



# **MAHATMA GANDHI IN PHOTOGRAPHS**

FOREWORD BY THE **GANDHI RESEARCH FOUNDATION**



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**ohandas Karamchand Gandhi:**

(2 October 1869 – 30 January 1948)

commonly known as *Mahatma* Gandhi, was the preeminent leader of Indian nationalism in British-ruled India. Employing non-violent civil disobedience, Gandhi led India to independence and inspired movements for non-violence, civil rights and freedom across the world.

*Mahatma* is Sanskrit for "Great Soul"; महात्मा mahātmā: महा mahā (great) + आत्म or आत्मन ātman (soul).

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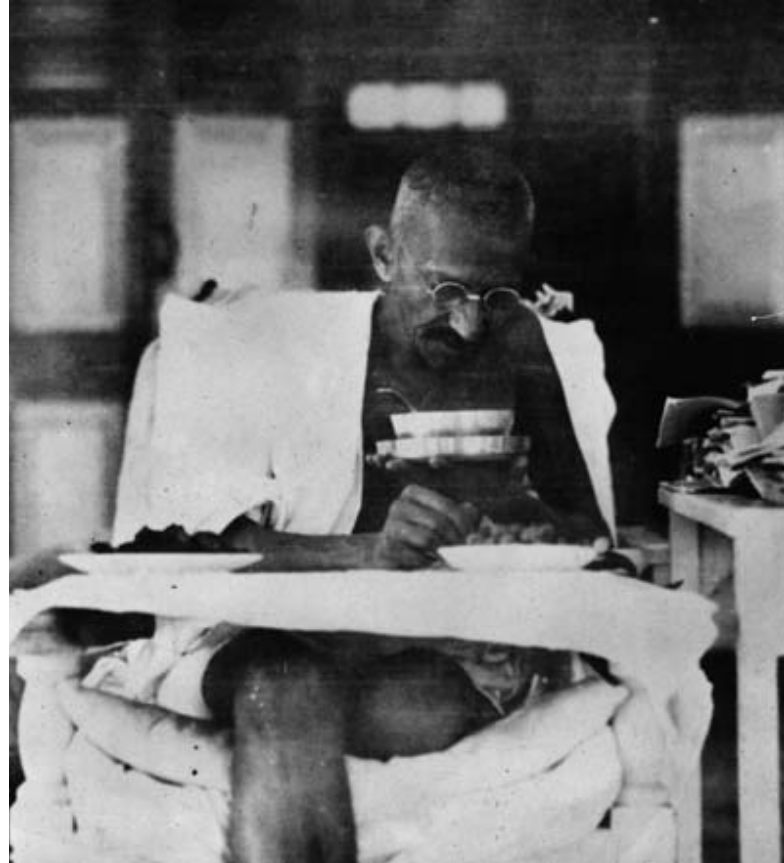
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**T**RUTH, for Gandhi, was the supreme principle, which includes many other principles. Realization of the Truth is the purpose of human life. Gandhi always strove to realize the Truth. He continuously tried to remove impurities in himself. He always tried to stick to the Truth as he knew and to apply the knowledge of the Truth to everyday life. He tried to apply the spiritual principles to the practical situations. He did it in the scientific spirit. Sticking to the truth means Satyagraha. Gandhi therefore called his experiments as 'Experiments with Truth' or 'Experiments in the science of Satyagraha.' Gandhi also requested the readers to treat those experiments as illustrative and to carry out their own experiments in that light.

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was a man considered one of the great sages and prophets. He was held as another Buddha, another Jesus, Indians called him the 'Father of the Nation'. They showered their love, respect and devotion on him in an unprecedented measure. They thronged his way to have a glimpse of him, to hear one word from his lips. They applied on their foreheads the dust on the path he had trodden. For them, he was almost an incarnation of God, who had come to break the chains of their slavery. The whole world bowed to him in reverence. Even his opponents held him in great respect.

