the money available, if necessary by raising a loan.

The harder task was to get his mother's consent. After much persuasion from many well-wishers and friends of the family Gandhi's mother agreed to let Mohandas go to England, provided he took three solemn vows – to keep away from meat, wine and women. Gandhi took these vows in all solemnity, and went to Bombay on his way to England.

Gandhi's troubles were not over. At Bombay, he was summoned by the elders of the caste. He was about to cross the seas and go abroad. This was forbidden by tradition. So he should desist or face being expelled from the caste and made an outcaste (denied all social contact with members of his own caste, including

his own family). Gandhi was hardly 18. But he discovered that he was not the man to be cowed down. He did not reply with anger or bitterness. He remained calm, and told the elders of the caste that he had made up his mind to go. He respected them. But he would not obey their order, and would readily face the consequences of his disobedience. In later years, Gandhi cited this as the first occasion on which he resorted to Satyagraha, though he did not know then his was an act of Satyagraha.

## 5

Gandhi set sail for England on the 4th of September 1888. He had managed to get a berth booked for himself in the same cabin in which Mazmudar of Jamnagar (Saurashtra) had booked his berth. Gandhi was aware of the big challenge that he was facing as well as the opportunities that were opening before him. He began to keep a diary, and meticulously recorded all that he observed, all that he felt, all that he thought, all that he did and all that he learned. He was shy and found it very difficult to converse in English. He kept to himself except when someone engaged him in conversation. Those who did, tried to convince him that he would not survive without a non-vegetarian diet. He had hardly eaten anything from the ship's kitchen. He did not know what the items of the menu contained. Nor could he bring himself to enquire from the waiters or others. So he had survived on the snacks and sweets that he had brought from home. He never felt sea-sick, and survived rough seas and reached England.

He booked a room in the Victoria Hotel. It was enormously expensive. The problem with his diet persisted. He had brought some notes of introduction with him. One of them was for Dr. P. J. Mehta. Dr. Mehta introduced him to the basics of British etiquette. He advised Gandhi to move out of the hotel and live with a private family. Gandhi followed his advice. But his problems continued to dog him. He could not get the vegetarian food he wanted. So he hardly ate what he was given. Yet he had to pay for his food. He was miserable. Everything seemed strange, – the people, their ways, their habits. He felt homesick, and longed for all that he had left behind in India, – his wife and child, his mother, his brother, food and so on. The thought of going back crossed his mind. But he recalled his responsibilities, and decided that he would stay on and qualify as a barrister before he went back.

Dr. Mehta recommended that Gandhi stay with a family he knew till Gandhi could get acclimatized to his environment. But even here, Gandhi found it hard. Food was one of the main problems. One day a friend took him to a highly

considered restaurant to induct him into the ways and manners of the British. He ordered soup. Gandhi summoned the waiter to enquire whether it had any element of meat or fish in it. His friend was so offended at Gandhi's persistence in his vegetarianism and in his "awkward" ways that he told Gandhi that he was free to go out and eat where he pleased and meet him later. Gandhi was thankful, and left the restaurant. But he could not find any vegetarian restaurant, and so went without food that night.

He started a search for vegetarian restaurants. One day, on one of his walks he came across a vegetarian restaurant in Farringdon Street. He was as delighted as a child that suddenly gets what it has been crying for. He entered, and had his first good meal after he left India. In the restaurant, his eye fell upon a book, *Plea for Vegetarianism*, written by Salt. He bought it and read it from 'cover to cover'. The book brought about a change in his attitude which can only be described as revolutionary. It convinced him that vegetarianism was no fad or superstition. He found, accepted and relished strong arguments in favour of a vegetarian diet and against living on other animals. He became a vegetarian by choice, by conviction. It restored his self-confidence. He was no longer apologetic or embarrassed. He read other books on dietetics and began to see the relation between one's diet and the health of one's body and mind. From then, experiments in diet took an important place in his life. He began to distinguish between what was necessary to maintain one's health and what was necessary to please one's taste buds. At this time, health was the primary concern of these experiments. In later life, the needs of spiritual life became the supreme motive.

To please his friends and to protect himself, Gandhi decided to make up for his vegetarianism by acquiring accomplishments that were regarded as essential for a socially acceptable gentleman. He equipped himself with suits tailored in the most fashionable area of London – Bond Street. A single suit cost him ten pounds. He obtained a double gold chain and a pocket watch, learned to tie a tie, spending ten minutes before the mirror to adjust it, began to take lessons

in French, dancing and elocution. He bought a violin and started taking lessons "to cultivate an ear for Western music". He bought a book on elocution.

But the cumulative effect of all this on his meagre resources and on his mind soon made him examine his own motives. He was not going to spend his life in England. His ambition was not to become a faint and fragmented copy of an Englishman. He had come to England to study, and he should go back to his studies, – it is not externals that made a gentleman, but character.

As soon as Gandhi arrived at this conclusion, he wrote to his elocution teacher and dance teacher setting out these thoughts and apologizing for discontinuing his studies. He went to the violin teacher and requested her to help him dispose of the violin. He told her how he had discovered that he was following a false ideal. She encouraged him in his determination to make a complete change.

The introspection also extended to other areas. He became conscious of the way he was spending his money and time. He began keeping an account of every penny he spent and insisted on tallying his balance before going to sleep. This habit stayed with him all through his life and stood him in good stead when he had to keep accounts of the large sums of money that he collected for public causes.

The daily scrutiny of expenses also led to the realization that he could lead a far simpler and more, frugal life. So he moved to a single room apartment, walked to his places of business to save on bus fares; and cooked as much of his food as he could. All this helped him to live at an incredibly low expenditure.

The change helped Gandhi to harmonize his "inward and outward life".

In his new found enthusiasm for vegetarianism, Gandhi began contributing articles on vegetarianism. He joined the Vegetarian Society, took part in its deliberations, opened a branch in the area in which he lived and worked as the secretary of the society. This gave him an opportunity to learn how institutions are run and how societies transact their business in meetings. It also enabled him to think dispassionately and precisely, and formulate his independent

views. He had not yet overcome his shyness to speak. Even when he had prepared himself or had a prepared text, the moment he stood up he would start feeling that his head was reeling. His mouth would dry up. Someone else would have to read out his speech for him.

There was an occasion on which the Vegetarian Society had to consider a proposal to remove an important member from membership. The ground was that the member was in favour of birth control. The proposal had the backing of the Chairman. But Gandhi had a different view. He was much younger, and inexperienced. Yet he felt that he should not sit silent when something wrong happened in his presence. He felt that since the society was concerned with vegetarianism, it could remove a person only for views or action inconsistent with vegetarianism, and not for a matter that was outside the concern of the society. He was on the losing side, but that did not deter him. Nor did the stature of other members overwhelm him.

His activities in the Vegetarian Society brought him in touch with many well-known men who had become vegetarians. Among them were men of all religions including Theosophists. They introduced him to Theosophy, Madam Blavatsky and Dr. Annie Besant who later became very famous in India. Two of the theosophists wanted him to help them to study the Gita. Gandhi had not read the Gita in Sanskrit or Hindi while he was in India. He confessed this to them. But he thought his acquaintance with Sanskrit would help him to explain the meaning of the stanzas. It was thus that he came across Edwin Arnold's English translation of the Gita, entitled *The Song Celestial*. Its message, particularly the description of the man of abiding wisdom (*Sthitaprajna*) made a deep impression on Gandhi's mind. The verses echoed in Gandhi's mind. He also read Edwin Arnold's *The Light of Asia*, the life and message of the Buddha with even greater interest than he did the Bhagawad Gita. Once he began reading he could not leave the book. The renunciation and compassion of the Buddha left a lasting impression on his mind. A good Christian friend suggested that he should read the Bible. He was not attracted by the Old Testament. But the New Testament produced a different impression. The Sermon on the Mount

went straight to his heart, and reminded him of a verse of Shamal Bhatt which said 'For a bowl of water give a goodly meal'.

He also read Carlyle's chapter on the Hero as a prophet and learnt of the Prophet's greatness and bravery and austere living. All these readings left him with the impression that much was common in the religions, and that renunciation was the highest form of religion.

Vegetarianism was not the only field in which Gandhi's vow was put to test. At least on one occasion he was on the verge of succumbing to the temptation of intimacy with women. But as he was sliding, he was alerted by the friend who was with him. He withdrew himself in time and left the scene, literally fleeing to save himself. He believed that it was God who had saved him from the brink.

His truthfulness saved him from leading a life of deceit as many Indian students did. Many who had left their wives in India pretended that they were unmarried, and enjoyed the company of unmarried English girls. When Gandhi found that an old lady was interested in giving him an opportunity to meet and befriend young girls, he promptly wrote to the lady telling her that he was married, and he should not have left her in the dark about it. He asked her to forgive him if she felt that he had abused her hospitality.

In the midst of all this, Gandhi had made use of his time to get through the Matriculation examination of the University and to keep terms and qualify for the Bar. He learned Latin, and did as much reading of the books of Law as was necessary to qualify for the tests. He passed his examinations and was called to the Bar on the 10th of June 1891. He enrolled in the High Court on the 11th, and sailed for India on the 12th of June.

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When Gandhi landed in India he was shocked to learn that his mother had passed away while he was in England. His brother had hidden the news from him for fear of the effect that it would have on Gandhi's mind and studies in England. Gandhi was deeply devoted to his mother. But he absorbed the shock and wanted to return to Gujarat to start work as a barrister. His brother, however, took him to Nasik to have a holy dip, – to wash off the sin of having crossed the seas. On his return to Rajkot his brother also organised a dinner to pacify the elders of the caste who had declared that Gandhi had lost caste. Gandhi himself had no remorse, and saw no reason for these 'Amends'. However, he bowed to his brother's wishes.

It was not easy for Gandhi to set up legal practice at Rajkot. Though he had passed the Bar Examination in England, he had not studied Indian laws. There was acute competition. He would not be able to earn what he wanted. The British Political Agent had turned down his request for help. He decided to move to Bombay. He enrolled in the Bombay Courts, but could not get clients because he strictly refused to take the help of touts. Finally, he got a client and appeared in the Small Causes Court.

But when the time for cross-examination came, he stood up, but could not find words to speak. His head reeled. He sat down and returned his fees to the client. He then tried to teach English in a school. The headmaster told him that he could not be appointed since he did not have a degree from a University. Gandhi was disappointed. It seemed to him that all doors were closed to him. How would he earn enough to look after the family, and help his brother to repay the loan that was taken to send him to England?

He returned to Rajkot and started to earn a pittance by drafting petitions and memorials. This did not give him enough income. Nor was it in keeping with the status that he had acquired as a barrister who had returned from London. He was at his wit's end, and could not see the way forward.

Quite unexpectedly, he received an offer from a Muslim firm of Kathiawar that had an established business in South Africa. They had a legal dispute with another Indian Muslim's firm. They wanted Gandhi to go to South Africa and help their Chief Counsel. They offered terms that appeared quite attractive. Gandhi decided to accept the offer and go to South Africa to try his luck and to make some money through the practice of law.

Gandhi landed at Durban in May 1893. Abdullah Seth, who was the head of the firm that had engaged his services, was there to receive him. Gandhi had landed on an unknown continent. He had no idea of what was in store for him. But he did not have to wait for long to discover that he was going to face the severest ordeals of his life.

Gandhi was very conscious of his status as a barrister and had insisted on travelling by first class in the ship. He had to be accommodated in the Captain's Cabin since there were no berths available in the first class.

Within two or three days of his arrival at Durban, Sheth Abdullah took him to the Court. Gandhi was wearing an Indian turban as he sat in the Court. The Magistrate stared at him, and ordered him to remove his turban. Gandhi considered that an insult. He declined to remove his turban and left the Court. This was his first personal experience of the insults and discrimination that Indians had to face in South Africa.

Both South Africa and India were part of the British Empire in the 19th Century. The white population of South Africa wanted to develop their plantations. They wanted labourers who would do hard work for nominal wages. They did not want to use black African labour. So they decided to recruit labour from India. These labourers were recruited on a system that came to be known as the Indenture System. Under it, Indians were recruited to work for a few shillings in the year. They had to sign a bond that they would serve for five years. They would not be permitted to return earlier. At the end of five years, they could renew their contract to work for five more years or return to India. The South African Government did not want them to stay back as free citizens. They were afraid of the industriousness and enterprise and frugal ways of Indians. They

wanted Indians in South Africa only as bonded labourers living in conditions of semi-slavery, not as free citizens and competitors. So the Government of South Africa discriminated against Indians and humiliated them at every turn. Those who wanted to stay back after serving their term of indenture had to pay a poll tax of three pounds every year. This was far beyond the means of the labourers whose wages were too meagre even to make both ends meet. Most of these labourers were from Tamil Nadu, Andhra, Bihar and UP. They were illiterate, innocent about rights, "and helpless and leaderless.

Indians had to put up with many other humiliating restrictions. They could not reside where they wanted. They had to carry identity cards and subject themselves to scrutiny by the police. They had to take licences to be vendors. In some States, they could not walk on the pavements, or be out of their houses after nightfall. Some Indians had gone to South Africa to trade. Some of them had built up wealthy firms. But in most States, Indians were kept outside the pale of social or political life.

A few days after his experience in the Durban Court, Gandhi continued his journey to Pretoria where the legal suit was being heard. He had to travel by train. A ticket was booked for him in the first class, and Gandhi commenced his journey.

When the train reached Petermaritzburg, a white passenger who entered the compartment, objected to a 'coloured man' travelling in the first class compartment. He wanted the coloured man, Gandhi, to be removed to the 'van compartment', which was meant for coloured passengers. Gandhi protested. He had a first class ticket, and he was entitled to travel in the first class. Gandhi refused to leave the compartment voluntarily. A constable was summoned. He took Gandhi by the hand, and pushed him out. Gandhi's luggage was taken out. He firmly refused to go to the van compartment. The train steamed away leaving Gandhi on the platform.

Gandhi went and sat in the waiting room. It was night, and it was bitterly cold. The railway authorities had taken charge of his luggage. His overcoat was in the baggage. But he had no mind to ask for it. There he sat alone shivering in the

biting cold, on the dark and deserted platform, far away from home, bereft of all succor, facing the biggest challenge of his life. He had been insulted and humiliated. What was being violated was his dignity as a human being. What was being asked of him was to acquiesce in the denial of his human dignity, to cooperate in the conspiracy (and effort) to downgrade him into a slave or lesser human. Was he to cooperate in his own undoing? Was he to let cowardice or greed snuff out his inherent birthright to be a human being? Or was he to stand up and resist? If he does not fight for himself, who will fight for him? Was he to accept the dictum "discretion is the better part of valour", and return to India, leaving the field of battle? Will he save his self-respect and dignity by doing so? Or will he lose respect in his own eyes? The answer became clear to Gandhi. He would not be the cause of his own undoing. He would not cooperate in his own undoing. He would fight, not flee or acquiesce. The forces ranged against him may be mighty. But he had his own strength; the strength of his spirit, of his will; of his ability to non-cooperate with his 'enemy'. That night Gandhi discovered himself. That night Gandhi shed his fear. He discovered a way that • anyone who could overcome fear, and was determined, could use. That was the night Gandhi emerged from his shell, and came into his own. He himself recalled it as the most creative experience of his life. The discovery of the power within one and the power of non-cooperation had set Gandhi free.

Gandhi continued his journey the next day. He had to take a stage-coach from Charlestown to Standerton. The experience of the train was repeated. He had a ticket but was asked to sit outside, by the side of the coachman. The 'leader' or conductor of the coach sat inside, in his place, and when he wanted to smoke he came out and asked Gandhi to vacate his perch by the coachman, and sit on a piece of jute matting on the foot rest. Gandhi refused. The burly coachman pushed him and pummelled him. Gandhi clung on to the railings, but did not give up his seat. He was being beaten and pushed down when some passengers felt ashamed at the scene and asked the 'leader' to leave Gandhi alone.

Gandhi arrived in Johannesburg, and went on to Pretoria. At Pretoria he established contact with the lawyers who were in charge of Abdullah's suit. The

next thing he did was to get a leading Indian merchant to convene a meeting of all the Indians in Pretoria. He said he wanted to get in touch with every Indian. The meeting saw a Gandhi who was very different from the one who had sat tongue-tied in meetings and court rooms. Gone was Gandhi's shyness, nervousness, and hesitancy. He said he wanted to study the condition of Indians and help them improve their situation. He placed three ideas before them. Firstly, they should forget distinctions of religion and language and consider themselves Indians. They should achieve unity. Secondly, they should look into their own actions and remove all shortcomings and weaknesses that could cause prejudice against them. Neglect of sanitation, illiteracy, unconcern for truthfulness and the like weakened them. They should overcome them. Thirdly, they should form an association that could voice their views and protect their interests. Gandhi created an impact. Those who attended promised to cooperate. Gandhi offered to teach English to those who wanted, and to give as much time as he could find for the common effort.

Meanwhile, Gandhi made many friends among people of all persuasions. His letters to journals espousing the Indian cause or drawing attention to specific instances of injustice and the transparent absence of bitterness, untruth and exaggeration in his writings drew appreciation from many, even among the white population.

Gandhi busied himself with the legal work for which he had gone to South Africa. He studied the facts of the case. He discovered that truth could be sifted and put forward only if he had a good grasp of accounting and book keeping. So he set himself to the task and acquired mastery over the intricacies of accountancy. But he always felt that the true service that a lawyer could give was to secure justice without acrimony and hostility and the spirit of vengeance. Justice did not require a demand for the pound of flesh. He, therefore, believed in using law and common sense to find a settlement outside the court, avoiding the acrimony that litigation brought.

He had succeeded in securing the confidence of his client Sheth Abdullah. The other party to the suit was also an Indian Muslim merchant from Gujarat.

Ultimately, Gandhi's persistent efforts succeeded, and the case involving a huge sum of money was settled out of court to the satisfaction of all. The arbitrator's award went in favour of Sheth Dada Abdullah, but the other party was not in a position to pay the awarded dues in one installments. If he had to do so, he would have become bankrupt. Gandhi persuaded Abdullah to permit Tyeb Sheth to pay the money in installments.

Now that the assignment on which Gandhi had gone to South Africa had ended, Gandhi prepared to return to India. A farewell meeting was arranged. At the meeting, as Gandhi was about to speak, his eyes fell on a copy of the *Natal Mercury*. It carried a report about the impending passage of a Bill to disenfranchise all Indians in Natal. Gandhi saw this as the thin end of the wedge. He said that if the Bill was passed, and the Indians acquiesced in it, they would be driving the first nail into their own coffin. Everyone felt concerned, and wanted that the Bill should be opposed. But who was to take the lead?

Who was to organize public opinion and bring pressure on the legislature? The younger Indians who were educated could perhaps take up the cause. But they had other interests. Everyone at the farewell meeting turned to Gandhi. They told him he was the man who could save the Indian community in the hour of trial. Gandhi was reluctant. He was anxious to go home. But the persistent demand of the leading Indians and his own sense of duty made him agree to postpone his return by a month. He declined to take any remuneration for public service. He would stay back and serve them for a month. Thus began a commitment that kept Gandhi in South Africa for two decades.

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Gandhi got to work that very evening. He drafted a petition to the Legislature and submitted it with the signature of 500 Indians. The Bill was passed in spite of the petition. But the Indian cause and the Indian action in support of it, drew public attention. Gandhi was not overwhelmed by the failure of the petition to secure redress. He drafted another petition, this time to the Secretary of State for Colonies in Britain. He secured 10,000 signatures within a fortnight. Copies were distributed in England as well. Sections of the British press took sympathetic note of the case that Gandhi presented in the petition. Gandhi left no stone unturned. He tried to create public opinion in South Africa, in England, in the Parliament, in the press, among public personages. He wrote to Dadabhai Naoroji, who was a member of the British Parliament. He had met Dadabhai once when he was in London. Now he wrote to Dadabhai asking him to use his great influence to seek redress for the Indian community in South Africa. He told the doyen of Indian leaders why he was praying for his help. "I am yet inexperienced and young, and therefore, quite liable to make mistakes. The responsibility undertaken is quite out of proportion to my ability. I may mention that I am doing this without any remuneration. So you will see that I have not taken the matter up, which is beyond my ability, to enrich myself at the expense of the Indians. I am the only available person who can handle the question. You will, therefore, oblige me very greatly if you will kindly direct and guide me and make necessary suggestions which shall be received as from a father to his child."

Gandhi's campaign had its effect. The British government vetoed the Bill passed by the Natal Legislature. But Natal got round the veto with another Bill. What more, the Government of Natal decided to impose a poll tax of 3 pounds on all indentured labourers who wanted to stay back in South Africa without renewing their indenture agreement.

This was an inhuman measure, and was meant only to bring pressure on the poor labourer who earned only 14 shillings a month. Many other restrictions were imposed on Indians.

Gandhi saw that the fight would be long and hard. He formed an organization of Indians, and called it 'The Natal Indian Congress'. He built up the organization with members w'ho paid a subscription, and with branches and rules for the conduct of business. He plunged into the task of creating opinion with frequent articles and letters in journals, memorials, petitions, and meetings of the Indian community.

But all this took many months. Gandhi had refused to take remuneration for his public work. But he had to find money to meet his own expenses. He decided to accept fees for the legal work for which Indian friends might use his services. To enable him to practise in the courts, he had to enroll himself. He applied for registration. His application was opposed by the Law Society, but upheld by the Supreme Court of Natal. He enrolled himself as an advocate.

The month for which Gandhi had agreed to stay on had stretched to years, and it looked as though he would have to spend many more years fighting discrimination in South Africa. He decided to take leave for six months to go to India and bring his family with him. He also wanted to use the opportunity to inform the people and leaders in India about the near slavery that Indian labourers were reduced to in South Africa, and the indignities that were heaped on all Indians. He visited the main cities, – Bombay, Poona and Madras. His visit to Calcutta was cut short by urgent summons from his colleagues in South Africa. At Bombay, Poona and Madras he met the tallest leaders of the time, and addressed meetings of opinion makers. Among those whose support he secured were Sir Pheroze Shah Mehta, Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Gopal Krishna Gokhale and others.

He received sympathy and supports everywhere. He described the humiliation of Indians and said that submission to insults was reconciling with one's own degradation. He urged public opinion in India to bring pressure on the Indian Government to protect the honour and dignity of Indian citizens. He urged the

Government of British India to suspend the recruitment of indentured labour if it could not protect Indian citizens or ameliorate their conditions. He also wrote and published a booklet on the conditions of Indians in South Africa. He had stated facts, and that too with his customary moderation...

When Gandhi received the urgent summons, he decided to cut short his stay in India and return to South Africa with his family. He and his family boarded the s.s. *Courland*, a ship that belonged to Dada Abdullah. Another ship of Abdullah's, the *Naderi*, was also sailing at the same time. There were 800 indentured labourers travelling by these ships. Meanwhile, the white population of Natal was in a state of mad fury. They had been infuriated by a news agency report that Gandhi had published a scurrilous and hateful leaflet against the whites of South Africa, and was bringing shiploads of Indian labourers to flood South Africa. Whites held meetings and declared that they would teach Gandhi a lesson. The flames of fury were fanned by leaders and officials. Thus, when the ships arrived at the port, they were not allowed to dock.

They were kept at sea. Even when they were allowed to dock, the ships were quarantined, and passengers were not allowed to disembark. Agents of the white infuriated men were waiting at the dock to deal with Gandhi. After 23 days of quarantine, on the 13th of May, 1897, the passengers were allowed to disembark. There were fears about Gandhi and his family. The family managed to leave and reach the house of Parsi Rustomji safely. Gandhi received a message from Mr. Escombe, the Attorney General, warning him about the mood of the whites. He asked Gandhi to wait till night-fall, and leave the ship after darkness had fallen. Gandhi had nearly decided to accept Escombe's advice when he received a message from Mr. Laughton, the advocate of Dada Abdullah advising him against accepting Escombe's suggestion, and informing him that he himself was going over to the ship to accompany Gandhi.

Gandhi left the ship and walked down with Laughton, with the intention of walking to the house of his colleague, Parsi Rustomji. Kasturba and the family had already reached the house. Soon after Gandhi and Laughton set out, those who were holding vigil spotted Gandhi by his turban. Alerted by them, a crowd

collected and moved menacingly towards Gandhi. Laughton tried to hail a rickshaw to take them to the house. The rickshaw puller was scared away. The crowd started closing in on Gandhi. In the pushing and pulling, Laughton got separated from Gandhi. Now the crowd began to rain blows, and throw stones. They were intent on lynching Gandhi. Gandhi walked on. He was hit by a rain of stones. He was injured, and started bleeding profusely. Swathed in blood, he was still hauling himself forward when he got dizzy and swooned. The crowd of lynchers and persecutors was in hot pursuit. Gandhi held on to the railings on the side of the road and kept crawling while more stones landed on his bleeding body. It is difficult to say what would have happened if, at that crucial moment, Mrs. Alexander, the wife of the Police Superintendent had not chanced to come from the opposite direction. She was a white woman, and much respected in the community. Seeing Gandhi bleeding and crawling with tormentors in hot pursuit, she went to Gandhi, opened her parasol to protect him from the stones, and chastised the crowd. In the meanwhile, Alexander, the Police Superintendent himself arrived on the scene with a posse of Police and rescued Gandhi, and escorted him to Parsi Rustomji's house.

Hearing that Gandhi had reached Rustomji's house, a crowd collected there, asking that Gandhi be handed over to them. They threatened to burn the house down, along with all the inmates, if Gandhi was not handed over. The Police Superintendent acted with great tact in holding the crowd at bay, and meanwhile persuading Gandhi to leave through the back door dressed as a policeman, and go to the safety of the police station.

When the news that white crowds had attempted to lynch Gandhi and had inflicted injuries on his body reached London and other capitals of the world, there was widespread revulsion and sorrow. The Secretary of State for Colonies sent a telegram to the Government of South Africa asking them to track down and punish the culprits. The Police Superintendent informed Gandhi of these orders and asked for his co-operation in identifying the culprits and punishing them. Gandhi had no bitterness whatsoever. He told the Government that he did not want the Government to prosecute any of his assailants.

He could perhaps identify many. But he did not believe in retaliation. It was against his Dharma. They were the victim's of prejudice, and had to be weaned. There was neither bitterness nor anger nor hatred in his heart. Moreover, it would serve no purpose if small fries were prosecuted while those who incited them went scot free.

8

As Gandhi was settling down in Johannesburg with his family, and building up the Natal Indian Congress as the spearhead of the struggle for the rights of the Indian Community, other developments took place. South Africa had to go through the ordeal of a civil war. The two sides who were ranged against each other were the descendants of the original Dutch settlers who had colonized large areas of South Africa, and the descendants of the whites who came later, particularly from Great Britain. They had their differences in attitudes and beliefs. The descendants of the Dutch were called Boers. They spoke 'Afrikaans' which was very similar to Dutch. They were tough farmers. They looked down upon the Indians and wanted only to use them as slave labour, confined to their locations. The attitudes of other whites were not very different.

Gandhi was in a quandary. What attitude should the Indians adopt in the war between these two white groups fighting for supremacy? Were they to side with the Government or with those who were challenging the Government that they were fighting? Or were they to remain neutral?

Gandhi believed that rights and duties were related. If Indians asked for equal rights they should be prepared to accept equal responsibility for discharging the duties of citizenship. A primary duty of the citizen was to defend the state when it was in danger. They could not claim exemption on the ground that they believed in pacifism or non-violence unless their faith in non-violence was well known even before the war. Moreover, even a symbolic participation by the Indian community would raise their standing in the eyes of the whites.

Gandhi therefore offered to raise a Corps of stretcher bearers to serve with the Army. His offer was accepted. With characteristic efficiency he recruited and trained an Indian Ambulance Corps. The members of the corps won admiration and praise for the exemplary courage they displayed on the field of battle carrying out their duties even in danger zones that they were not bound to enter. They surprised the Army and civilians with their feats of endurance, trudging through rough terrain, often doing more than 25 miles a day. All this

compelled the white population to revise their view about the Indians whom they had written off as feeble and cowardly, and concerned only with eking out an existence. At the end of the war, the Indian corps was mentioned in the despatches of the General, and its members and Sgt. Gandhi were praised for their contribution, and awarded medals of recognition. Gandhi had put the bona fides of the Indian community beyond question.

The war with the Boers was over in 1901. Gandhi felt that he had put the Indian struggle on course. He had created awareness and determination. He had brought different sections of the community together. He had built up an organization. He felt that the time had come for him to return to India and work among his people there. The Indian community was sad, and did not want to let him go. But they could not dissuade him. So they arranged a farewell and showered him and Kasturba with gifts in gold and gems and jewellery. Kasturba herself was presented with a necklace worth more than fifty sovereigns of gold. Gandhi was deeply perturbed. How could he accept these costly gifts for services he rendered in answer to the call of his conscience? He had a sleepless night. He was deeply agitated, and paced up and down in his room. By the morning he had taken the decision to make a trust and donate all the gifts he had received from the community the day before, and five years ago, on the eve of his return to India. The Trust and income from it were to be used for the service of the community. It was not easy for him to persuade Kasturba to part with the golden necklace and diamonds gifted to her. She demurred and was in tears. Gandhi was harsh, and reminded her that the gifts were for the service he had rendered.

On his return to India, Gandhi wanted to set up practice in Rajkot. But he was persuaded to settle down in Bombay, since Bombay had more opportunities for public work as well as for his work as a barrister. He spent some time in Pune with the great Gopal Krishna Gokhale, and visited Calcutta, Varanasi and other places on his way back to Rajkot. He was shocked and appalled to see the river of blood flowing from the goats that were sacrificed at the Kali temple at Calcutta, and the filth and ungodly atmosphere at Varanasi.

He had hardly settled down in Calcutta when South Africa summoned him again, to lead a delegation of Indians to meet Chamberlain, the British Secretary of State for Colonies. Great hopes were entertained from the visit. Gandhi (and the Indians) believed that the Imperial Government would be more responsive and fair to the Indians because of the service that Indians had rendered in the cause of the Crown, and because Transvaal had now become a Crown colony after the defeat of the Boers. But they were shocked and sorely disappointed. Chamberlain was more interested in raising funds from the whites than in doing justice to the coloured or the blacks. The memorial that Gandhi had drafted was brushed aside saying that the colonies had self-rule.

Worse humiliation was awaiting Gandhi and the Indians in Transvaal where too the Indian community wanted to wait on Chamberlain. After the war, conditions in the Transvaal were not normal. An Asiatic Department had been set up. The declared aim of the Department was to protect the Asians, but the real purpose was to harass them and drive them out. They insisted that Asians from outside Transvaal could enter Transvaal only with a permit. The system of permits had led to corruption. Gandhi found it hard to get a permit to enter Transvaal, and when he managed to do so, he was not permitted to join the Indian delegation that Chamberlain received. This was an eye opener. Gandhi was insulted and excluded. He realized what the new policy of the Government meant. The odds would now be heavier. They would have to start afresh. He would not be able to return to India as he had planned to do. He would have to make Johannesburg (Transvaal) his headquarters. He got his colleagues to agree to his moving from Durban, and enrolled in the Supreme Court at Johannesburg. He found a house in the legal quarters of the city. Since he now anticipated a prolonged stay in South Africa, he asked his family to return to be with him.

He knew that the struggle was going to be long and hard. The whites had already hardened their attitude. It might harden further and might become ruthless when their interests were in real danger. Rights will not be granted for the asking. They will have to be wrenched from unwilling hands.

For this, two things were necessary. The Indian community should be united. Their organization should be strengthened. They should be willing to back their petitions with action, if that became necessary. Action was not possible without readiness to suffer its consequences, without sacrificing narrow self-interest, without readiness to pay the price of freedom and equality. The Indian community had to shed its fear; know its goals; understand the means that they were to employ, cooperate in the strategy of action. All this meant constant communication between him and all sections of the Indian community living in all the states of South Africa. Gandhi decided to start a journal for this purpose. The journal was published in English, Hindi, Gujarati and Tamil. Week after week he wrote on all issues, all aspects of the ideology behind the struggle, all problems before the community. It was the life line of his communication with the people, and with all sympathisers and adversaries. He continued to edit it till he returned to India in 1914.

The second need related to himself. He should become a fit instrument to lead his people in such a struggle, – the struggle in which the weak who were in the right were pitted against the mighty who were defending injustice. Gandhi had already shed his shyness. His diffidence had melted in the fire of his commitment to the cause. The cause was not self- glorification but the vindication of the dignity and equality of the human being. He had discovered the power of the spirit, of the will. This is present in all. But everyone has to be helped to discover it and to use it against evil. Gandhi had to help them to discover this treasure house of power that they held within themselves. But he could do so only if he became the selfless transparent manifestation of this power within. He could do so only if he purified himself, overcame, and became immune to, all temptations. In his own words, a leader had to be immune to all temptation, and be in command of his desires.

In the midst of all his public activity, he therefore embarked on a ruthless and relentless exercise of introspection and self-purification. He delved deep into the life and message of every great human being who had set out to discover the power and ways of the spirit. He embarked on a respectful study of all the

main religions of the world, – Christianity, Hinduism, Islam and others. He had studied something of these religions earlier. But now it became urgent, and was based on his commitment to find and tread the path of the spirit for himself and for his colleagues.

He had many friends among the Christians. Many of them had been impressed by his respect for Christianity. They had hoped that Gandhi would accept the Christian faith. Some of them had urged Gandhi to do so. Gandhi was greatly attracted by the life of Jesus. Tears welled in his eyes when he thought of the crucifixion of Jesus, or the Sermon on the Mount, and its message of love and renunciation. But he had difficulties. He could not accept Christianity as explained by his followers. He could not believe in miracles. He could not believe that Jesus was the only Son of God. In his view, all human beings were the children of God. He could not subscribe to the belief that only those who accepted 'His great redemption' could find eternal peace. He replied, "I do not seek redemption from the consequences of my sin. I seek to be redeemed from sin itself, or rather from the very thought of sin. Until I have attained that end, I shall be content to be restless."

He could not accept many of the superstitions and rituals that had come to be identified as an essential part of Hinduism. He could not accept that God or religion could ordain human beings to be treated untouchables. He had revolted against this even while he was a young boy, and his mother had asked him not to touch the young Ulaka who belonged to a caste that was considered untouchable. He would touch Ulaka to show that the belief was a myth and was indefensible. There were many questions in his mind about human life, death, the soul, rebirth and so on, and he engaged in discussions and correspondence with Raichandbhai, a well-known religious thinker and practitioner in Gujarat. He delved into a study of the Gita, and discovered a veritable 'spiritual dictionary' in it. It had an answer for every occasion, every difficulty. Many of its stanzas brought tears to his eyes. To him the battlefield of Kurukshetra was metaphorical. There was an incessant fight going on within us between good and evil. Lord Krishna had shown us the path that could lead to the victory of

the good. It did not lie through violence and war, but through the renunciation of attachment to desires and the fruits of action. A human being cannot escape action. He should wear himself out in action, not with attachment to the fruits of his action, but by dedicating them to all, by renunciation. He called the Gita the yoga of the non-attachment. He also saw in the Gita the message that all human beings had to earn their bread by their own work, looking upon all such work as a link in the sacrificial effort that maintained society and sustained nature. This he called the spirit of Yajna. He accepted the Gita's idea that one who wanted to serve others or even himself should control his desires and emotions and become a *Sthitaprajna* or a man of abiding wisdom. He had to overcome his ego and the temptation of the senses, and live by the sweat of his brow.

All these thoughts and beliefs were surfacing and milling in his mind when, on one of his journeys from Johannesburg to Durban, his friend and colleague, Polak gave him a book to read on the train. It was Ruskin's *Unto This Last*. He started reading, and found that he could not lay the book down. The book confirmed many of his thoughts:

1. The good of the individual is contained in the good of all, – since all human beings are interdependent.
2. All socially useful work, – whether that of the lawyer or barber has the same value.
3. A life of labour, particularly productive labour related to basic needs – like agriculture or handicrafts - was the life worth living.

Gandhi believed in practising whatever he accepted as true or desirable. So, he decided to lead the life of a farmer and craftsman, while devoting his life to the struggle for justice. He bought a farm near Phoenix, 14 miles from Durban, and moved to this farm which was named the Phoenix Settlement. This was in 1904 when he was 35 years of age. He often trekked from Durban to Phoenix and back. He invited his colleagues - Indian, European, Chinese and others to go and settle in the Phoenix Settlement. The printing press of the *Indian Opinion* was shifted there. The Settlement became Gandhi's laboratory to

discover the transformation that the individual and the community needed to lead a life free from exploitation and dedicated to the realization of high ideals. Among the members of the community were Polak and his wife Millie, Maganlal Gandhi and many others.

The experiments that Gandhi conducted at the Settlement related to all aspects of life. He had to discover what helped to tame the body and mind, – to acquire mastery over the senses, to overcome the ego that stood in the way of the mind, and an order that worked for the welfare of all that he described later as Sarvodaya.

So there were experiments with food or diet; experiments aimed at self-sufficiency in the production of essentials; experiments on the extent to which an individual could go in achieving self-sufficiency consistent with interdependence; experiments in new methods of education through manual work or craft, supplementary study, character-building and community living. Gandhi was the example that inspired these experiments and monitored the evolution towards truth, love, sacrifice and non-exploitative values. The community also witnessed experiments aimed at acquiring control over emotions like anger and jealousy, and problems arising from boys and girls living in each other's constant company.

In the meanwhile South Africa was rocked by a rebellion of the Zulus. There were large-scale military operations against the Zulus. Again Gandhi offered to raise an Indian Ambulance Corps to tend the wounded and remove the dead. Gandhi's experiences during the Rebellion were harrowing and excruciating. He saw barbarism at its worst. Zulus were whipped till their skins peeled off. They were left in a pool of blood. Whites refused to tend the wounded Zulus. They wanted the Zulus to bleed and die, and be fed upon by birds of prey or wild beasts. The Indian Ambulance Corps looked after the Zulus - wounded and dead. Again the courage and forbearance of Gandhi and his colleagues were commended, and they were honoured with medals. But Gandhi's mind was restless and in remorse for what he had seen of the cruelty of man against man. The physical sufferings that he had seen had drained his mind of all desire for

the momentary pleasures of the body. He had already been thinking of a vow to give up the life of the flesh, and the attractions of the flesh. The conviction grew in him that he could not do public work without leading a life of *brahmacharya* or celibacy. So, when he returned from the field of battle, he talked the matter over with his wife. She had no objection. He was happy to receive her consent. He took the vow of *brahmacharya* (celibacy) in 1906. He was 37 years of age.

## 9

Even as Gandhi was preparing himself for the struggle ahead, the Government of the State of Transvaal notified the draft of a new Ordinance on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of August 1906. The new law made it compulsory for all Indians, even children, to register themselves with their finger prints. Everyone would have to carry a certificate on his person at all times. Those who did not would lose the right of residence, and would face prison or deportation from Transvaal. The Indian community was incensed at the thought of their women being stopped and searched for certificates. So great was the indignation that some Indians threatened to shoot policemen who stopped or submitted their women to search.