Mohandas Gandhi was, however, not a great scholar, nor was he a great warrior. He was not born with exceptional faculties. Neither was he a good orator, nor a great writer. He did not claim anything exclusively divine in him. He did not claim being a prophet or having superhuman powers. He considered himself an average man with average abilities. Born in a middle class Bania family in an obscure princely State in a corner of India, he was a mediocre student, shy and nervous. He could not muster courage to speak in public. His first attempt at legal practice miserably failed. But he was a humble seeker of Truth. He was a man with ex-



ceptional sincerity, honesty and truthfulness. For him, understanding meant action. Once any principle appealed to him, he immediately began to translate that in practice. He did not flinch from taking risks and did not mind confessing mistakes. No opposition, scorn or ridicule could affect him. Truth was his sole guiding star. He was ever-growing; hence he was often found inconsistent. He was not concerned with appearing to be consistent. He preferred to be consistent only with the light within.

He sacrificed his all and identified himself with the poorest of the poor. He dressed like them, lived like them. In the oppressed and the depressed people, he saw God. For him, they too were sparks of the divine light. They might not have anything else, but they too had a soul. For Gandhi, soul-force was the source of the greatest power. He strove to awaken the soul-force within himself and within his fellowmen. He was convinced

that the potentialities of the soul-force have no limit. He himself was a living example of this conviction. That is why this tiny and fragile man could mobilise the masses and defeat the mighty British empire. His eleven vows, his technique of *Satyagraha*, his constructive programme—all were meant to awaken and strengthen the soul-force. He awakened and aroused a nation from semi-consciousness. It was a Herculean task. For, India was not a united country, it was a sub-continent. It was a society divided in different classes, castes and races, in people with different languages, religions and cultures.

It was a society where almost half of the population i.e., women, was behind purdah or confined to the four walls of houses, where one-fourth of the population—the depressed classes—was living marginalised life, where many did not have a single full meal every day. Gandhi made the oppressed sections wake up and break their chains. He mobilised the people and united them to work for the cause of Swaraj, which gave them a sense of belonging, a sense of purpose. Gandhi wanted to win Swaraj for the masses. For him, Swaraj did not mean replacement of White masters by brown masters. Swaraj meant self-rule by all. He said: "Real Swaraj will come, not by the acquisition of the authority by a few, but by the acquisition of the capacity by all to resist authority when it is abused." He worked to develop such a capacity. Development of such a capacity involved transformation of the individual.

Transformation of the individual and transformation of the society—they were not separate, unrelated things for Gandhi. Revolutionary social philosophies had concentrated on changing the society. On the other hand, spiritual seekers had concentrated on the inner change. Gandhi not only bridged the gap between these extremes, he fused them together. Gandhi was thus both a saint and a social revolutionary. For Gandhi, unity of life was great truth. His principle of non-violence stemmed from this conviction. Non-violence was not a matter

of policy for him; it was a matter of faith. He applied the doctrine to all the departments of individual and social life and in so doing revolutionized the doctrine, made it dynamic and creative. He believed that a true civilization could be built on the basis of such non-violence only. He rejected the modern civilization. For him, it was a disease and a curse. This civilization leads to violence, conflicts, corruption, injustices, exploitation, oppression, mistrust and a process of dehumanisation. It has led the world to a deep crisis. The earth's resources are being cornered by a handful of people without any concern for others and for the coming generations. The conventional energy sources are getting depleted. Forests are being destroyed. Air, water, soil—everything has been polluted.

We are living under the shadow of nuclear war and environmental disasters. Thinking men the world over are looking to Gandhi to find a way out of this crisis and to build an alternative model of sustainable development. Gandhi knew that the earth has enough to satisfy everybody's need but not anybody's greed. He had called for the replacement of greed with love. Gandhi is, therefore, now a source of inspiration and a reference book for all those fighting against racial discrimination, oppression, domination, wars, nuclear energy, environmental degradation, lack of freedom and human rights—for all those who are fighting for a better world, a better quality of life. Gandhi is, therefore, no longer an individual. He is a symbol of all that is the best and the most enduring in the human tradition. And he is also a symbol of the alternative in all areas of life—agriculture, industry, technology, education, health, economy, political organisations, etc. He is a man of the future—a future that has to be shaped if the human race has to survive and progress on the path of evolution.