Gandhi was clear that if the Ordinance became law and the Indians acquiesced, they and their honour would be wiped out. The Ordinance had to be resisted. But resistance would bring unprecedented suffering. Would his people stand up and fight? He convened a meeting of all Indians at the Empire Theatre, Johannesburg. On the 11th of September 1906, when the time of the meeting came, the hall was overflowing with people. Haji Habib read out the resolution drafted by Gandhi. It declared that Indians would not submit to the Ordinance. They would suffer the penalties that would result from defiance, but would not submit. Gandhi did not want them to pass the resolution without full knowledge of the consequences. He told them they might be arrested. They may have to spend several months in dark and dingy prisons. They might not be able to eat the food that they would be given. They would be at the mercy of African warders. They should expect no mercy. They might be assaulted, handcuffed. They might take ill and die in prison. Their families might suffer. Would they still pass the resolution and pledge resistance?

At this time, the Chairman suggested that they should pass the resolution with God as witness. Gandhi's ears stood up. In a flash, he saw a great opportunity. He asked for permission to speak again. He explained to the listeners what it meant to take a pledge or vow in the name of God. The resolution ceased to be

an ordinary resolution. It became a pledge or vow before God. There could be no going back from a vow taken with God as witness. It became a spiritual obligation. Would they still take the pledge and pass the resolution? There was still time for those who were not sure, to desist. But for him, the leader, "only one course is open to me ... to die rather than submit to the law". The listeners were electrified. Some were in tears. All of them rose and took the pledge or vow in the name of God.

Gandhi said that at that moment, he did not understand all the implications of the new method of resistance that the vow symbolized. "I only knew that some new principle had come into being, which was capable of revolutionizing individual and social life." This was the birth of Satyagraha. To begin with he called it passive resistance; but this did not clearly convey the inspiration behind the fight or the nature of the fight. So the term 'Satyagraha' was coined on the basis of suggestions that came from Indian friends.

Many Indians refused to register. Gandhi was ordered to leave Transvaal. He refused. He was arrested on the 10th of January 1908. As was to become his custom later, he asked the magistrate to award him the heaviest sentence that the law prescribed, since he was the main culprit. He was sentenced to two months in prison. By the end of January many Indians were in jail. General Smuts who was the Prime Minister was perplexed. He sent Mr. Cartright, the editor of a journal and a friend of Gandhi's, with a proposal for a compromise. Cartright met Gandhi in prison and gave him the General's message. The Government only wanted to prevent further immigration of Indians into Transvaal. So, if the Indians in Transvaal registered themselves voluntarily he would withdraw the Ordinance. Gandhi was taken to meet the General.

Gandhi believed in the General's intentions and his promise to repeal the Act, and agreed to the compromise. Gandhi was released. But he found it hard to convince many of his followers who had no faith in the government. Gandhi explained his reasons and announced that he would be the first to register.

On the appointed day, Gandhi was proceeding to the office of the Registrar to register voluntarily. He was surrounded by his friends and followers. Suddenly,

a Pathan who had taken the pledge of resistance stepped forward, asked Gandhi what he was about to do, and felled him with severe blows. Gandhi exclaimed 'Hai Ram' and fell unconscious. He was removed to the house of a Christian missionary, Rev. Doke. When he regained his consciousness, Gandhi made two requests. One was that Mir Alam and his assistant should not be prosecuted, but should be forgiven. The other was that he (Gandhi) should be taken to the Asiatic Registrar so that he might be the first to register. But his physical condition was such that he could not be taken to the office of the Registrar. Gandhi then wanted that the Registrar should be requested to go to his bed side. The Registrar came, but advised Gandhi to wait till he was well enough. But Gandhi would not agree. He had to be the first to register as he had promised to do. But he could not lift his swollen and bruised hand. His hand was lifted up and placed on the spot, and he signed and gave his finger prints. Mr. Channey, the white Registrar, wiped his tears as he saw Gandhi sign. This was not the last time Gandhi brought tears of affection and admiration to the eyes of his adversaries.

But Gandhi's Indian critics were proved right. General Smuts betrayed Gandhi. As soon as he found that a large number of Indians had registered voluntarily, the General brought in a Bill to validate voluntary registration in the eyes of the law, and announced that the Black Act (on registration) would not be repealed. Gandhi was truly tricked. The honour as well as the future of the Indian community was in danger. It seemed as though they had defeated themselves.

Gandhi rose to the occasion. He found a dignified way of exposing the General's perfidy and vindicating the honour, intentions and courage of the Indians. He declared that the Indians would stop registering and would publicly burn the certificates of registration that had been issued to them, thus voluntarily defying the Government and inviting them to take action against them under the Act. A mammoth meeting was arranged at the grounds of the Hamidia mosque, and a cauldron was set up near the dais. An ultimatum was sent to the Government. From suffering in silence and petitioning, Gandhi had led the

people to a position of fearlessness and defiance. It was they who were now issuing an ultimatum to the Government. "We regret to state that if the Asiatic Act is not repealed in terms of the settlement, and if the Government's desire to this effect is not communicated to the Indians before a 'specific date', the certificates collected by the Indians would be burnt, and they would humbly but firmly take the consequences."

The response was tremendous. There was high drama, open rebellion of the kind the world had never witnessed. The world press had assembled to witness the bonfire. The Government did not relent. It replied in the negative. As its telegram was read out at the meeting, there were cheers. Again, Gandhi declared that anyone who was afraid of consequences could take back his certificate before it was burnt. There was only one shout that rent the air : "Burn them." And as the certificates in the cauldron were about to be set fire to, Mir Alam who had been released from prison stepped forward and hugged Gandhi, and apologized for mistaking Gandhi's intentions and suggesting that he had been bought over by the whites.

The struggle against the Black Act was intensified. Gandhi found many ingenious ways of defying the Act. He inducted prominent and respected leaders of the community like Parsi Sorabji and Adajania from Natal into the struggle of defiance, to court arrest and imprisonment.

The Government had to act. They arrested Gandhi and imprisoned him. This was in 1908. He was sent to Volksrust prison. It was there, in the prison, that Gandhi read Thoreau's book on Civil Disobedience. He was happy to find that the book vindicated his views and plan of action. By now, many Indians had courted arrest through defiance or Satyagraha. They were lodged in prison. Their courage and determination were exemplary.

When Gandhi was released from prison after his third stint, in 1909, constitutional issues relating to the Union of South African states were before the British Parliament. Many Indians felt that Gandhi should use the opportunity to present the Indian point of view to the Government and Members of Parliament. He proceeded to London in the company of a colleague. He had

great faith in the fair play and sense of justice of the British nation. But he was disappointed. Indian demands met with a negative and cynical response. The visit to England, however, gave him an opportunity to secure sympathy and support from many leaders of public opinion in England. It also gave him an opportunity to meet and exchange views with many Indian revolutionaries who were advocating violent means to seek India's independence. This saddened him. He felt that they had not thought out the meaning of independence or the impact that one's methods would have on the attainment or distortion of one's goals. He was also saddened by their unthinking acceptance of Western Civilization and the cult of industrialism. He was convinced that the philosophy of greed and indulgence would destroy human civilization. To him Satyagraha was the answer. These thoughts were very much in his mind, and so, on his way from England to South Africa, he put his views down in the form of a dialogue. This book was published first in Gujarati as *Hind Swaraj*. It was later translated into English, and is often looked upon as a basic exposition of Gandhi's political and economic views.

It was during this visit to London that Gandhi first started corresponding with Tolstoy, the great Russian thinker and litterateur. Gandhi had read his books.

To him Tolstoy was a sage, a revolutionary thinker. He had been greatly influenced by Tolstoy's spiritual perceptions as well as his thoughts on social and economic matters.

On his return from London, Gandhi was confronted with the need to intensify his struggle. Many Satyagrahis were in prison. Many more would have to serve terms in prison. He had to find a way of looking after their families while they were in prison. He could not depend only on public funds. So he conceived the idea of setting up a farm where the families could live, work on land or crafts and produce what was needed for the community. One of his close associates, Herman Kallenbach, an architect of German stock offered him a plot of 1000 acres which had already been acquired. On this plot was set up the Tolstoy Farm. The object of the farm was to train Satyagrahis and their families to lead a life of simplicity, love and truth, and to depend on one's own labour.

Kallenbach and other colleagues of Gandhi – Indian as well as Western – joined him. Everyone had to do manual work including the grinding of corn. The community baked its own bread; had its tannery and shed for shoe-making. Inmates had wooden pillows and two blankets each. Life was rigorous, but it was lived on the high plane on which the Satygrahi was expected to function. Gandhi also dealt with the need to provide education to the children of the families. His own children were part of the young community that Gandhi tried to teach and guide. Gandhi conducted his experiments with education and dietetics both at the Phoenix settlement and the Tolstoy Farm.

Meanwhile, a new King was ascending the throne of England, and the British wanted to create an atmosphere of good will. They decided to amend and soften the Black Act, to make it look as though it was not specifically discriminatory against Indians. They released the Satyagrahis who were in jail. The Satygraha movement had gone on for four years or more. It was now decided to suspend Satygraha and review the next moves.

At this time, the British Government in India encouraged the great Indian patriot Gopal Krishna Gokhale to visit South Africa. He was a highly respected figure in the Empire as a great scholar, man of integrity, wisdom, moderation and high values. He had espoused the cause of South African Indians for many years, and done so with great force and effect. Gandhi looked upon him as his political Guru. He, therefore, saw a great opportunity in the visit of Gokhale. He took personal responsibility for all arrangements and for attending to Gokhale's needs and serving him in every way. The Government of South Africa treated Gokhale with great respect. He was received by General Botha, General Smuts and other ministers. Gokhale got the impression that General Botha had agreed to repeal the Black Act and abolish the 3 pounds tax. But Gandhi knew the South African leaders better. He expressed his disbelief.

During the visit, Gokhale got an opportunity to observe Gandhi at close quarters. On his return to India, he said that Gandhi "has in him the marvellous spiritual power to turn ordinary men around him to heroes and martyrs. In Gandhi's presence one is ashamed to do anything 'unworthy', indeed afraid of

thinking anything 'unworthy'." Gokhale expressed the hope that Gandhi would now be able to return to India since the struggle in South Africa was nearly over.

But soon, it was seen that Gokhale had been misled by the South African Leaders. General Smuts regretted that the proposal to abolish the 3 pounds tax and withdraw the Black Act had to be given up because of opposition from the whites.

A new challenge had been flung at the Indian community. Gandhi decided to respond with swift and decisive moves. He moved his family to Phoenix, and decided to clear the Tolstoy farm and induct all inmates into the battle. Upto now, there were two issues that had rallied the community, namely the withdrawal of the Black Act or ban on Asian immigration, and the abolition of the 3 pounds tax.

A third was now added by a judgement delivered by Judge Searle. With one verdict the Judge declared all marriages solemnized by rites outside the Christian Church invalid. By this stroke, all marriages of Hindus, Muslims, Parsis and Sikhs became invalid in the eyes of law, thus undermining the legal status of families, wives and children. This infuriated women and men alike. Women became as keen to fight the government as men. Gandhi realized that this one act of the government had awakened women and made soldiers and militants of them. He wanted to give women equal opportunity to take part in the struggle. He knew they were capable of great heroism and powers of endurance. These were qualities that the Satyagrahi needed. So he forged a plan of action.

But to implement that he had first to persuade his own wife Kasturba to join the struggle, offer Satyagraha and court imprisonment and prosecution. This was done without difficulty. Kasturba was ready to show Gandhi that she too was willing to suffer imprisonment or work for the sake of justice.

Gandhi formulated new plans. He would send women Satyagrahis including Kasturba across the borders of the two states. If arrested, they would go to prison. If left free, they would go to the coal mines at New Castle, where

Indian indentured labourers were working. They would tell the workers of the struggle and the government's undermining of Indian marriages and families.

Gandhi's plan worked. Women Satyagrahis crossed the frontiers. Some including Kasturba were arrested and sent to prison. Others who were allowed to go free reached the mines. Their story sent the miners into a fit of indignation. They downed their tools and came out of the pits. The response was overwhelming.

Gandhi came to know of the strike and rushed to New Castle. He cautioned the miners. They were staking their all. They would lose the huts that the employers had given them. They would lose their jobs and incomes. Their families would suffer. They should leave the mines only if they were prepared for all these possibilities.

The struggle might be long. All that he could promise was that he would "live and have my meals with them as long as the strike lasted".

The workers reaffirmed their determination and arrived in their thousands, with their women and children. Gandhi had a big problem on his hands. Surely, the workers added a new dimension to the force at his command. But where was he to house them? How was he to feed them? How was he to use them in the struggle? They had to be housed under the roof of the sky. Some Indians helped in finding grains and other requirements. One of them, Lazarus looked after their needs with all that he had, housing them in his compound and putting his stocks of grain at their disposal. But how long could thousands be fed that way?

Gandhi hit upon a plan that would meet many of his objectives. He would take the workers to the Tolstoy Farm where they could work and wait to participate in the struggle. If they were arrested at the frontier of the State, Government would take responsibility for them.

It was no easy task to take thousands of hungry illiterate men, women and children on a long march. They had to get food on the way. A white baker came to the rescue. He agreed to make bread available at the stages of the march on the appointed days. Everyone would get Vi lbs. of bread and half an ounce of

sugar. That was all. Gandhi himself had to serve the rations, since no one else could deal with the men who were angry and hungry. The rules of the march were read out. The marchers had to be disciplined. They should be non-violent. They should do nothing to provoke the white men in the areas through which they passed. They should observe good sanitary habits. Otherwise they may cause epidemics.

They would cover the 200 miles from Charlestown to the Tolstoy Farm in eight days, walking 24 miles a day. Kallenbach, Polak and others helped him to organize and conduct the march. The long march was perhaps the first long march in recorded history. It started on the 6th of November 1913 at the break of dawn. It bore witness to the heroism and determination of the Indians. While the marchers forded a river at one point, a child perched on the hip of a mother slipped into the swirling waters of the river. The mother did not wait to wail and mourn, but kept up the march with others.

There were no incidents involving the white population or the Police till the marchers reached the frontier. There Gandhi was arrested at night and removed, but released on bail. He and his leading colleagues were arrested, released on bail and rearrested when they resumed the march.

At Balfour, three special trains were waiting. The marchers were arrested. But now something unexpected happened. The workers were not taken to prison. Instead they were taken back to the mines. The mines were declared part of the premises of the prisons of New Castle and Dundee. The white managerial staff of the mines were vested with the powers of jailors. Workers refused to go down the pits. They were whipped. They refused. They were forced down and beaten with iron chains. They refused to pick up tools and work. They persisted in their defiance. Wherefrom did these indentured labourers who were condemned as cowards and slaves get the iron will to resist without raising their arms?

The news of the atrocities that followed shocked the capitals of the world, and sparked off 'hartals' and strikes by Indians all over South Africa. The Government inducted mounted military police. They were ordered to shoot at

sight. There were many scenes of heroic nonviolent defiance all over South Africa.

Gandhi went on a fast. This was the first of his many fasts for public causes. In utter identification with the indentured labourer, who was derisively called a 'Coolie', Gandhi gave up his European dress. He cut his hair short like the coolie, wore a lungi and discontinued the use of footwear.

When reports reached England, there were a deep sense of shame and waves of indignation. In India, people were shocked and enraged. Gokhale and other Indian leaders wanted an immediate end to atrocities and discrimination. India was on fire. The British Viceroy himself was moved to make a speech at Madras, in support of the Satyagrahis and their cause. Gokhale sent two prominent Englishmen to help Gandhi and to act as intermediaries. One of them was the great leader, educationist and missionary, Rev. C. F. Andrews.

The British Government was in a quandary. They brought pressure on the South African Government to appoint a commission to enquire into Indian grievances and demands. Gandhi was not satisfied. There was no Indian on the Commission. The Commission might turn out to be an eye wash. He, therefore, prepared to restart the struggle.

But an unforeseen development took place. The workers of the South African Railway System went on a nation-wide strike. This caused great hardship to all South Africa. Gandhi immediately suspended Satyagraha, explaining that it was against the tenets of Satyagraha to exploit the distress of the adversary.

This had a disarming effect on General Smuts and the whites. They did not know how to fight and hate Gandhi in the face of such love and generosity. They realised the truth of what Gandhi had claimed from the very beginning : that he had nothing against the white population of South Africa; all that he wanted was the removal of injustice. Love and suffering had melted the intransigence and resistance of the whites. The Government decided to accept all the three demands of the Indians, – abolition of the poll tax, validation of marriages and abolition of restrictions on travel and residence. The Satyagraha came to a successful close.

Gandhi had discovered a new weapon. He had demonstrated the power of the weapon – a weapon or power that every human being had within himself. He had shown the power of love and suffering. He had taken his people from the depths of helplessness to the peaks of victory: from contempt and ridicule to respect; from fear to fearlessness and bravery.

He felt he had completed his work in South Africa. He decided to return to the wider theatre of the motherland to serve his people and to further demonstrate the power of Satyagraha.

10

In July 1914, Gandhi and his family left the shores of South Africa to return to India. Gandhi first went to England in the hope that Gokhale would be in England, and he would be able to meet him. But as Gandhi's ship neared Britain, the First World War broke out.

Gandhi was concerned about what he should do as a citizen of the British Empire. He still believed that the Empire stood for values that would benefit the people of India. Moreover, as long as he enjoyed the benefits of being a citizen, he could not neglect or ignore the duties that were attached to citizenship. Since he believed in Ahimsa, he could not take to arms. But there were other ways in which he could serve. He, therefore, offered to raise an Ambulance Corps and started training. But he contracted pleurisy. He was advised that the cold of England would make recovery difficult. So he decided to leave for India.

He was given a rousing reception when he arrived in Bombay. Gokhale himself was at the dock to receive him. He was keen to meet Gokhale because he wanted to learn more about conditions in India before he plunged into public work in India. Gokhale had asked him to spend one year observing and learning. That would help him to understand men and issues, and to feel the pulse of the Indian nation.

Gandhi first went to Rajkot and other places in Gujarat. From there, he went to Shantiniketan in Bengal. The great poet Rabindranath Tagore had set up Shantiniketan to serve as the centre of his small versatile *sadhana*, and as an instrument for the transmission of his vision to succeeding generations. When Gandhi decided to leave South Africa, he had to find a new home for his colleagues in the Phoenix Settlement and the Tolstoy Farm who had joined him to live as members of the spiritual community and participate in his *sadhana*. Though Gandhi and Tagore had never met each other, both knew each other as kindred spirits, though following different paths of *sadhana*. Rabindranath was the first leader to describe Gandhi as 'the Mahatma' – "a great saint in a

beggar's attire", and to Gandhi, Rabindranath was Gurudev, or the Great sentinel of Shantiniketan. It was, therefore, natural for Gandhi to think that Shantiniketan would be a good temporary home for his colleagues, till he decided where to set up his own Ashram or permanent abode in India. Gandhi's visit to Shantiniketan was a landmark. A new stream of consciousness flowed from him, and even though his stay was short, Gandhi left an imprint on the students and teachers of Shantiniketan. Gandhi's sojourn was, however, interrupted when news came of the passing away of Gokhale.

Gandhi rushed to Poona which was the headquarters of the Servants of India Society and Gokhale himself. Since he had looked upon Gokhale as his political Guru, he offered to work for the Servants of India Society which Gokhale had set up. But he knew that his ways of thinking were not identical with those of Gokhale's main colleagues like Srinivasa Sastri. Gandhi did not want to embarrass anyone. So, he withdrew his application for the membership of the Society.