### **Birth and Parentage**

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was born at Porbandar, a coastal city in Kathiawad (now a part of the Gujarat State) on the 2nd October 1869. He was the youngest child of his parents, Karamchand and Putlibai.

Gandhis belonged to the Modh Bania community. They were originally grocers. However, Uttamchand, Mohan's grandfather, rose to become Dewan of the Porbandar State. Mohan's father, Karamchand, also served as the Dewan of Porbandar, Rajkot and Vankaner States. Kathiawar then had about 300 small States. Court intrigues were the order of the day. At times, Gandhis became their victim. Uttamchand's house was once surrounded and shelled by the State troops. Karamchand was once arrested. However, their courage and wisdom earned them respect. Karamchand even became a member of the Rajashanik Court, a powerful agency to solve disputes among the States.

Karamchand had little education, but had shrewdness of judgment and practical knowledge acquired through experience. He had little inclination to amass wealth and left little for his children. He used to say that "My children are my wealth". He married four times, had two daughters by the first two marriages and one daughter and three sons by his fourth marriage. Putlibai, his fourth wife, was younger to him by 25 years. She was not much educated but was well-informed about practical matters. Ladies at the palace used to value her advice. She was deeply religious and superstitious and had strong will-power. She used to visit the temple daily and regularly kept difficult vows. Mohan loved his mother. He used to accompany her to the Haveli (Vaishnav temple).

Mohan had a great devotion for his father and he often used to be present at the discussions about the State problems. Gandhis had Parsi and Muslim friends and Jain monks used to make regular visit. Mohan thus



had occasion to hear discussions about religious matters also. Being the youngest, he was the darling of the household.

### **Childhood**

Mohan attended Primary School at Porbandar. When he was seven, his family moved to Rajkot. He was a mediocre student, was shy and avoided any company. He read little besides the text books and had no love for outdoor games. He had no love for outdoor games. However, he was truthful, honest, sensitive and was alert about his character. Plays about Shraavan and Harishchandra made a deep impression on him. They taught him to be truthful at any cost and to serve his parents with devotion.

He was married along with his brother and cousin for the sake of economy and convenience. He was only 13 then. He enjoyed the festivities of the marriage. Kasturbai, his wife, was of the same age. She was illiterate but strong-willed. His jealousy and immature efforts to make her an ideal wife led to many quarrels.

He wanted to teach her but found no time. His experience later made him a strong critic of child-marriages.

Mohan joined High School at Rajkot. He was liked by the teachers and often received prizes. But he neglected physical training and hand-writing. Habit of taking long walks made up for the first neglect, but he had to repent later for the neglect of handwriting. He was devoted to his father and considered it his duty to nurse him during his illness. In the High-School, he made friends with one Sheikh Mehtab, a bad character. He stuck to the friendship despite warnings from family-members. He wanted to reform Mehtab but failed. Mehtab induced him to meat-eating, saying that it made one strong and that the British were ruling India because they were meat-eaters. Mohan was frail and used to be afraid even to go out alone in the dark. The argument appealed to him. Later, he realized that lying to his parents was worse than not eating meat, and abandoned the experiment.

Mehtab once sent him to a brothel, but God's grace saved him. He induced Mohan to smoking. This once led to stealing. But all this became unbearable for Mohan. He confessed his guilt to his father, who did not rebuke him but wept silently. Those tears cleaned Mohan's heart and taught him a lesson in nonviolence.