In the meanwhile, after much thought, Gandhi decided to set up his Ashram at Ahmedabad, in his native province. He set up his Ashram first at Kochrab in the town itself. Later he moved to the outskirts of Ahmedabad, and set up an Ashram on the banks of the river, Sabarmati.

Gandhi's Ashrams were different from those of the ancient sages. He was a seeker after Truth. To him, Truth was God. So he was a *Sadhak*. But he did not believe that one had to withdraw from the world or society to seek Truth or God. Truth could be and should be sought in all fields of human activity. He did not believe in dividing life into 'this worldly' and 'other worldly'. There was only one world. Whether it was the inner world of the human being or the external world in which he lived, – society and environment. Truth ruled both the worlds. So the path to Truth or the *sadhana* for truth had to be identical.

He identified this common *sadhana* as Satyagraha – life and action based on Truth, a way of life that would enable one to find and cling to Truth in personal and social life. "Such a way of life had to be based on Truth, love, *brahmacharya* or total consecration of oneself to the pursuit of truth; non-

stealing; non-possession (non-acquisitiveness) and freedom from the slavery of the palate; bread-labour: equal respect for all religions: Swadeshi; respectful tolerance of differences of opinion, fearlessness and humility. On the basis of these beliefs he formulated eleven vows that every member of the Ashram had to observe. He looked upon the Ashram as a spiritual community of social activists.

Gandhi went to attend the session of the Indian National Congress at Calcutta. He had been present at an earlier session of the Congress. But then Gokhale was there. He was not on his own. Since then, things had changed. The Indian struggle in South Africa had made Gandhi known all over India. He had acquired the reputation of a man who was both a saint and a militant. India is a land that venerates saints. So Gandhi had his first taste of the veneration of people who were eager for his *darshan*.

At this session, a young man from Champaran in Bihar, Rajkumar Shukla, met him and talked of the woes of the peasants of Champaran and their exploitation by the British. The planters were forcing them to cultivate Indigo on their lands and imposing and extracting many illegal levies from them.

The poor peasants were compelled to make offerings of poultry, meat and the like, whenever there were celebrations in the house of the planters. Gandhi was touched by these accounts, but told Shukla that he would be able to go to Bihar only after some days. Shukla persisted, following him from place to place. Finally, a date was fixed, and Gandhi went to Champaran. There, his preliminary enquiries confirmed all that Shukla had said. Gandhi decided to stay and make a detailed enquiry before deciding on a course of action. He was assisted by eminent lawyers like Brij Kishore Babu, and Dr. Rajendra Prasad, who, later became the first President of India.

The news of Gandhi's arrival spread to the villages. 'A Mahatma had come to save the starving and exploited poor peasant.' Thousands of villagers flocked to see Gandhi. The town was overflowing. The British Collector got nervous. He ordered Gandhi to leave the district. Gandhi refused saying that he had gone to Champaran to help the poor, not to challenge the Government. He was arrested

and produced in Court. But the trial had to be postponed because the Magistrate did not know whether the massive crowds that had thronged to the premises of the court would remain peaceful. He postponed the trial and sought Gandhi's help to control the crowds.

In the meanwhile, the Viceroy and the Governor ordered that the case against Gandhi should be withdrawn, and he should be allowed to proceed with his enquiry. Gandhi was set free. Gandhi resumed the work of collecting evidence. He, and his colleagues interviewed thousands of peasants and recorded their evidence after questioning the witnesses, to be sure that what was being recorded was nothing but unvarnished truth. Even the British officers of the Indian Civil Service were impressed by Gandhi's relentless and dispassionate concern for truth. The Government received reports that the evidence was overwhelming and indisputable. They appointed a Commission of enquiry, and made Gandhi a member of the Commission. After a careful assessment of the evidence, the Commission upheld Gandhi's case in every respect. The system that compelled plantation of Indigo was given up, and it was agreed that the peasants would be paid reasonable compensation. This was the first victory of Satyagraha in India.

While taking evidence, Gandhi had also been appalled by the poverty, illiteracy and shocking sanitary conditions in the villages. He set up schools and centres of popular education, and called his friends from Bihar, Gujarat, Bombay and elsewhere to go to Champaran and work for the betterment of the conditions of the villagers. Acharya Kripalani was then working as a Professor in Muzaffarpur. He joined Gandhi, and became one of his closest associates.

Gandhi was still in Champaran when he was informed about the serious trouble that was brewing in Ahmedabad. The workers of the textile mills were restless. It was feared that they might go on strike, and the city might be in the grip of violent disturbances. Anasuyaben Sarabhai, who was working with industrial labour sought his help. So did the mill-owners who were led by Anasuyaben's brother, Ambalal Sarabhai. Even the Collector, who was the representative of the British Government, asked Gandhi whether he could not step in to save the

city from violent disturbances. Gandhi studied the case of the workers. It was mainly for the restoration of some allowances that they were drawing. Nearly 80% of these had been cut down. Meanwhile the cost

of living had gone up. Mill-owners were making higher profits. Gandhi pleaded with the mill-owners to settle the matter through negotiations or arbitration. They agreed, but went back on a flimsy and technical excuse. Gandhi had no alternative but to advise labourers to strike. But he got workers to take a solemn pledge not to go to work till their demands were met, not to resort to violence under any circumstance. The workers took the pledge, and Gandhi took up their leadership.

It was an uncommon struggle. There was no bitterness and no hatred. The leaders of the owners as well as the employees met Gandhi every day. Gandhi was continuing his efforts to persuade the employers. Everyday all workers assembled at a prayer meeting, and Gandhi advised them on the state of the strike and the duties of workers. Twenty days passed. Workers began to get restive. Someone whispered that it was the workers who suffered by the prolonged strike, not Gandhi who ate his meals and went about in cars. This cut Gandhi to the quick. At the prayer meeting of the day, he announced that he was giving up food. He would fast till the workers reiterated their determination to stand by the pledge they had taken. It was not a fast against the employers, to make them accept the demands of the workers. It was meant to make workers realize the need to stand by the plighted word. Gandhi's announcement resulted in a wave of repentance. Men and women were in tears. They implored Gandhi to give up his fast. The fast also brought pressure on the owners, though Gandhi did not want to influence

them with a fast. A compromise was arrived at. An arbitrator was appointed. His award totally vindicated the demands that Gandhi had formulated, Gandhi called the struggle a "Dharma Yuddha", because it was waged for justice, and with the pure means of persuasion, love and voluntary suffering.

Gandhi was elected President of the Gujarat Sabha. His attention went to the plight of the peasants in the Kheda district of Gujarat. Peasants were reeling

under the impact of one of the worst famines in memory. Crops had failed, but the Government was insisting that land revenue should be paid in full. Gandhi told the peasants that since their case was just and indisputable, they should be prepared to fight non-violently. They should refuse to pay the land revenue, unless it was reassessed in the light of the failure of crops. If the government retaliated by confiscating their property, farms and bullocks they should not surrender or take to violence. Peasants were ready, and Gandhi started preparing them for the hard struggle that lay ahead.

It was then that Gandhi made the acquaintance of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, a barrister who had returned from England and was practising in Ahmedabad. Vallabhbhai became a lifelong colleague of Gandhi, attracted by his courage and dynamic methods of struggle for justice. The Sardar himself was of peasant origin. He was one of the ablest organisers the country had ever seen. People stuck to their determination even at the cost of the forfeiture of their property and the harassment and suffering that the Government inflicted. Finally, the Government yielded in the face of the heroic, nonviolent and unflinching struggle of the peasants. There was a compromise on the agreement that only those who felt they could afford would pay the revenue imposts.

Gandhi had taken up the causes of peasants and workers in different parts of India, and proved that Satyagraha was a practical and effective method, and was in tune with the genius of the people of India.

Gandhi was invited by Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya to attend the foundation ceremony of the Benaras Hindu University at Benaras. The Viceroy delivered the inaugural address. A galaxy of British officials, political leaders and the princely Rulers had assembled. Dr. Annie Besant was in the Chair. When Gandhi's turn to speak came, the great assemblage got a taste of the revolutionary in Gandhi. He began by regretting that he had to speak in a foreign language to his own people. He went on to talk of the poverty of the starving millions and the glittering jewellery of the princes; how the poor farm labourer toiled and sweated in the sun to produce two blades of paddy, where there was only one, while the British and the princes lived in luxury and

opulence. "Whenever I hear of a great palace rising in any great city of India, be it in British India or be it in India which is ruled by our great chiefs, I become jealous at once and I say: 'Oh, it is the money that has come from the agriculturists'." He said that tears rose in his eyes when he thought of the starving toilers who produced all wealth, but did not get two square meals a day. India would have no peace or progress till the poor came into their own. The Chair tried to stop Gandhi, but he was undaunted. Finally, bowing to the Chair, he sat down. But he had sounded the bugle of revolt and revolution, and sent a message of hope to the people who were groaning under exploitation.

## 11

The World War-I ended in 1918. It was hoped that when the war ended the British Government would take steps to meet the aspirations of the Indian people for self-government. Gandhi himself had great faith in the intentions and fair play of the British. But he, as well as the country, received a rude shock. It was incredible. Instead of transferring more power and freedom to the people, the Government proposed to make the severe restrictions on freedom imposed during the war a part of the regular laws of the country. The new Bill that was to be introduced would give the Government powers to detain citizens without trial, to search premises, to prevent meetings, to suppress newspapers and publications, and so forth. This was deceit, betrayal, a tightening of chains. The Bill called the Rowlatt Bill could not be allowed to become law. It had to be resisted. But how ? By whom ?

Upto now, the Congress and the national movement had seen only two alternatives. One was the method of praying and petitioning to the Government. The other was the cult of terrorism, the bomb and assassination. Of these, the first depended on the Government's goodwill. The other was an unequal fight, because an unarmed people could not match the forces of the Government through sporadic acts of indignation or revenge. The masses of the people were not involved in either. Gandhi believed that the Government could be defeated only if the masses entered the battle. They could do so only if the fight was waged with means that they had access to. These were the methods of non-violent Satyagraha. He had seen the masses use this method with courage and success in South Africa. If it could be done by Indians in South Africa, why could it not be done by Indians in their own motherland ?

He formed Satyagraha Sabhas in which members took the Satyagraha Pledge. He began a campaign to educate people in the meaning and methods of Satyagraha. He had tried Satyagraha in Champaran, Ahmedabad and Kheda. He believed that the time had come for him to place it before the whole of India, and to use it to resist the Rowlatt Bill. The struggles that he had led had been

in the North and West of India. He had to explain Satyagraha to the people of the South as well. He went to Madras on this mission. It was there that he made the acquaintance of Rajagopalachari who later became one of his chief lieutenants.

The situation called for immediate action. One could not wait – even to convince the Indian National Congress. He had to appeal to the people. It was a battle for *Dharma* or Truth. He was confident that the people of India would respond to the appeal of *Dharma*. He was turning these thoughts over in his mind. While still at Madras, he decided to appeal to the people of India to observe a *hartal*, to voluntarily desist from all work and spend the day in prayer and self-purification for the battle. "Last night, the idea came to me as if in a dream, that we should call on the country to observe a general *hartal*" He 'Said that the appeal was also a serious risk. If people were roused, but went out of control, the struggle would suffer a grievous setback, and result in more ruthless repression. But Gandhi was confident. "The step taken is possibly the most momentous in the history of India. It constitutes an attempt to revolutionize politics and to restore moral force to its original station."

It was a gamble. The inert people of India might not have responded. He would then have become a laughing stock. But he was vindicated. The response proved that he had understood the masses of India. He had discovered the key to their hearts and minds.

He had asked that the *hartal* be observed on the 30th March. But later the date was shifted to the 6th of April. The postponement caused some confusion. Delhi observed the *hartal* on the 30th of March. There was unprecedented enthusiasm and public response. But there were also incidents of violence. Gandhi went to Delhi and wanted to go to Punjab where the cauldron was brewing. But he was arrested at the outskirts of Delhi and put on a train that carried him back to Bombay. At Bombay he learned that there were violent incidents in Ahmedabad and Viramgam in Gujarat, involving the death of innocent Englishmen. He was shocked. He decided to postpone his journey to Punjab and atone. He confessed that he had made a 'Himalayan miscalculation'

about the ability of the people to remain non-violent in the face of provocation or in the thick of the fight. He issued pamphlets to explain the meaning and discipline of Satyagraha.

But events did not wait in the Punjab. People were deeply agitated and indignant at the arrest of Gandhi. Local leaders like Kichlew and Satyapal were struggling to see that the crowds did not go astray. But when the Government arrested and removed them on the 10th of April, the crowds lost control. They attacked Government offices, cut telephone lines, burnt down the Town Hall and attacked and injured Europeans. Even European women were attacked. The Government brought in troops under General Dyer. There was a lull. It was the calm before the storm. On Baisakhi day, the 13th of April, a peaceful meeting was announced at the Jallianwalla Bagh. Thousands of unarmed men, women and children assembled. There was only one narrow passage through which people could enter or leave the ground. It was walled in on all sides by buildings. The General brought armoured cars and sealed the passage that provided entry and exit. He declared the meeting unlawful, and ordered the troops to fire into the unarmed crowd. 1650 rounds were fired. According to the Government itself, 379 people were felled down with bullets. 1137 were injured. Martial Law was proclaimed. Orders were promulgated compelling Indians to crawl on their stomachs, on the road on which English people had been attacked. It was some time before the rest of the country came to know of these events. India was aghast. General Dyer boasted that he had exhausted his ammunition, otherwise he would have fired more rounds. He had wanted to teach Indians a lesson they would never forget.

The Government appointed a committee under Lord Hunter. Their task was to enquire into the incidents. But most Indians felt that the committee was an eyewash. A citizens' committee was appointed. This included Gandhi and leaders like Motilal Nehru and Jayakar. It is in the course of his tour with the committee that Gandhi came to know the gruesome details of what had happened. In the meanwhile, the British nation was engaged in making a hero of Dyer.

What he saw in the Punjab and what he saw of the Government's attitude began a process of disillusionment in Gandhi. He began to lose faith in the professions and the fair play of the Government. He began to see the Imperial Government as a force of evil. A Satyagrahi had to non co-operate with evil. The acts and attitudes of the Government thus forced Gandhi, who was once proud to be a citizen of the Empire, to become a confirmed non-co-operator.

Gandhi placed the idea of non-co-operation before the people. He asked the Congress to accept the programme of non-co-operation. The Muslims of India too were angry with Britain and the Government for the way in which they had treated the institution of the Caliph of the Turkish Empire – Khilafat, as it was called. They had sought Gandhi's advice. He was invited to their conferences. He proposed a programme of non-co-operation. It took the participants by surprise. But by 1920 they had realized that there was no alternative method of action. The Khilafat Committee of which Maulana Azad was a respected leader, unanimously decided to accept the programme, and authorized Gandhi to start the programme on their behalf. Gandhi placed the programme before the Congress. The Congress too accepted the programme and authorized him to lead the non-co-operation movement.

The aim of the movement was to withdraw all cooperation from the Government. People were asked to boycott schools and colleges, the courts of law and all other institutions of the Government. In response to the call, students left educational institutions, and prominent lawyers like Motilal Nehru, C. R. Das and others gave up their practice. People were asked to give up approaching the Government Courts for justice. Those who had received titles and honours from the Government returned them. Rabindranath Tagore returned his Knighthood. Many others returned their titles. Gandhi returned the medals he had received for his services in the wars. The moral objective was to non- co-operate with evil. The political objective was to paralyze the Government and make it evident that it had lost the respect and recognition of the people. No Government could go on without the cooperation of the people.

Non-co-operation also meant reprisals from the Government. Many moderates in the Congress found non-co-operation distasteful, and left the Congress.

Among them were known leaders like Mohammed Ali Jinnah who later became the founder of Pakistan. But Gandhi won the day. A tidal wave swept the country. Students, Lawyers, Government servants and all sections of the people responded. National educational institutions were set up in many places to provide education to those who boycotted the Government schools. Gandhi himself set up the Gujarat Vidyapeeth. People's courts were set up to settle disputes outside the British courts. Bonfires of foreign goods lit up the sky as part of the programme to boycott foreign goods.

Gandhi started three weeklies, *Young India* in English, and *Navajivan* in Hindi and Gujarati, to spread the message of Satyagraha and non-cooperation, and to explain his concept of Swaraj, and the individual and collective *Sadhana* that was needed for it. His message reached every nook and corner in India.

Thousands of Indians had been arrested, and were in jail. There was an insistent demand that Gandhi should launch a Civil Disobedience movement. He promised at the Calcutta session of the Congress (1920) that India would have Swaraj within a year if it took to non-violent non-co-operation. He decided to start mass Civil Disobedience in one district and extend it to others if it proved successful and remained non-violent. He chose Bardoli in Gujarat, and wrote to the Viceroy on the 1st of February 1922, telling him of his intention to start mass Civil Disobedience from Bardoli.

The country was on flash point. Within three days of the despatch of the letter, something happened in Chauri Chaura in Eastern U. P. which upset all plans and assessments. A crowd of demonstrators was passing a Police Station. The Police waited till the tail of the crowd appeared. They then ridiculed and provoked the participants of the procession. Some of the processionists responded and the Police opened fire. The crowd returned and set fire to the Police Station. The constables who tried to escape from the burning building were hacked to death.

Gandhi was shocked. How could he start a mass Civil Disobedience after Chauri Chaura showed that people had not understood the discipline that the Satyagraha army should observe? He promptly suspended the plan to launch mass Civil Disobedience. Many of his followers and colleagues like C. R. Das, Jawaharlal Nehru and others were indignant and nonplussed. How could one bring a people's movement to the white pitch of revolutionary action and then withdraw? Gandhi's answer was clear. He was the general. If the general could not rely on the discipline of the Army, how could he conduct the campaign? If soldiers took what action they pleased, how could there be a concerted, well-directed deployment of the force of the Army? He had no alternative but to disengage, regroup and return to the charge.

The Government was in two minds ever since Gandhi launched non-cooperation. Were they to leave him free or to arrest him and risk a flare up? It seemed to them now that the time had arrived. Gandhi seemed to have lost the support of many colleagues. People were demoralized that Gandhi had called off the fight. It appeared to the Government that Gandhi was isolated, despondent and 'played out'. This was the moment to strike. He was arrested on the 10th of March and put on trial at Ahmedabad in the court of Mr. Broomfield.

Then followed an extraordinary trial, which perhaps has no parallel. The court was overflowing with citizens, – Gandhi's followers as well as others. The Judge came, and before taking his seat, bowed to the prisoner at the bar. Before him was a man who had been charged with sedition, tampering with the loyalty of His Majesty's servants and subjects, spreading disaffection among the people and the Army. The charges were based on three articles that Gandhi had written in the *Young India*. Gandhi and his colleague Shankarlal Banker were the accused. Gandhi made it easy for the Judge by pleading guilty. He said he had preached disaffection. He was once a loyal subject and co-operator. He then described how from a loyal citizen he had been forced to become a rebel. Sedition had now become a moral and spiritual duty for him. But non-violence was the first and the last article of his creed. He knew he was playing with fire

and running a mad risk. But if he were discharged, he would do the same thing again. He knew he was guilty in the eyes of the law that the British Government had promulgated. But there was a higher law by which a human being is judged, and he was acting in accordance with that higher law. The Judge had only one option – to resign and join Gandhi if he believed in the higher law, or award him the highest punishment prescribed by the Government's laws, since there was nothing to extenuate the gravity of his action.

The Judge was not to be outdone. He too knew it was a historic trial. He addressed the accused with great courtesy and respect, and said : "Mr. Gandhi you have made my task easy by pleading guilty to the charge of sedition; it would be impossible to ignore the fact that in the eyes of millions of your countrymen you are a great patriot and great leader. Even those who differ from you in politics look upon you as a man of high ideals and of noble and of even saintly life. It is my duty to judge you as a man subject to the law. There are probably few people in India who do not regret that you should have made it impossible for any Government to leave you at liberty. But it is so." Then the Judge placed him in the category of a great patriot who had been sentenced earlier, Lokmanya Tilak, and sentenced Gandhi to six years of imprisonment. He also added that if the course of events made it possible for the Government to release Gandhi earlier, "none would be happier than I". Gandhi thanked the Judge for the courtesy he had received. His friends and followers in the court were overcome with emotion. Many wept unashamedly. Gandhi was taken to the Yervada prison to serve the term.

## 12

Gandhi settled down to his six-year term in prison. He was lodged in the Yervada jail near Poona. He believed that the discipline of the Satyagrahi wanted him to spend every minute in the pursuit of truth, in making himself a better instrument, and in showing others how they could do likewise, and work for the reign of truth and justice in society.

He followed his regular routine of praying, spinning, reading and reflecting. While in the Yervada prison, he read about 150 books. These included classics and the works of well-known authors. Gandhi brought his full attention to bear on whatever he read. He studied, reflected, digested, and absorbed whatever seemed logical to him.

The jail authorities had deputed an African prisoner, to work as his attendant. Neither could talk to the other because neither knew the other's language. But one day the African was stung by a scorpion. Gandhi promptly made an incision, sucked the poison out, and cleaned and bandaged the area. The African prisoner became a devoted and loyal attendant.

In a few months, Gandhi developed acute appendicitis. In January 1924, he had to be removed to the Sassoon Hospital in Poona. The condition of the patient needed immediate surgical treatment. Col. Maddock, an English surgeon, was to perform the surgery. Gandhi summoned his friend Srinivasa Sastry of the Servants of India Society. He sat doubled up in bed, being in acute pain, and wrote a statement, saying that he was undergoing the surgery of his own will. He was being treated with great courtesy; he had full faith in the surgeon, and whatever happened would be the will of God. He wanted to ensure that if something untoward happened, the country did not blame the surgeon or the Government. As it happened electricity failed during the operation. The surgeon had to continue with the light of a hurricane lantern. The operation was successful. Gandhi recovered. The Government decided to remit the unexpired period of the prison term and release Gandhi. Gandhi felt sad that he had to be released due to ill-health. He went to Bombay to recuperate.

In the meanwhile, he became fully acquainted with what was happening in the country. The exhilaration of the days of non-co-operation had waned. The country was in a state of depression. Congressmen were divided on what was to be done. Some well-known leaders like C. R. Das, Motilal Nehru, Vitthalbhai Patel and others were in favour of entering the new Councils and Assemblies that would come into existence as a result of the British Government's decision to set up such bodies (Minto- Morley Reforms). Others like Rajagopalachari and Vallabhbhai Patel felt that the reforms did not transfer real power, and participation in the councils would only give them respectability. It would only enable the British Government to misguide world opinion to believe that they had set up self-governing bodies in India. These leaders, therefore, felt there should be no change in the policy of non-cooperation. Others argued that one should use entry into the councils to expose and checkmate the Government.

In spite of two sessions of the Congress, one at Gaya, and the other at Delhi, no compromise could be reached. Those who wanted change in the policy of non-co-operation had formed a Swaraj Party, and fought the elections to the councils. Gandhi wanted to give the Swarajists freedom to try and see whether they could succeed in "wrecking the reforms from within". He presided over the Congress at Belgaum in 1924 and prevented a split in the Congress.

Both the representatives of the Khilafat Committee and the Indian National Congress had been unanimously behind the Non-co-operation and Civil Disobedience movements. They had received powerful support from Maulana Azad, the Ali Brothers and others. But in the year during which Gandhi was in prison, things had changed. The issue of the Caliphate was dead when Kamal Ataturk came to power in Turkey. The issue that had roused Muslims had ceased to exist. The British Government was keen to woo the Muslim leaders and drive a wedge between the two communities. They seemed to have succeeded. There were ugly and barbarous riots in which the two communities had fought each other in many parts of India. Gandhi could not bear this estrangement of brothers and the readiness to sink to the level of brutes. He felt that such acts had nothing to do with religion. In fact one who had the love

of God in his heart should have the love of man, of all men, in his heart. Gandhi decided to appeal to the conscience of both communities. He went on a twenty- one days' fast. His fast and the attendant suffering and penance melted hard hearts and rekindled the spirit of tolerance and human affection. A national unity conference was held in Delhi. Leaders of all communities pledged to maintain peace and friendship.

Gandhi now threw himself into a nation-wide campaign to build the foundations of a new nation and to educate people on the essentials of Satyagraha. He had already inspired a change in the constitution of the Congress. From a forum for speeches and debates, it had been transformed into an instrument of democratic action, with membership, elected committees, rules of procedure and so on. The objective had been defined as Swaraj. The means that it would use would be "peaceful and legitimate". The Congress had found it difficult to accept the word 'non-violent' since many in the Congress had accepted non-violence 'only as a policy', and 'not as a creed'. Gandhi had reconciled himself to presenting his non-violence through an imperfect medium.

There were other aspects of nation building that needed immediate attention: Communal Unity, regeneration of spinning and weaving and organizing the production of khadi to provide self-employment to hundreds of thousands of villagers; working to ; ensure equal status and opportunities to women; working to organize kisans, workers, and students; working against discrimination and untouchability, and to establish social equality; working for the eradication of evil habits like drinking; working for the welfare of tribals and so on. Gandhi wanted to reach and serve all sections of people.

It is only when everyone received justice that the nation would become united in its will to seek freedom and build a new society. Gandhi set up organizations to undertake these programmes and travelled the length and breadth of the country in intensive tours to promote what he described as the constructive programme, – the constructive aspect of the non-violent revolution which was aimed at creating a new man and a new society. Gandhi also wrote every week

in the *Young India* and other weeklies to explain the implications of the philosophy and methods of Satyagraha.

In 1927, the British Government appointed a Royal Commission to review the working of the Reforms that had been introduced in 1919. This Commission was headed by Sir John Simon. There was no Indian on the Commission. The people of India looked upon the Commission as an insult to the nation, and the Congress decided to boycott the Commission. Everywhere the Commission met with black flags and deafening cries of "Simon Go Back".

The British Government challenged the Indian leaders to produce an agreed proposal for Constitutional Reform. In answer, a Committee set up by an All Parties Conference under the Chairmanship of Motilal Nehru formulated a set of proposals. But the younger leaders like Jawaharlal and Subhash Bose were not satisfied with the demand for 'Dominion Status'. They wanted complete Independence. It looked as though there would be a break. At the Calcutta Congress, Gandhi suggested a compromise. The Nehru report should be accepted with the condition that if the British Government did not grant Dominion Status, within one year, the Congress would accept complete Independence as its goal, and would lead a movement of non-violent, non-cooperation to achieve the objective.

For five years after his release in 1924, Gandhi buried himself in all these activities. Meanwhile many changes were taking place in the political field.

In 1928 Gandhi got another opportunity to demonstrate the power of non-violent Satyagraha; to show how even 'unlettered' peasants could use the weapon to bring mighty Governments to their knees. The British Government of the Bombay Presidency decided to increase land revenue by 22% in the Bardoli Taluk. The area was already suffering from the failure of crops, and the poor peasant found it beyond his competence to pay the taxes, even if he lived on a starvation diet. When all efforts to persuade the Government failed, Gandhi felt that the poor peasant could secure justice and save himself only through Satyagraha. But Satyagraha demanded firm determination, effective organization, unflinching courage and readiness to suffer. Gandhi deputed his

trusted colleague, Sardar Patel to organize the struggle in Bardoli. The British Government decided to crush the movement with ruthless repression. The huts and pots and pans of the poor peasants were confiscated. Their oxen and buffaloes were impounded and removed. Their ploughs were taken away. The Government announced that the lands that had been confiscated would be sold in auction. Peasants starved; hid their belongings; dismembered their carts and buried the parts to hide them from the eyes of the police. But no one yielded. Reports of the atrocious repression and the courageous resistance of the people spread all over India. Contributions started pouring in from all over India. Gandhi announced that he would personally take over the leadership of the campaign if the Sardar was arrested. He moved to Bardoli. Meanwhile, the Governor of Bombay went to consult the Viceroy. He told the Viceroy that the question was whether the writ of the Government was to run in the District. But in a few days, the Government decided to climb down.

It revoked the increase in taxes; released all prisoners; returned confiscated lands and property; and returned the cattle, or paid compensation for their loss. People agreed to pay taxes at the old rates. The peasants of Bardoli and their leaders Sardar Patel and Gandhi had set an example that other districts in India could follow.

Meanwhile, there was increasing scepticism about the Governments' talk of constitutional reforms. Hardly anyone believed that the Government was ready to transfer power. Even moderate Congressmen were disillusioned. The younger leaders in the Congress were no longer prepared to countenance British rule in India. They, therefore, wanted the Congress to declare that it was no longer satisfied with "Dominion Status" within the British Empire. Nothing short of total Independence could satisfy Indian aspirations. They felt that the time had come to demand complete Independence, and the ending of the chapter of Imperial presence in India. Young leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhash Chandra Bose were for complete Independence. Gandhi had begun as a loyal subject, but turned a rebel. He too had been in support of Dominion Status. But he too had begun to feel that the economic, political and moral ruin of India that had

resulted from British rule could end, and a new India be built only on the basis of complete Independence. The annual session of the Indian National Congress at Lahore therefore turned out to be the beginning of a new chapter. In a historic resolution, the Congress adopted the goal of complete Independence, and adopted a pledge to launch a struggle for complete Independence. It authorized Gandhi to lead the struggle, and prepare for a countrywide Satyagraha. Gandhi accepted the responsibility. He realized that the struggle for complete Independence had to be different from the earlier struggles that he had led. They had been struggles to achieve limited and local objectives. An objective that encompassed the whole nation could not be achieved without full and enthusiastic co-operation from the masses. He had, therefore, to find an issue that would enthuse the masses and make them understand the relation between Independence and their daily lives. They should know what was at stake, and why they should pay the price for the freedom that they needed and demanded.

Gandhi could not easily think of a form of struggle and an issue that could attract the widest and most enthusiastic participation of the people. After days of thought he lighted on the issue – salt.

There was a tax on manufacture, on stocking, on transporting, and on selling salt. The purpose was to make salt manufactured in India many times more expensive than the salt that was imported from the United Kingdom. It was similar to the case of the textiles. Destroy Indian industry to benefit British industry. Render Indians unemployed to keep British labour employed. Everyone, – even children and animals needed salt. It was part of the poorest man's diet. So the fight against the Salt Laws could show the common man the cause and price of slavery. It could also give him an opportunity to participate in the fight.

Gandhi announced his plans. He wrote to the Viceroy on the 3rd of March to give him notice of what he proposed to do. It was a classic example of how Gandhi always ensured that his case was just and unanswerable. He asked the Viceroy to look at the poverty of India and the cause of the poverty. He pointed

to the salary the Viceroy drew. It was seven hundred times the income of the ordinary Indian peasant. The Viceroy perhaps did not need his salary since he was a Lord. Perhaps he could spend more than the amount of his salary in charity. But the disparity was shocking and unjust. England had ruined India politically, economically and morally. They should make amends. But they would not do so unless forced to do so. So it became a question of matching forces. The people in India had the force of justice, the force of the spirit of Satyagraha. It could overcome the force of arms. And then he went on to spell out his plan.

Along with a band of tried and tested followers he would march from Ahmedabad to Dandi on the sea to manufacture salt on the sea shore, from the waters of the sea, thus defying the laws of the British Government. He asked people all over India to wait till he had broken the law first.

The Viceroy and his colleagues ridiculed Gandhi's plan, and said that Gandhi would drown in a pool of ridicule. They said it was the maddest of all Gandhi's mad plans. Many Indians too were sceptical.

They wondered how the mighty British Government could be brought down by picking up a pinch of salt on the sea shore.

On the day appointed for the march to start from Gandhi's Ashram at Sabarmati, the whole country was agog and expectant. The air quivered with excitement. The world press which had learnt of Gandhi's plans was at Sabarmati to report the great event to the world. Gandhi told them that his was a fight of right against might, and he wanted the sympathy of the world in the fight.

He had selected 78 of his colleagues – indeed a small army – from the Ashram to set out on the march. There were strict rules to ensure that there would be no violence. It was declared that they would let themselves be cut to pieces, rather than raise their hands against anyone. They would go forward. They would die on the way rather than return without freedom. They would not return even if the Ashram was on fire or their near ones were on their death beds. As they marched, the people of India were on tip toe. At every village

people turned out with folded hands and knelt before the Mahatma. There were arches and flowers and shouts of victory to Mahatma Gandhi all the way.

The British Government did not know what to do. They had started by ridiculing Gandhi. But the response that he was receiving rattled them. Could they allow this to go on? Was it not putting the Viceroy and the King Emperor's Government in ridicule? The District Collectors wrote to the Governor of the State that the writ of the Government had ceased to run in their Districts. Village officials were resigning from the service of the Government. It seemed as though the King Emperor's Government had ceased to exist. Will they let Gandhi go on? Will they not arrest him? The Governor wrote to the Viceroy. The Viceroy consulted His Majesty's Government in London. Governors were summoned. They could not make up their minds. If Gandhi was arrested, he would become a hero, and there would be outbursts all over the country.

If he were left free, it would be the British Government that would come into ridicule. Meanwhile Gandhi began to taunt the Government in his own gentle way. The Government should not think of merely arresting him. His guilt was far greater. The punishment that he deserved was hanging.

Gandhi reached Dandi on the shores of the sea. On the 6th of April, as the sun rose after the morning prayer, Gandhi stooped down and picked up salt from the sea, and said that he was shaking the foundations of the mighty British Empire with a pinch of salt.

This was the signal the country was waiting for. All over India, thousands of leaders and 'volunteers' marched to the sea front and broke the law by manufacturing salt. Where there was no sea or lake, as at Allahabad, the people boiled salt water in public and made "illegal" salt. On that day, according to the British Government, 5 million people in over 5000 meetings in towns or villages all over India broke the salt law by making, selling, transporting illegal salt. The writ of the Government had truly ceased to run. The Government itself was surprised by the massive participation of women in the struggle. The secret reports of the Government said "Gandhi's appeal to

women is a clever move, and whatever may be its practical effect in the field of action, it is likely to have considerable effect on social life."

On the 4th of May, Gandhi again wrote to the Viceroy asking him to see the writing on the wall, and accept the demand of the people. If the Government did not do so, the people of India would move to the next stage and take over Government depots of salt. Gandhi was arrested on the 5th of May. The Civil Disobedience went on unabated. Thousands were imprisoned. The people of India demonstrated exemplary discipline. They were calm and non-violent in the face of the barbarous assaults of the police. They demonstrated the cool, chilling courage and forbearance of the Satyagrahi. At Dharasana, Wadala, and many other places, the police rained lathi blows on non-violent volunteers sitting in prayerful postures.

Skulls and bones were broken. Limbs were fractured. Blood was streaking down from the bodies of the volunteers. Volunteer stretcher bearers came and removed the bodies of the wounded and dying, and the next batch that was watching the courageous defiance of the first moved forward and took their place. The world press was reporting these feats of courage and the barbarous repression that the Government had let loose. It was clear to the world that the people of India had repudiated British authority. They were being held down by sheer brute force. At Peshawar, the Gorkhas and the Garhwal Rifles refused to fire on unarmed, peaceful demonstrators. They were sentenced to imprisonment for 10 or 14 years.

There were moves for negotiations initiated by Sapru and Jayakar. Gandhi wanted to consult the members of the Congress Working Committee. He was released on the 26th of January 1931. There were prolonged discussions with the Viceroy that lasted many days.

In the end, an agreement was arrived at. It was known as the Gandhi-Irwin Pact. There were two signatories, – Viceroy representing the Emperor, and Gandhi representing the people of India. Gandhi could not get the Viceroy to agree to all demands, particularly the appeal to spare the lives of the great

patriot – Bhagat Singh and his colleagues who had been sentenced to death for causing death with bombs and pistols.

Gandhi was subjected to harsh criticism. He explained why his effort did not succeed. But the Gandhi-Irwin Pact had proved that the people of India had claimed and asserted their right to be regarded as equal. There was a new pride, and the feeling that India had vindicated its right to independence.

In Britain, some were shocked that the Viceroy had agreed to talk to Gandhi on equal terms. Winston Churchill, who later became the Prime Minister of Britain during the Second World War, decried the "nauseating and humiliating spectacle of this one-time Inner Temple Lawyer, now seditious *fakir* striding half-naked up the steps of the Viceregal Palace, there to negotiate and to parley on equal terms with the representative of the King Emperor."

## 13

Many leaders of the Congress were not happy with the Gandhi-Irwin Pact. Nor were the British Officers who were against Irwin's effort at compromise. There were differences in the interpretation of the Pact. It looked as though it would break down. Meanwhile, the British Government decided to hold another Round Table Conference with Indian Leaders to evolve agreement on further constitutional reform. The First Round Table Conference was a failure. The Congress was not there. It could not, therefore, be presented as being representative. There were serious objections to the way the Government had selected participants. Yet, the Congress decided to attend. It also decided that Gandhi would be its sole representative at the Conference. This was a very heavy responsibility, especially because there were some differences within the Congress itself. Another reason that made the task difficult was the composition of the Conference. The Government had packed it with Rulers and people selected from many groups from which the Government expected support. On the eve of his departure to attend the Conference at London, Gandhi, therefore, warned the nation that he might return empty handed.

He sailed from Bombay with his personal entourage that included his Secretaries, Mahadev Desai and Pyarelal, Miraben an English disciple, and Devdas Gandhi. Miraben was the daughter of an English admiral, but had become Gandhi's disciple and co-worker, and taken the Indian name, Mira. Gandhi travelled by the second class and spent most of his time on the deck. He spent the day as he would have done in his Ashram with prayer, spinning, reading, talking to visitors. He was very popular with the children on the ship. Many fellow passengers attended the prayer or talked to him on matters of religion, human problems and politics. He radiated warmth and love.

In London, he decided to stay in the East End, where the poor and the families of the working class lived. He did not want to stay in luxurious hotels or areas where the rich and privileged lived. Every day he went to the St. James Palace where the Conference met, worked till late into the evening, and returned to

his lodge in East London. He struck an instant rapport with the workers and their families. They looked upon him as one of them. Ethnic differences and differences in nationality and political views never stood between Gandhi and the common people. He wanted to go to Lancashire where textile workers had been hit by unemployment as a result of his movement for the boycott of foreign goods and the adoption of Swadeshi. He answered their questions with calm and understanding. He told them they had three million people who were unemployed. He had in his country three hundred million people who were unemployed, whose average daily income was not even one-tenth of their dole. Should he not ask that they should get employment and incomes? Even God dare not appear before them except in the form of bread. Those who had questioned Gandhi agreed with him, and said that in his place they would do what he was doing. He had conquered their hearts.

At the Conference itself, Gandhi saw through the plan of the British. They wanted to create the impression that the Indians were quarrelling among themselves; they had conflicting interests which they pursued with mutual hostility; they would be at each other's throat if Britain was not there to hold them together and protect every one's interest. Transfer of power, therefore, was unthinkable. Some made no secret of their belief that Indians were unfit for self- government. And the Government had selected participants to ensure a deadlock.