Mohan's father died when Mohan was 16. He had nursed him daily. But at the time of his death, Mohan was with his wife. He always felt ashamed for this lapse. Mohan passed the matriculation examination in 1887. He attended the College at Bhavnagar, but left after the first term. At that time, the idea of his going to England for studying law came up. Mohan was fascinated. He made up his mind and overcame resistance from the family-members. He took the vow not to touch wine, women and meat at the instance of his mother to remove her fears. He then sailed from Bombay in September 1888, leaving behind his wife and a son. The caste elders were against his going to

England. They excommunicated him from the caste.

### **Gandhi in England**

Gandhi reached England by the end of September 1888. Everything was strange to him. He was shy and diffident, could not speak English fluently and was ignorant of British manners. Naturally, loneliness and homesickness gripped him. Gandhi became a vegetarian for life. It was difficult to get vegetarian food. Friends persuaded him to break the vow of vegetarianism but he stuck to it. He began searching vegetarian restaurants and found one ultimately. He purchased Salt's book 'Plea for Vegetarianism', read it and became vegetarian out of conviction. He studied other literature and joined the Vegetarian Society.

He came in contact with the leaders of that radical cult, became a member of the Society's Executive Committee and contributed articles to the Society's paper. He even started a Vegetarian club in his locality and became its Secretary. This experience gave him some training in organising and conducting Institutions. Experiments about diet became a life-long passion for him.

### **Gandhi tries to play the 'English Gentleman'**

For a brief period, Gandhi tried to become 'The English Gentleman' to overcome lack of confidence and to make up for the 'fad' of vegetarianism. He wanted to become fit for the British elite society. He got clothes stitched from an expensive and fashionable firm, purchased an expensive hat and an evening suit and learnt to wear the tie. He became very careful about his appearance. He even joined a dancing class, but could not go on for more than three weeks. He purchased a violin and started learning to play it. He engaged a tutor to give lessons in elocution. But all this was for a brief period of three months only. His conscience awakened him. He realised that he was not going to spend his whole life in England; he should rather concentrate on

his studies and not waste his brother's money. He then became very careful about his expenses.

### **Study of religions**

Gandhi also started the study of religions. Before that, he had not even read the Gita. Now he read it in the English translation. He also read Edwin Arnold's 'The Light of Asia,' Blavatsky's 'Key to Theosophy' and the Bible. Gita and The New Testament made a deep impression on him. The principles of renunciation and non-violence appealed to him greatly. He continued the study of religions throughout his life.

### **Gandhi becomes a Barrister**

Bar examinations were easy. He therefore studied for and passed the London matriculation examination. Becoming a Barrister meant attending at least six dinners in each of the twelve terms and giving an easy examination. Gandhi, however, studied sincerely, read all the prescribed books, passed his examination and was called to the bar in June 1891. He then sailed for home.

### **A Period of turmoil**

Gandhi's three year's stay in England was a period of deep turmoil for him. Before that, he knew little of the world. Now he was exposed to the fast-changing world and to several radical movements like Socialism, Anarchism, Atheism etc., through the Vegetarian Society. He started taking part in public work. Many of his ideas germinated during this period.

### **Gandhi in South Africa**

Gandhi returned to India as a Barrister, but he knew nothing about the Indian law. Lawyers used to pay commissions to touts to get cases. Gandhi did not like this. Besides, he was shy and an occasion to argue in the Court unnerved him. He became a disappointed and dejected 'Bridles Barrister'. At that time, a South

African firm Dada Abdulla and Co. asked for his assistance in a case. Gandhi eagerly agreed and sailed for South Africa in April 1893.