Gandhi, therefore, was forthright. He spelt out the objectives of the Indian nation, said that the British Government had created an unreal situation. It was they who were creating and promoting differences to use them as an excuse to deny freedom. It is this attitude that should change. There were no conflicts of interests in India. All artificial interests that went against the interests of the common man should go. Every legitimate interest whether British or Indian that would not be in conflict with the interests of the masses could remain. Independent India would scrutinize all such claims and annul whatever was against the interests of the poor.

He was against the plan of the British Government to create permanent divisions in India through a "Communal electorate" in which Muslims, Hindus and people of other communities would elect their own representatives separately. There would be no common electorate. This would mean that there would be no union of hearts and no common vision. India would never evolve a common image. This was the surest way of breaking up India and continuing in command. He said that for the same reasons he was also against the creation of separate electorates for the so-called untouchables.

Great Indians like Srinivasan Sastry, Akbar Hydari, Dr. Ambedkar and others were present. But the Conference could not come to common conclusions. That was what the British Government wanted. But nationalist India felt thwarted.

While the Conference was going on, Gandhi had the opportunity to meet leading figures in British society. He spoke at Oxford, at the London School of Economics and at Eton.

At the house of Lindsay, the master of Balliol, he met the leading professors and intellectuals of Britain – Dr. Gilbert Murray, Gilbert Salter, Prof. Coupland, Edward Thomson and others. They were amazed at the calm and clarity with which Gandhi answered every question, however profound or provocative it was, without so much as a frown or twitching of the skin on his face. He met leaders in other fields like Charlie Chaplin and the great playwright, Bernard Shaw. All these visits and talks enabled the people of Britain to see Gandhi through their own eyes and to feel the impact of his uncommon personality.

On his way back to India he decided to spend a few days with the great French writer and philosopher, Romain Rolland who had written a biography of Gandhi even before meeting him. They spent many days at Villanueve exchanging their perceptions and sharing apprehensions and aspirations.

Gandhi was invited to a 'Tea Party' that the King- Emperor of England held for the delegates to the Conference. Representatives of the Government tried to press Gandhi to dress in a three-piece suit for the occasion. Gandhi refused. He said that he had come to the Conference as a representative of the poor people

of India. He had, therefore, no right to wear anything more than what they were. He met the King clad in his loin cloth and shawl.

The visit to Lausanne in Switzerland was memorable. It was there, at a meeting of religious practitioners, philosophers and intellectuals that Gandhi first explained the profound significance that he attached to the fine distinction between the two statements : God is Truth and Truth is God. He used to say God is Truth. But now after many years of experience and reflection, he had come to realize that it was more correct to say Truth is God than to say God is Truth. Gandhi himself did not believe that God was a person. God or Truth was the law, and the law giver rolled into one.

He visited Italy. He could not meet the Pope. But he was overcome by the figure of the Christ on the Cross that he saw in the Pope's Chapel. He met the Fascist dictator Mussolini. There were fears that the dictator might exploit Gandhi's visit. Gandhi told Mussolini that he was building a house of cards.

Gandhi landed at Bombay on the 28th of December, 1931. He was candid. He told the people that he had returned empty handed. He did not believe that Britain would accept the demand for Independence without further struggle. He was apprehensive of what lay ahead. In the meanwhile Irwin's successor, Willingdon, had already destroyed whatever good will had been created by the Gandhi- Irwin Pact. While Gandhi was in Europe or on the high seas, many leaders of the Congress including Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan had been arrested. Jawaharlal Nehru had been arrested while he was on his way to receive Gandhi at Bombay. Willingdon had promulgated new orders restricting freedom. Lathi charges and firings were the order of the day. Thousands had been put in jail. A war of repression had been launched. The Congress Working Committee had come to the conclusion that the Congress had no alternative but to revive Civil Disobedience.

Gandhi still wanted to meet the Viceroy and persuade him to see reason and not push the country into another holocaust. But he was rebuffed. The Government had decided to teach the Congress and Gandhi a lesson. Congress was declared an unlawful association. Its offices were sealed. Its funds were

confiscated. Its workers were arrested and treated with harshness and cruelty, both inside and outside prison. Women became special targets since the Government wanted to prevent a repetition of the Salt Satyagraha. Newspapers were not allowed to publish reports of Congress activities, meetings and arrests. Efforts were made to suppress the publication of journals and to prosecute journalists. The Government had decided to crush the movement.

Gandhi himself and the members of the Working Committee were arrested on the 4th of January, hardly one week after his arrival from London. He was sent to the jail at Yervada. His Secretary, Mahadev Desai and Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel were detained with him.

Gandhi got back to the usual routine that he followed in prison. This time he had to attend to a voluminous mail from India and abroad, seeking his views and advice on many matters. He himself was keen to remain in touch with the inmates of his Ashram and his colleagues in the various States.

## 14

In August 1932, while Gandhi was still in jail, the British Government announced its 'Communal Award'. The award decreed that henceforth the 'untouchables' or depressed classes of Hindus would have separate electorates. They would elect their representatives in the Legislatures from among themselves, and other Hindus (so-called caste Hindus) would have no say in - determining who would represent people belonging to the depressed classes. This would mean a permanent separation and isolation of the so-called untouchables. Gandhi had some inkling of the British plan even during the Round Table Conference in London. He had then declared that this was a sinister plan to create a permanent division among the Hindus, and he would resist it with his life. It would not only be another exercise to divide Indian society and to continue to rule in the name of irreconcilable differences in Indian Society. It would also cut the depressed classes out of Hindu society. This would only perpetuate untouchability. Untouchability is an unmitigated evil. It has no sanction in Hindu religion. It must go root and branch. But it will go only when the so-called caste Hindus recognize the sinfulness and indefensibility of this practice, repent and make amends. There will be no incentive for the so-called caste Hindus to do so if the 'untouchables' are removed from Hindu society. The British proposal would therefore result in the perpetuation of 'untouchability' as well as the division of Hindu and Indian society. This was a diabolical plan and should be resisted.

On the 13th of September, Gandhi announced that he would go on fast to arouse the conscience of the Caste Hindus as well as the British Government. He would commence his fast from the 20th of September, and would give it up only when there was agreement to give up what was contemplated in the Award. The country, particularly the Hindu community was shocked, and shaken into excruciating introspection. Was it not their sinful and inhuman practices that had forced Gandhi, the Mahatma, to stake his life to arouse their conscience, and given the British Government an excuse to create and

perpetuate divisions? Many orthodox Hindus were moved to give up their orthodox attitude to the untouchables. Jawaharlal Nehru's aged mother who was an orthodox Brahmin took *prasad* from the hands of 'untouchables'. Temples, roads and wells were thrown open to the so-called untouchables. India's great poet, Rabindranath Tagore described it as the Mahatma's 'sublime penance'. He said the penance was "a message to all India and to the world. It should be accepted through a proper process of realization. The gift of sacrifice should be received in the spirit of sacrifice".

Gandhi himself explained the reason for his fast. He was "only against separate electorates, and not against statutory reservation of seats". He did not want to be misunderstood. He had identified himself with the "untouchables" from the time he was about 10 or 12 years of age. In South Africa he had turned his wife Kasturba out of 'his' house because she had shown reluctance to clean the commode of a guest who was from the so-called "untouchable" community. He had threatened to close down his Ashram if its inmates dragged their feet on welcoming 'untouchables' as equal members of the Ashram community. " I am a 'touchable' by birth but an 'untouchable' by choice; and I have qualified myself to represent, not the upper ten among the 'untouchables'; but my ambition is to represent and identify myself with the lowest strata of untouchables, namely the 'invisibles' and 'unapproachables' whom I have always before my mind's eye wherever I go; (I) am convinced that if they are ever to rise, it will not be by the reservation of seats, but will be by the strenuous work of Hindu reformers in their midst, and it is because I feel that this separation would have killed all prospect of reform that my whole soul has rebelled against it ... let me make it plain that the withdrawal of separate electorates will satisfy the letter of my vow but will never satisfy the spirit behind it. What I want, what I am living for, and what I should delight in dying for, is the eradication of untouchability root and branch. My life I count of no consequence... if it (the fast) wakes up caste Hindus from their slumber, and if they are roused to a sense of their duty, it will have served its purpose."

There was intense anxiety in the country. It turned into agony as days went by without a solution. Gandhi was already in poor health. He was exhausting the slender reserves in his body. The response and amends had to be quick.

On the eve of the fast, on the 19th of September, "caste Hindu leaders" and the leaders of the "depressed classes" met at Bombay. Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya had taken the initiative for the Conference. Dr. Ambedkar was present at the Conference. So were leaders like Rajendra Prasad, Rajagopalachari, Dr. Moonje, Sapru and Jayakar, Kunzru, Hansa Mehta, Anasuyabai Kale, M. C. Rajah and many others. Everyone was keen that Gandhi's life should be saved. An acceptable solution must be found. There followed a series of discussions and drafting of formulae. The leaders assembled in Bombay shuttled between Bombay and Yervada (Poona) to find a formulae that would be acceptable to Gandhi. Dr. Ambedkar repeatedly insisted on "full compensation" to his community.

The debates centred around separate electorates; reservation of seats in the legislatures; the number of seats to be reserved; the number of years for which the system of reservations should last. These were most relevant for an agreement that could bring pressure on the British to withdraw the 'communal award'.

Gandhi had nothing against the reservation of seats. The number should be fair and just. The difficulty about separate electorates was overcome by the suggestion that in reserved constituencies the common electorate should elect its representative from a panel of four chosen by the voters belonging to the depressed classes. But there could be no agreement on the number of years for which reservations were to last. Dr. Ambedkar proposed that there should be a referendum to decide the question after ten years. Gandhi would not agree to ten years. He wanted it to be after one year or 5 years. Otherwise the long period might be used to canvass reservation in perpetuity, thus frustrating the very purpose of joint electorates and the effort to achieve total integration on the basis of equality.

While the debate was going on Gandhi's condition was deteriorating by the hour. He could hardly lift himself up in bed. His voice was nearly inaudible. He lay for long stretches with his eyes closed. The doctors who examined him declared that he had entered the danger zone. Even if he now gave up his fast, he ran the risk of paralysis. People everywhere were in unspeakable agony. Hundreds of thousands of people swore that they would never again entertain or countenance the thought of untouchability.

Finally there was an agreement that the question of when the referendum would be held would be decided later. Since the draft formulations were now acceptable to the 'caste Hindu' leaders as well as Dr. Ambedkar and his followers, Gandhi decided to end his fiery ordeal. At a meeting to ratify the Pact, Dr. Ambedkar said that the Pact had saved the life "of the greatest man in India". "It had safeguarded the interests of the Depressed Classes. I must confess I was surprised when I met him, to find that there was so much in common between the Mahatma and myself. In fact my disputes whenever they were carried to him, I was surprised to see that the man who held such divergent views from me at the Round Table Conference came immediately to my rescue and not to the rescue of the other side."

The agreement was communicated to the British Government. They announced their acceptance of the 'Yervada Agreement'. Among scenes of great jubilation, Gandhi broke his fast in the yard of the Yervada prison by sipping a glass of orange juice that Kasturba gave him. Many great leaders – Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Mahadev Desai, Kasturba, Rabindranath Tagore, Sarojini Naidu and many others were present. Rabindranath sang a prayer song from the Gitanjali. The great poet had visited Gandhi frequently and shown his complete identification with the cause as well as the penance that Gandhi had undertaken. Gandhi declared that the depressed classes, whom he began to call the children of God or 'Harijans', might hold his life as a hostage for the fulfilment of the pact and the total abolition of untouchability.

This was the beginning of a massive and momentous movement that Gandhi launched for the abolition of untouchability, root and branch. He started a new

weekly called *Harijan*, established an organization with the specific purpose of working for the abolition of untouchability and for the welfare of the 'Harijans'. Leaders of the so-called high castes took up the work of this organization in all States of India.

But Gandhi was still in prison. The Government was not keen to give him facilities for public contact even to carry on the campaign against untouchability that he had launched. So he went on another fast – a 21-day fast to quicken the conscience of the caste Hindus and to convince the Government of his earnestness to work for the cause of the Harijans. He let it be known that he had no intention of taking up programmes of Civil Disobedience in the immediate future.

Gandhi was released in August 1933. He went on a whirlwind tour of the country to persuade people to root out untouchability and to make amends for the evil practice. Thousands of temples were thrown open. Other restrictions were given up. Wells, roads and other public places were opened to the Harijans. But his task was not easy. He was challenged and obstructed by the orthodox in many places. They demonstrated with black flags and abuse. There was an attempt to blow up his motorcade. But they had not reckoned with the fighter in Gandhi. Gandhi confronted them as perhaps no other social reformer or religious leader had done in the past. He challenged them to prove that untouchability was a part of the Hindu religion. How could a religion that believed in Advaita, or oneness, treat anyone as untouchable? No scriptural text could take the place of reason, morality and conscience. Nor was there any scriptural text that justified untouchability. There may be interpolations. Anyway, who were these so-called Sanatanists to interpret religious texts? The texts themselves defined the qualifications of one who had the right to interpret. Only a person who kept the five basic vows of Truth, Ahimsa, Brahmacharya, Non-possession, and Non-stealing, in letter and spirit, had the right to interpret. It was almost like the saying "let one who is without sin cast the first stone". In his gentle but firm way he overcame the resistance of religious persons. Even a Shankaracharya had to stand aside. It was only the

combination of the saint and the militant in Gandhi that could accomplish this. His fast and whirlwind tour accomplished more than what anyone had achieved in the past. He succeeded in breaking the hold of caste and untouchability on the minds of the caste-Hindu. He transferred the onus and the feeling of guilt to those who defended or practised untouchability. That was the death-knell of untouchability, and thereafter, the end was only a matter of time and persistence.

Gandhi's tour took him to towns and villages in every part of India. He was overcome by the sight of persistent poverty. He realized that the problems of the villages could never be solved without reforms in the ownership of land, agricultural practices, and the revival of village industries. He knew that village industries could hold their own only if the skills of the artisans were improved, and their technology was improved. He was not against science or technology or machinery. But to him, the test was not only what it did for the human being, but also what it did to the human being. He was not against machinery. He was only against the kind of machinery that allowed a man to ride on the back of other human beings and exploit them. Gandhi realized the need for finding an appropriate technology that would bring the craftsman or worker into his own, and meet the demands made on him. With all these thoughts in mind, he inspired the setting up of a Village Industries Association, similar to the All India Spinners' Association and the Khadi institutions that he had set up earlier.

Education was another subject that was uppermost in Gandhi's mind. He had experimented with the kind and methods of education that a new society needed, even in South Africa, – in the Phoenix Settlement and the Tolstoy Farm. He had continued the effort in his Ashrams in India. He had come to the conclusion that the problems and needs of primary education could be met only by making education craft and community centred. The craft should become the medium of education. He convened a conference of educationists in Sevagram, and placed his ideas before them. They welcomed the proposal and gave practical shape to the idea. An organization named Hindustani Talimi

Sangh was set up to carry on the work of "Nayi Talim" or new education through the medium of crafts. Thus Gandhi spent the years intensifying the constructive programme and extending it to new fields.

## 15

Meanwhile, there were developments in the field of constitutional reform. The Simon Commission which had been appointed to review the Act of 1919 had submitted its report. But no action had been taken. In 1935 the British Parliament passed a new Constitution for India, and it came into force in 1937. Nationalist India was totally disappointed. There was no real transfer of power even in the States, (then called Provinces) not to speak of the Centre. Some powers in the States were transferred to a Council of Ministers. But even these were subject to the veto of the British Governor. Important subjects were reserved for the Governor. Franchise was limited. All the same, the State Assemblies were to be elected. It gave the Congress an opportunity to prove its public support. If the Congress kept away from the polls the Assemblies and Governments would be formed by elements that were keeping away from the national struggle.

The Congress was in a dilemma. Though Gandhi was not a member or office bearer of the Congress, his advice was important for the Congress. He was the one who had his finger on the pulse of the masses. He alone could lead the country if the experiment failed, and it came to a struggle again. Gandhi was not against participation in the Assemblies if the Congress could use them to solve the crying problems of the people, like drinking water, sanitation, welfare of the Harijans and tribals, primary and secondary education, alcoholism and so on. The Congress decided to contest the elections. It won massive majorities in many States, and was in a position to form Governments in seven out of the eleven States. But it would form Governments only if the Governor gave an assurance that they would not intervene or use his overriding powers to thwart the policies and decisions of the people's representatives. After long discussions, the Congress felt assured that the Governors would act as constitutional heads. Congress Ministries were formed in most States, with leaders like Rajagopalachari, Govind Ballabh Pant, B. G. Kher, Srikrishna Sinha, Gopinath Bordoloi, Dr. Khan Saheb and others becoming "Prime Ministers" in the

States (Chief Ministers were called Prime Ministers at that time). The Governments set examples in probity, accountability, austerity and concern for the problems of the people.

But the Governments could not remain in office for long. On the 3rd of September 1939, the Second World War broke out. As soon as Britain declared war on Germany, the Viceroy too declared that India was at war with Germany. There was not even the semblance of consultation with the Prime Ministers in the States or the representatives of the people. The Congress Ministries resigned declaring that the hollowness of the claims of the new Constitution had been exposed.

What was the Congress to do during the war? Were they to help actively in the war effort? Prominent leaders of the Congress like Jawaharlal Nehru, Maulana Azad, Rajagopalachari and others were supporters of the Allies. They were totally against Hitler and Mussolini, against Nazism and Fascism. They supported Britain and the Allies because they were fighting for democracy—against dictatorship. They wanted India to take full part in the fight for democracy. But how could India do so, how could the leaders enthuse the people of India to cooperate in the war, if democracy was meant only for Britain, and not meant for India as well. They wanted the Congress to tell the Viceroy that the Congress would support Indian participation in the War effort if the British Government would declare that at the end of the war, India would attain full freedom. They would participate in a national Government if it was set up on these terms.

Gandhi himself supported the Allied cause. He met the Viceroy. He could not help shedding tears when he thought of the destruction of the historic city of London or of the woes of the people. But he was against all wars. The British attitude to India had disillusioned him. Yet his sympathy for the Allied cause and people who had to suffer the terrible consequences of the war came from his heart. However he was a votary of non-violence. He believed that all wars were ruinous. They would cause suffering, but would not solve any issue. He wanted to work for a world without wars. Only non-violence could save

humanity and secure justice. He could act as an advisor of the Government and of the Congress if they wanted him to lead them to a world without war.

The Congress was not willing to accept this position. It had not accepted 'pacifism'. It had never accepted the view that Independent India would have no army, and would not use arms in self-defence. It, therefore, reluctantly and respectfully decided to differ from Gandhi and offer co-operation to the Government in its war effort if a provisional Government was set up.

The Government did not care to accept the offer of the Congress. It made a statement which was a virtual incitement to communal and obstructive elements to persist in obstruction. It virtually assured them that the progress towards self-government would depend on their consent.

Congress felt insulted and humiliated. The country too felt that its hand of friendship and co-operation had been rejected. Some kind of protest was called for, even to protect national honour. They did not want to disrupt the war effort. Nor did Gandhi want to embarrass the Government when it was fighting for the survival of Britain and the Allies. Congress turned or returned to Gandhi and asked him to resume leadership.

Gandhi hit upon a new form of Civil Disobedience, – Individual Civil Disobedience. Individuals chosen or approved by Gandhi would defy the orders of the Government by notifying the Government of their intention to do so. They would address the public and declare that India had not been consulted before the Government proclaimed that India was at war.

Vinoba Bhave was chosen as the first Satyagrahi. In phases, members of the Working Committee, Legislators, Office bearers of the party and others offered Satyagraha in this manner. Tens of thousands were lodged in prison.

Meanwhile, the war was going against the Allies. Country after country had been overrun in Europe. The soldiers of the Axis powers – Germany and Italy – were on the shores of the Mediterranean. Britain was fighting a heroic battle for survival. Japan had entered the war, and had made spectacular gains, sweeping down the Asian coast. America had rallied to the defence of the

Allies. President Roosevelt of America felt that some move should be made to solve the "Indian problem" and induct the Indian leaders into the struggle against the Axis powers. The pressure of circumstances was too much even for Churchill, the war time Prime Minister of Britain, who was a known opponent of Indian independence. The British War Cabinet drafted its proposals for future constitutional change in India, and sent Sir Stafford Cripps, a well-known friend of India, to persuade Indian leaders to accept the proposals.

The proposals were in two parts. The long-term proposals visualized that after the war, India would acquire the right to be a full Dominion (with the right to opt out of the Empire). But the States or provinces and the Rulers would be free to remain out of the new Dominion and retain direct relationship with the British Crown. In the immediate present, there would be a new Executive Council to assist the Viceroy, but it will not have the rights of a cabinet of the type that ruled in England.

Gandhi who was summoned by Sir Stafford looked at the proposals and advised Sir Stafford to take the next plane home as the proposals were not acceptable to India. He returned to his Ashram at Wardha.

The Congress leaders had long discussions with Sir Stafford, and finally rejected the proposal because it would pave the way for a fragmentation of India. In the immediate present, it would only enable the Government to put up a facade that Indians were part of the Government.

Sir Stafford's mission was a failure. He returned to England, and blamed Gandhi, although Gandhi had taken no part in the negotiations between the Congress and the British Government.

India felt frustrated. There was a mood of indignation and anxiety. The war was no longer distant for India. The Japanese had overrun the entire Asian coast and Singapore. They had occupied Burma and were knocking at the door of India at Manipur. It looked as though British invincibility was a myth. The British Army was being forced to withdraw from country after country. It was withdrawing after destroying crops and other materials to ensure that the Japanese did not have access to them. What was to happen to the people of

these countries? They could not run away. Even their food was being destroyed. How would they survive? Who would defend them? Britain had surrendered its responsibility.

Who would defend India? What would happen if people lost the will to defend? The situation called for a drastic remedy. Britain might leave India and go as it had left other countries, leaving people defenseless and hopeless.

India had to be taken out of this morass of helplessness and fear. No people can become free or remain free without the will to resist. India should discover its will to resist. Who can help the country to do this, without losing time? The Congress and the country turned to Gandhi.

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Gandhi found the answer, – Britain must quit India. It is not for them to think of what would happen if they left, when they left. India was there before they came. India would look after itself when they left. For heaven's sake, quit. Leave the country to God, or anarchy. But go. The country pricked its ears. Here was the voice of revolution, a non-violent revolution.

Some leaders of the Congress were baffled. Even Jawaharlal and Azad were not sure of the wisdom of the proposal. They thought that it might help the enemies of democracy. Some Britishers condemned Gandhi as a fifth columnist, an agent of the Axis powers and Japan. But Gandhi's erstwhile adversary against whom he had fought for 20 long years in South Africa, General Smuts, said "It is sheer nonsense 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 wrote and spoke explaining the reasons behind his proposal. He explained it to the world through the interviews he gave to outstanding columnists like Louis Fischer. His message echoed throughout the length and breadth of the country. Faint hearts picked up courage. The nonplussed saw that there was a way. In the course of a few weeks the country was electrified. Students, young men and women, workers, villagers, – every section of the people felt that the hour had come. The country depended on them. The future depended on them. Gandhi told them that the hour had come to "do or die". It was only when individuals went forth to seek death that nations lived. In a few weeks, Gandhi had set the country on fire.

The Working Committee of the Congress met at Sevagram, and took the momentous decision on the 14th of July. The resolution asking Britain to Quit India was adopted by the All India Congress Committee at the Gowalia Tank grounds at Bombay, on the 8th of August 1942. Gandhi had told the meeting that he would meet the Viceroy and try to convince him. If he failed, he would tell the country what to do. It would be an unprecedented mass upsurge, – revolution, but strictly non-violent. Anything else will misfire and lead to a

roul. He asked the country to wait for his signal and the programme of Civil Disobedience and Non-cooperation, if his talks with the Viceroy failed.

The country was waiting for his signal when the Government struck. Soon after midnight on the morning of the 9th of August, Gandhi was arrested. So were all the members of the Congress Working Committee and all the known leaders of the Congress at the Central, State and District levels. The papers were muzzled; so no one knew what had become of Gandhi or the leaders. Rumours spread that Gandhi had been taken to Africa. It was after a day or two that people came to know that Gandhi had been taken to Poona, and lodged in the Aga Khan's Palace which had been converted into a special prison. The leaders in the Working Committee including Jawaharlal Nehru, Maulana Azad, Sardar Vallabhbhai, and others were lodged in the Fort at Ahmednagar which was protected by a moat that encircled it. All the leaders who could speak or guide authentically were taken away and isolated from the people.

A tidal wave of fury swept the country. It seemed as though all restraints gave way. It seemed as though there was only one objective. Hit back and give the Government a taste of the fury of the people. Since most of the older leaders had been removed from the scene, the leaders of the younger generation took over. No instructions had been formulated or left behind since Gandhi was waiting to know what would transpire in his talks with the Viceroy.

Hundreds of thousands of processions were taken out in all the States, almost all towns and villages, in defiance of prohibitory orders. Attempts were made to hoist the National Flag on the offices and buildings of the Government, and in public places. The country echoed with the cry "Mahatma Gandhi Ki Jai", "Britain, Quit India". Attempts were made to disrupt communications. Fish plates and rails were removed. Bridges were blown up. Government buildings were set on fire. Telephone wires were cut off. Efforts were made to prevent rail traffic. Students and young men and women were in the forefront of action. They forced the closure of schools and colleges for months. Many young men and women were shot down while hoisting the National Flag. There were indiscriminate arrests, and detention without trial. Those who attempted to

lead processions or hold meetings were mercilessly lathi charged or shot at. Machine guns were used. Unarmed crowds were fired upon from the air. A reign of terror was launched. Collective fines were imposed. Villagers were forced to patrol tracks at night, on penalty of arrest and collective fines. Women were maltreated. At many places, police entered villages and indulged in orgies of rape and shooting. Prisoners were treated with cruelty. Many were tortured. Even leaders like Jayaprakash Narayan were subjected to torture.

There was unprecedented, deliberate, barbarous repression. In some States like Bengal, Bihar and Maharashtra, parallel governments were set up in villages and Tahsils, and the supporters and henchmen of the Government were subjected to corporal 'punishment'. Gandhi came to know of all this only much later. In the meanwhile, the Government launched an intense campaign to malign Gandhi and the Congress leaders. They blamed Gandhi for the violent demonstrations and 'sabotage', and accused Gandhi of having sanctioned them or connived at them, if he had not plotted them. They suggested that he had given up his faith in nonviolence. Some implied that his non-violence was a ploy, and that he was indulging in downright hypocrisy when he talked of non-violence. They tried to spread these stories all over the world.

Gandhi was in prison. He had no way of answering these allegations in public and countering the calumny that was put out. He wrote to the Viceroy and the Government on these allegations. He charged the Government with having precipitated the struggle, isolating the leaders from the people with a midnight sweep; provoking the people and unleashing a reign of "leonine violence" against the people. If he had not been arrested and isolated, he would have appealed to the people to stick strictly to the path of non-violence. It was most likely that he would have succeeded. His faith in non-violence was the breath of his life. It was no ploy. He had often declared that he did not care for an independence that was won through violence, because it would not signify the freedom of the common man. It seemed as though the Government had lost all sense of propriety, fair play or justice. How else could they level such grave allegations against him and yet not give him a chance to answer the

allegations? If they had a shred of evidence they should put him on trial. If found guilty, he would bear the consequences. Time was of the essence in meting out justice. His correspondence with the Government only brought long and tortuous replies, but not acceptance of the challenge to prove him guilty in a court of justice.

Even before Gandhi settled down in the prison in the Aga Kkhan's Palace, he was shaken by a tragic blow. Mahadev Desai, who had worked as his secretary, almost from the beginning of his public work in India, died of a sudden heart attack on the 15th of August. Desai had served Gandhi and the cause dutifully, – recording Gandhi's interviews and speeches, helping him answer his voluminous mail, writing continuously in the Young India and Harijan, and helping Gandhi in the work of editing these journals, keeping accounts, regulating appointments, keeping in touch with Congress workers and the organisation for constructive work that Gandhi set up, maintaining contacts with the high officials of the British Government and so on. Mahadev Desai's death was a truly irreparable loss for Gandhi.

As on the previous occasion when he was in prison Gandhi kept himself busy with daily prayers, spinning, writing to the Government and detailed discussions with his prison mates on matters of religion, political philosophy, economic programmes, techniques of revolution, the ideal of a classless and stateless society, and similar subjects. The Government had lodged some of his colleagues with him, Kasturba was with him. Others who were with him at the Aga Khan's palace included Sarojini Naidu, Mirabehn, Pyarelal Nayyar and Sushila Nayyar. He read many books and discussed them with his colleagues. It was during these days that he first read Marx's Das Capital. There were, therefore, incisive and extensive discussions on Marx and Marxism, the Soviet experiment, and the superiority of techniques and goals based on non-violence.

By February 1943, Gandhi felt that he had waited long enough for a reply from the Government on his demand for an opportunity to clear himself of the charges that the Government had levelled against him. He should do something to vindicate himself. He decided to go on a fast of 21 days. It began on the 10th

of February. The Viceroy dismissed it as political black mail. But as Gandhi embarked on his fast there was deep agony in India. He was in poor health, and in no condition to undergo the rigours of a 21-day fast. Soon he entered the 'danger zone'. The doctors who attended on him said that he would suffer an irretrievable breakdown, and would die if he did not take glucose. Every moment seemed crucial. None of his Indian colleagues could dare suggest to Gandhi that he should take glucose in the water he was drinking. Yet they too knew that nothing else could save him. They were disconsolate. The Surgeon-General who was an Englishman was so moved and so keen to try to save Gandhi that he decided to try and persuade Gandhi. He broached the subject. Gandhi managed a smile, and signalled that he was in the hands of God. When Gandhi's colleagues entered the room, they found the Surgeon-General wiping his tears on the verandah. The nation was on an anxious vigil. The British Government, on its part, had made up its mind to let Gandhi die. They assembled a pile of sandal-wood inside the precincts of the Aga Khan's Palace for the funeral pyre. But the miracle occurred. Gandhi came back from the brink of death, much to the surprise of the doctors, much to the chagrin of the Government, and much to the joy of the Indian people. There was a spurt in programmes of defiance all over the country. The nation's agony was so intense that three Indian members of the Viceroy's Executive Council disassociated themselves from the policy of the Government, and resigned.

Kasturba Gandhi had been in indifferent health from 1943. The illness did not respond to treatment. In February 1944, she breathed her last with her head in Gandhi's lap. A few days earlier, she had told Gandhi : 'Now, I am going.' As Gandhi said, 'They were indeed a couple out of the ordinary.' She had been his partner for over sixty years in a saga of ordeals, suffering, discovery of self, and sadhana for truth and nonviolence. It was another irreparable loss that he sustained while in the Aga Khan's Palace.

All these began to tell on Gandhi's health. He was laid low with malaria. He had also contracted amoebiasis. As reports of his health came to be known, and his condition deteriorated, there were increasing and insistent demands for his

release, from India and outside. The fortunes of the war had turned in favour of the Allies. The Government was no longer in a state of panic. They decided to release Gandhi.

On his release streams of visitors began to converge at Gandhi's residence. He found that he was too weak even to talk. He had to conserve his energy by observing silence. But he rallied soon, and began to pick up the threads of his preoccupations.

The members of the Working Committee were still in prison. So were most others who had been detained. A way had to be found to lead the country out of the deadlock. He wrote to the Viceroy and the Prime Minister Churchill offering his services "for the sake of your people and mine, and through them those of the world". He met with a rebuff.

He saw that political progress was being blocked by the persisting differences with Jinnah and the Muslim League. He decided to try to reassure Jinnah and narrow down differences. He sought a meeting with Jinnah. Gandhi and Jinnah parleyed at Jinnah's residence at Mount Pleasant Road in Bombay for nearly two weeks. But the ice could not be broken. Jinnah refused to relent or even specify his demands. In 1940 the Muslim League had met at Lahore and passed a resolution demanding the partition of the country and the creation of a new State (to be called Pakistan) consisting of the areas in which Muslims were in a majority.

Jinnah was not willing to concede the right that he demanded for the Muslim minority in India to the non-Muslim minority in the areas that he claimed as part of the projected Pakistan. The talks broke down.

The phase of defiance had quietened down. But the other part of the programme, the constructive programme which, in Gandhi's eyes, was as essential as Civil Disobedience could be carried out, had to be carried out. Many new ideas had occurred to him while in prison. He, therefore, convened meetings of workers who were engaged in the fields of Khadi and Village Industries, Nai Talim or Basic Education, Harijan Seva, Tribal Welfare, Hindustani Prachar, organizations of women, students and labour and so on,

and chalked out plans to deepen and revolutionize these activities, with the objective of working for a new human being and a new society. He had also revived the morale of the workers of the Congress and organizations of constructive work. He travelled to the different States of the country, meeting workers and people, rebuilding morale, revitalizing programmes, trying to kindle new hope.

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Tables had turned in the War. Hitler and Mussolini were on the verge of defeat. The Japanese Armies had been pushed back, and many countries in the East liberated. A new Viceroy had come to India, Lord Wavell. He wanted to find a way out of the deadlock in India. The leaders of the Congress or the members of the Working Committee were released. As the first step he wanted to reconstitute his Executive Council and include leaders of the people. He convened a Conference at Simla, and put forward his proposals. The Congress and the Muslim League under Jinnah participated in the Conference. But Lord Wavell's efforts failed when Jinnah insisted that the Muslims should have as many members in the Executive Council as the 'Caste Hindus' had, and the Muslim League should have the sole right to nominate Muslims for inclusion in the Executive Council. The Congress could not accept either of these demands without giving up its claim to be a national organisation representing all communities. The Conference failed.

In the meanwhile, the war ended in Europe, and elections were held in Great Britain. Churchill and the Conservatives were defeated, and the Labour party came to power. Labour had sympathy for the Indian cause. In March 1946, the new Prime Minister Clement Attlee decided to send a Cabinet Mission to India. It consisted of three of his eminent colleagues. Two of them, Lord Pethick Lawrence and Sir Stafford Cripps were known to Gandhi, and were known as friends of India and Indian leaders.

The Mission held discussions with the leaders of the Congress and the Muslim League and many other public figures. They took counsel with Gandhi too. When they failed to find a consensus, they presented a proposal of their own. The Constitution would have three tiers. The Union of India at the top would have control of foreign affairs, defence and communications. The rest of the powers would vest in the States. There would be three sections of States, each of which would decide whether they should function as a group and if so, what subjects should be delegated to the government at the group level. The

elaborate proposals were an answer to the question: should India remain one or should the country be divided. It seemed as though the Labour Government preferred a United India. Jinnah declared that he could never accept a Union of India. From 1940 or earlier he had held that India consisted of two nations, the Muslims, and the Hindus and others. His contention was that each nation had a right to have its own state. The two nations, Hindus and Muslims could not live together. The Congress rejected 'Pakistan'. Gandhi had termed it as vivisection, and said that if it took place it would take place over his dead body. He could never look upon religion as a dividing force nor as the basis of nationhood. To him there was only one nation in India, and it comprised of and would always comprise of people of different faiths.

Gandhi and the Congress believed that religion was not the basis of nationhood. There were many other factors including history, language, culture and so on. India had been a nation though it had different languages and sub-cultures in different areas. There had always been a cultural personality of India which was based on, and evolved from its diversities. India had never smothered pluralism.

It had thrived on it, and evolved its distinct culture of tolerance and pluralism. This nation could not be split on the basis of religion. People of both Hindu and Muslim religions and other religions resided in all parts of India. It was not therefore possible to create a state on the basis of religion without uprooting or annihilating large masses of people belonging to other faiths. This would only result in carnage and misery.

But Jinnah was adamant. He insisted that there were two nations, and that they could not live together in one State – India. A new state had to be created by the British before they left. He had already worked his followers up to a white pitch. He was not satisfied with the Cabinet proposals.

The Cabinet Mission had also proposed the setting up of a National Government. They did not succeed in setting up one before they went back to England. Now Lord Wavell tried again. He asked Nehru to form one. Jinnah was in a fit of fury. He called the Congress a Caste Hindu fascist organisation, and refused to

be a party to their "campaign to dominate the Muslims and other non-Hindus". He would now discard constitutional methods and take to "Direct Action" to achieve Pakistan. He appealed to the Muslims to observe the 16th of August 1946 as Direct Action Day.

Against whom was the Direct Action planned? The British Government? The Congress? The Hindus? What would be the means? The answer came in Calcutta on the 16th of August. On that day, Muslim 'hooligans' went on a rampage, killing hundreds of Hindus, raping Hindu women and killing innocent children. It looked as though elaborate preparations had been made, and arms had been collected and stockpiled. For two days the Hindus were dazed. But then they rallied, killed, looted, raped and set fire to property as Muslims had done. The casualties were high on both sides. Many houses and buildings lay in embers.

The reprisals by the Hindus resulted in further reprisals by the Muslims in areas where they were in absolute majority. One of these areas was the district of Noakhali in East Bengal. It became the scene of an unprecedented carnage. Hardly a handful of Hindu huts and families could survive the onslaught. Hindu men, women and children were slaughtered. Some were forcibly converted to Islam. Women were subjected to repeated rape and humiliation. Some were kidnapped and subjected to forcible "marriages". Some committed suicide to escape rape or capture. The charred remains of houses stood as reminders of the insanity and inhuman cruelty that had ravaged the fair green land where Hindus and Muslims had lived like blood brothers for centuries, speaking the same language, singing the same songs, sowing, and reaping the same harvests and sharing each other's joys and sorrows.

Gandhi heard of the great Calcutta Killing when he was in his Ashram at Sevagram. He rushed to Delhi to proceed to Calcutta. At Delhi, he, as well as the country, came to know of the holocaust in Noakhali. For nearly a week the Government of Bengal, under Suhrawardy, had censored and suppressed the news. When the reports of the carnage and rape in Noakhali reached Bihar where Hindus were in a majority there was a deafening and stunning echo. Muslims were killed and raped. Their houses were gutted by arson, and looted.

The Hindus in Bihar vied with the Muslims of Noakhali in repudiating the values of humanness and mutual love that had characterized and sustained Indian society for centuries. They descended to levels that would have shamed the most barbarous tribes and animals.

Gandhi had reached Calcutta on his way to Noakhali, when reports of the Bihar outrage reached him. He was overcome with sorrow and shame. What was happening to India which had set an example to the world in tolerance and mutual love? What had happened to all the lessons that people had learnt: about the power of love and Satyagraha? Were we destined to destroy each other in fratricidal strife and kill each other as animals, or even as animals will not do? He had special affection for Bihar. It was there that he had started his first Satyagraha in India and served the exploited, starving people. He decided to live on "the lowest diet possible" a semi-fast, and announced that he would go on a fast unto death, if the people of Bihar did not immediately halt the madness and turn a new leaf. Gandhi's semi-fast and the timely measures taken by the Government had their effect, and the madness abated in Bihar.

Gandhi proceeded to Noakhali. He wanted to go alone. But a Minister and Parliamentary Secretaries of the Government of Bengal accompanied him. He had to travel by train and car and boat. He was almost besieged by people who had flocked for his darshan.

As Gandhi approached Noakhali he saw the havoc that communal madness had wrought, – the charred remains of houses, the skulls and skeletons that were strewn beside huts and houses; the vacant and lifeless looks of women whose honour and self-respect had been looted, the living dead who were haunting the villages that had become charnel grounds. They had seen their husbands or children or fathers being butchered before them. Men had seen their mothers or wives or sisters being raped before being killed. Gandhi did not know how to console them. Who could give back to them what they had lost forever? Gandhi said that he had not come to console, but to give courage. He would stay with them. No, he would stay alone in the hut of any Muslim who would house him, living on whatever he could get to eat, sleeping on the mud floor, at the mercy

of hooligans and would-be murderers for the twenty-four hours of the day. He would share their agony and risks. He would try to bring back sanity through his courage and his appeal to the sense of humanness and compassion in the Muslims. He decided that he would send the members of his entourage to live alone in far dispersed areas, as he lived, instilling courage in the minds of the Hindus and compassion and human kindness in the minds of the Muslims.

He himself would set up his headquarters in the village of Srirampur. It was a typical site. Only three of the hundreds of Hindu families living there had survived. Gandhi had with him his Bengali Secretary, Nirmal Kumar Bose, and his stenographer. His granddaughter Manu too was with him. The madness that he saw launched Gandhi into intense and ruthless introspection. He had tried to place the law of love before the people, in South Africa, in India. He had tried to practise it incessantly. He had passed through fire many times to purify himself and his people. Yet today what he could see all around him was untruth and hatred and brutal violence. It appeared as though he had failed. Why did he fail? Was there something lacking in him?

Was there something lacking in his understanding of the law of love? Had he been too frail and too broken an instrument to be the medium of an invincible power? He should purify himself even further. He should reduce himself to zero and rid himself of his impurities. The moment demanded that he pass through fire to rid himself of his impurities so that the pure ore of love would shine through him and bring people to their senses.

He decided to disband his camp at Srirampur and to walk alone from village to village. He would go alone, entrusting himself to\* God, – the God of love and Truth. The district was crisscrossed by rivulets, and was marshy. Paths were overgrown with thorny bush. Rivers had to be crossed by walking along bamboo poles that had been stretched above the waters to serve as bridges. He was old and weak. He might slip and fall into the flowing waters or eddies. He discarded the use of footwear. He would walk on barefoot, braving thorns and quagmires. He was willing to leave a trail of blood, – his own blood – to mark his quest for compassion and love. He was at the mercy of the very people who

had gone on rampage and killed and looted and raped. He would expose himself to their fury, Gandhi was not- far wrong. They stood sullen and furious as he wended his way on barefeet. At some places, they placed thorny bushes on the narrow footpaths through which he had to pass, or placed nightsoil along the footpaths that he had to take. He bent down and removed the nightsoil with dried leaves and placed his feet on the path. The looks of many showed their unrepentant anger. Some taunted Gandhi, and asked him if he was not going to Bihar. Was he only concerned with the safety of Hindus? He replied that he made no distinction. The sins of the Hindus of Bihar were as black as the sins of the Muslims of Noakhali.

He would go to Bihar and Punjab as soon as some sanity was restored in Bengal. To him Allah and Ishwar were one. There were some who harkened to his call, and vowed to work for the return of sanity and humanness.

After two months of this 'pilgrimage' in Noakhali, in March 1947, Gandhi decided to go to Bihar to spread the message of sanity and love. Here, it was the Hindus who had gone mad and done all that the Muslims had done in Noakhali. Gandhi's task here was to bring solace to the Muslims who had been the victims of the holocaust, and bring Hindus to the path of sanity. Here, the response that Gandhi received was far more warm and reassuring. Many who had been guilty of perpetrating atrocities on the minorities confessed their guilt, and promised to turn a new leaf. Moved by Gandhi's words on the miseries of Muslim women who had suffered, many Hindu women gave Gandhi their jewellery to give help to their 'sisters'? Gandhi was unsparing in his condemnation of what the Hindus had done in Bihar and what the Muslims had done in Noakhali.

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Gandhi was in Bihar when a new Viceroy Lord Mountbatten took over at Delhi. He had been sent to India with a specific mandate to find a solution and implement it before the end of June 1948. The Muslim League had decided to boycott the Constituent Assembly. The new Viceroy wanted to seek Gandhi's advice before he came to his own assessment. Gandhi told him that the best course would be to ask Jinnah to take over as Prime Minister and run the affairs of the country. If Jinnah declined, the Congress should be asked to shoulder the responsibility. Gandhi thought that his proposal would ensure the survival of a United India, and there would be no partition. The Viceroy was baffled, Jinnah said it was too good to be true. The Congress was wary about the Mahatma's proposal.

Mountbatten came to the conclusion that there was no alternative to the partition of the country, and on the same grounds dividing or partitioning the Muslim majority states in the North-West and North-East to keep the areas with Hindu majority in India. He was able to convince the Congress that this was the only solution to save the country from Civil War, and to protect the rest of India from fratricide. It is difficult to say what argument clinched the issue with the leaders of the Congress, – saving the rest of the country; fear of civil war, desire for the immediate end of British rule and independence; the sheer impossibility of working with the representatives of the Muslim League or fear of continued paralysis if they were to work with the representatives of the League.

Gandhi was firmly against partition. He did not see any good coming out of it. Rivers of blood would flow. There would be carnage. Millions would be uprooted. It would mean the surrender of all that he and the Congress had stood for and struggled for, – the unity of India, the belief in pluralism and tolerance on which, Indian society was based, the belief in secular nationalism that refused to make religion the basis of nationhood.

He advised the Congress leaders, – implored them, not to accept partition in a hurry. The worst that could happen was that they would have to wage another struggle to obtain independence without losing the unity of the country. Even if partition was to come, let it come after the British left. Their presence created an artificial situation. But Gandhi could not convince the leaders of the Congress. They had made up their minds. They did not want to sail with him. They went through the ritual of consulting him. But they did not lay all the cards on the table. They did not let him know that they had conveyed their acceptance of partition to Mountbatten. It was from others that Gandhi came to know that they had accepted partition.

As one irreversible step after another was taken on the path towards partition, Gandhi cautioned and implored the Congress and the Government at every step. He asked them not to be in a hurry, not to abdicate the claim of the Congress to represent the nation; not to accept anything which would reduce Congress to the position of a representative of the Hindus or Caste Hindus; not to accept the partition of the Punjab or Bengal on grounds that were based on religion; not to accept the partition of the country. At every point, the Congress either disagreed with Gandhi or circumvented Gandhi. Mountbatten brazenly told the Mahatma, 'The Congress is not with you; it is with me.'

As the negotiations progressed the Congress was not keen to keep Gandhi in the picture. Two leaders of the Congress, Sardar Patel and Jawaharlal Nehru told the Viceroy not to worry too much about what Gandhi said. Often Gandhi was kept in the dark, and came to know of the decisions of the Congress only after they had been conveyed to the Government or arrived at in consultation with the Government. He was unwanted. From the beginning of the negotiations, Gandhi was clear that he wanted independence for united India. If the Government were not prepared to accept that position, he felt the Congress should not agree to the partition of India, but should be prepared for another non-violent struggle to achieve independence for an undivided India.

The Congress leaders particularly Nehru, Azad and Patel had decided that immediate independence was more important than the unity of India. They

might have had their reasons. The British Government wanted partition. Jinnah wanted partition. Gandhi was isolated. His colleagues had deserted him.

He was still prepared to fight. But he knew that he had no time to build up a new alternative leadership. He told his attendants : "Today I find myself all alone. Even the Sardar and Jawaharlal think that he was wrong, and peace was sure to return if partition was agreed upon. Nevertheless, I must speak as I feel ... we may not feel the full impact immediately, but, I can see clearly that the future of independence gained at this price is going to be dark. Should the evil I apprehend overtake India ... let posterity know what agony this old soul went through, thinking of it.... Let it not be said that Gandhi was party to Indian vivisection." It was a Monday, his weekly day of silence on which Mountbatten met Gandhi to talk of the Congress's acceptance of partition. Mountbatten was astonished by Gandhi's 'self-effacement' and 'self-control'.

It seemed to him that his colleagues and the Government had no need of him, anymore. He decided to leave Delhi, and go where he was needed. He was needed in Calcutta, in Noakhali, in Bihar, in the Punjab, – everywhere where people were in anguish, where they had been blinded by anger and had sunk to the level of brutes. He had to assuage their suffering, give them solace, atone for their sins, cool their passions, teach them to live with each other. Hatred could not quench hatred. Only love could. So the lone pilgrim, the messenger of peace and love set out for Noakhali where he had left his work uncompleted.

On the way when he was in Calcutta, trouble broke out in the city. The former premier Suhrawardy and many others requested Gandhi to stay and restore peace. He agreed to do so if Suhrawardy would stay with him under the same roof and work with him.

A house was chosen in a locality that had been badly affected. On the day on which Gandhi moved in, an angry mob of youngsters surrounded the house, pelted stones, broke panels, forced their way in, and confronted him with blood-shot eyes, brandishing lathis. Gandhi stood in their midst with arms folded, fearless, – cool in his courage and compassion, ready to be set upon, and lynched. The anger abated. The assailants retreated. It appeared as though

there was a change of heart. A few days later, on the 14th of August, on the eve of Independence, the two communities jointly waved the national flag and celebrated the coming of Independence. But the peace was fragile. Anger welled up again. The desire for retaliation asserted itself; on the 31st August a menacing mob of Hindus, armed with lethal weapons approached and surrounded the house. They were looking for Suhrawardy. But Suhrawardy had left a few minutes ago. Their quarry had escaped. But their fury did not abate. The missiles that they had brought flew past Gandhi. They were in no mood to listen to him.

Gandhi saw that he could salvage the situation only with an appeal to the highest in man. He had always believed that man had both the beast and the super human in him. The way to enter their hearts and tap the springs of divinity or 'humanness' was through a fast. He went on a fast on the 1st of September. It worked the miracle. It melted hearts. The leaders of all communities gathered and assured him that the chapter of hatred and violence would be closed forever. Hindus and Muslims danced on the streets with joy and embraced each other. The world hailed his success as a miracle. He had accomplished what many divisions of the army could not accomplish elsewhere. Lord Mountbatten hailed him as 'the one man Peace Brigade'.

Gandhi now felt that his work in the East was done, and he should hurry to the Punjab from where harrowing tales of misery and carnage were pouring in. Meanwhile the day that had been set for the transfer of power arrived. On the 15th of August, India and Pakistan were to emerge as two Independent states, after nearly three centuries of foreign domination. The day for which the people of India had longed and struggled and suffered had arrived. But the man who had taken them from the wilderness to the threshold of power and independence was himself struggling in the wilderness, carrying his cross on his shoulders. He was far away from the jubilation and revelry of the capitals. The new Government asked him for a message. He said he had no message – no new message to give.

Gandhi reached Delhi on his way to the Punjab. But at Delhi, he found that the flood of human misery that had gathered in the Punjab and Sind had reached Delhi. Millions of people who had been uprooted from their homes and lands and lost their all had arrived at Delhi on their trek to safety. It was undoubtedly the biggest exodus that history had seen.

Their misery, agony, bitterness and anger were beyond description.

There were among them people who had seen the gory murder of their parents or spouses, their sisters and brothers and children. Many women had been raped. Many had been abducted and kept as slaves or forcibly married. Children had been picked up by their feet and killed by being dashed on the ground. Houses had been burnt and looted in village after village, city after city. People had escaped detection and fled from their homes and lands, carrying whatever they could salvage, not knowing where to go, not knowing where they could find safety. Caravans of those who sought refuge formed themselves; husbands were missing; wives were missing: parents and children were missing. There were also orphans and helpless old people who had lost their grown up children. Aerial surveys showed that some caravans were sixty miles or more in length. They had no rations to survive on. Many died on the way. Those who came later had to wade through corpses. The stench of corpses and swarms of vultures were in the air. Worse still, sometimes caravans were ambushed, and subjected to murder, loot, rape and abduction. At some places, those who sought water were given poisoned water, and they died on the way. The caravans had no assurance of security, even when they survived. They had to start life again in refugee camps, living on rations, living in squalor. How could they resume their lives and find their human dignity again? All this happened to columns that moved from one country to the other.

To Hindus who poured into India from what had become Pakistan, and to Muslims who were fleeing for safety to Pakistan.

What else could one find in the camps and concentrations of refugees except anger, misery and the spirit of revenge? They were angry with the leaders whose actions had brought them to a state of misery and despair. Gandhi felt

that it was his duty to visit these camps and to do whatever could be done to bring solace to them, trace their kin and rehabilitate them. The Government was looking after the problems of rehabilitation. But he had to apply the balm to their wounded and embittered minds and hearts. He stood in their midst, unprotected, listening to their woes and trying to comfort them. He visited one camp after another, of arriving Hindus as well as fleeing Muslims. He felt sad and ashamed at the depravity that had engulfed the minds of his people. Then came another blow that shocked him. The Government of India had decided to withhold the 55 crores of rupees that were Pakistan's share of the common assets at the time of Partition. Gandhi thought that this was immoral. The money was part of what belonged to both at the time of partition. At partition, assets too were partitioned as happened in every family. Both had agreed on what would constitute Pakistan's share. How then could it be held back, merely because the treasury happened to be in Indian hands?

If a family partitioned its assets and two brothers had agreed on each other's share, how could the elder brother refuse to pay what was agreed to be the younger brother's share? This would be too immoral a beginning for Independent India. He asked Mountbatten for his view. Mountbatten said that his personal opinion was similar to Gandhi's.

Gandhi decided to go on a fast to appeal to the conscience of his colleagues who were now in Government, and also to restore sanity and love to the minds of his people.

As the fast progressed and Gandhi's health started sinking, the country began to realize that it was running the risk of losing the Mahatma forever. Intransigence gave way to introspection. The Government decided to release the 55 crores. Hardened hearts began to melt. Waves of penitence and high sentiments swept the country. There was a sense of imminent pathos. Once again, the leaders of communities assembled, expressed their deep sorrow and promised to live in peace and love. Gandhi had triumphed yet again.

But there were some in India who looked upon Gandhi's successes as an anathema. There were such people among supporters of the British as well as

among Hindu and Muslim extremists. But Gandhi's work in Bihar, Calcutta and Delhi had brought about a change in the attitude of his Muslim critics. They now looked upon him as the saviour of Muslims in India. Even the people and leaders in Pakistan had begun to hail Gandhi as 'the great man of India', the Mahatma.

However, fanatics and extremists among the Hindus had become more bitter about Gandhi. They accused him of being soft to the Muslims. They thought he was anxious to please Muslims, and was willing to sacrifice the interests of Hindus to protect the Muslims. Many of them were opposed to the virtues of tolerance and non-violence that Gandhi propagated as characteristics of the Hindu tradition. During his campaign against untouchability, and at other times, they had accused him of betraying Hinduism. Many of them believed that Hindu interests should rule in India, that India was Hindu India. Partition and the riots that occurred in its wake had given them an opportunity to inflame communal hatred and openly advocate aggression and retaliation. Gandhi believed that retaliation would imprison the country in a cycle of mutual hatred and efforts at mutual annihilation. This was not sane or humane; nor was it consistent with what he understood of Hinduism and Indian nationalism.

His Hindu detractors knew that he had immense influence with the Government; even more intense influence with the masses. The masses looked upon him as the incarnation of the soul of India; as a demigod.

Some looked upon him as the avatar of Vishnu. They began to feel that the evil influence of such a person should be removed, if necessary, by doing away with him.

There were enough reports with the Government, and in the press, to indicate that these forces might try to assassinate Gandhi. The Government offered police protection. Gandhi declined it, saying that his life was in the hands of God. Moreover, as he had already said when Mir Alam had tried to assassinate him in South Africa, "To die by the hand of a brother, rather than by disease. It cannot be for me a matter of sorrow. And if, even in such case, I am free from

the thought of anger or hatred against my assailant, I know that that will rebound to my eternal welfare."

Of late, it had appeared that he had a premonition. He had lost his desire to live for the full span of human life – which he believed was 125 years. He often said that he would like God to take him away if he could not serve his people, but only be a witness to fratricidal strife and inhumanity. He had no desire to live to see this misery and madness if he could not end it. Every day in the evening he sat with the people in common prayer to God who was Ishwar to some, Allah to some. He never missed his prayer. On the 20th of January, while he was at prayer, there was an explosion and commotion in the audience. Gandhi sat through the prayer motionless, without even a muscle twitching. When Lady Mountbatten congratulated him on his escape and utter equanimity, he said, "If somebody fired at me point blank and I faced the bullet with a smile, repeating the name of God in my heart, I should indeed be deserving of congratulations." On the 29th of January, a day before the end, he told his granddaughter that if he were a true Mahatma he would face the bullet of an assassin with love in his heart and God's name on his lips.

On the 30th of January at 5 p.m. as on every preceding day, the crowd was waiting for Gandhi in the prayer ground. Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel had come to meet him, perhaps to talk of differences that had surfaced between the Mahatma and him, and Jawaharlal and him. Gandhi was talking to him when his granddaughter Manu pointed out that he was getting late for prayer. He could not bear being late, least of all, for prayer. He got up in a hurry, took leave of the Sardar and walked briskly to the prayer ground, leaning on the shoulders of Manu and Abha, his granddaughter and granddaughter-in-law. As he neared the raised ground, someone tried to edge forward, ostensibly to touch the Mahatma's feet. Manu tried to push him away. But he managed to reach the Mahatma. In a second, he bowed to the Mahatma, and as he rose pumped three bullets into him from a pistol that he had hidden in his dress. The shots were fired point blank. Two pierced the Mahatma's chest and went out, one was lodged in his lung. The Mahatma seemed to flounder. He slipped down with

folded hands and the cry "Hai Ram" on his lips. For a minute, the crowd did not know what had happened. Then they were stunned and speechless. The Mahatma was dead. He had been killed before their eyes, by an Indian, a Hindu. In life, he was known as Bapu, the Father. Bapu was no more. India felt orphaned.

The country was plunged in gloom. No one could find words to talk to anyone. They could only sob. Everyone felt that something within him had died, something which he had cherished, which was linked to his pride as an Indian and as a human being. Wherever the news of Gandhi's death reached, life came to a standstill, and a pall of gloom and shame descended. When the news reached the United Nations, there was stunned silence. Human beings everywhere moaned the loss of something they cherished.

In India, Pandit Nehru spoke on the radio and said: "The light has gone out of our lives.... Yet I am wrong, for the light that shone in this country was no ordinary light.... And a thousand years later, that light will still be seen in this country, and the world will see it.... For that light represented the living Truth."

Maulana Abdul Kalam Azad said that he had woken up from a dream, feeling that his hands were blood-red. He saw that his hands as well as the hands of all others in the country had been stained with the blood of Gandhi. A few days later, addressing Gandhi's associates in Gandhi's Ashram at Sevagram, Dr. Rajendra Prasad said, "We have betrayed him before the cock crew thrice in the morning."

Gandhi is no more. But, as he himself foresaw: "When I am dead and buried, I will speak from my grave." Gandhi's body has been cremated, but not his message. That message will continue to be the message of hope for humanity.