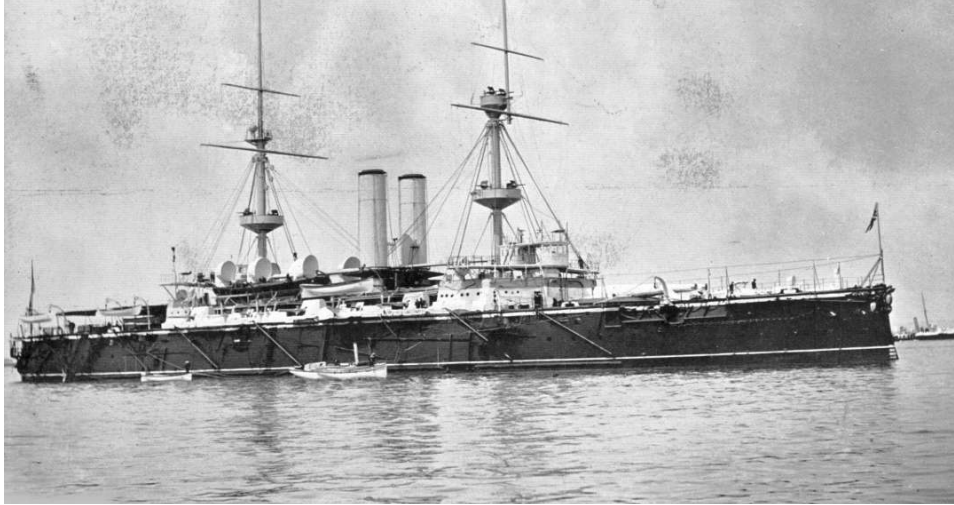
### **Problems of Indians in South Africa**

The small Indian community in South Africa was facing many problems at that time. It consisted mainly of indentured labourers and traders. The indentured labourers were taken there by the European landlords as there was acute labour shortage in South Africa. The condition of these labourers was like slaves. During 1860-1890 around 40,000 labourers were sent from India. Many of them settled there after their agreement periods were completed and started farming or business.

The Europeans did not like it. They did not want free Indians in South Africa. They also found it difficult to face competition from Indian traders. Therefore the White Rulers imposed many restrictions and heavy taxes on the Indians. They were not given citizenship rights, like right to vote. They were treated like dirt and constantly humiliated. All Indians were called 'coolies'. The newspapers carried out the propaganda that the Indians were dirty and uncivilized. The Indians could not travel in the railways and could not enter hotels meant for Europeans. They were hated and radically discriminated in all matters by the dominant White community.

### **Gandhi fights racial discrimination**

Right since his arrival, Gandhi began to feel the pinch of racial discrimination in South Africa. Indian community was ignorant and divided and therefore unable to fight it. In connection with his case, Gandhi had to travel to Pretoria. He was travelling in the first class, but a White passenger and railway officials asked him to leave the first class compartment. Gandhi refused, whereupon he was thrown out along with his luggage. On the platform of Maritzburg station. It was a severe-



ly cold night. Gandhi spent the night shivering and thinking furiously. He ultimately made up his mind to stay in South Africa, fight the racial discrimination and suffer hardships. It was a historic decision. It transformed Gandhi.

He had also to travel some distance by a stage-coach. During this travel also, he was insulted and beaten. On reaching Pretoria, Gandhi called a meeting of the local Indians. There he learnt a lot about the condition of Indians. It was there that he made his first Public Speech and suggested formation of an association. He offered his services for the cause. Gandhi later settled the case, for which he had come, through arbitration. He then decided to return home. But at the farewell party, he came to know about a bill to restrict Indian franchise. Gandhi thought that it had grave implications. The people then pressed him to stay for some time. He agreed.

Gandhi's first major fight had started. He addressed meetings petitioned to the legislative assembly, conducted a signature campaign. He also started regular legal practice there and soon became a successful and leading Lawyer. For sustained agitations, a permanent organisation was needed and the Natal Indian Congress was born. Illiterate indentured labourers also joined the struggle. A proposed tax on them was fought and got abolished after a fierce battle.

In 1886, Gandhi visited India for a brief period. In India, he met renowned leaders and gave wide publicity to the South African struggle. Rumours reached South Africa that Gandhi had maligned the Whites there and that he was coming with a large number of Indians to swamp the Natal colony. It was wrong. But it made the Whites furious. Gandhi had to face the fury, when he returned with his wife and children, he had to enter the port town secretly, but he was found out and assaulted. The Whites wanted to hang him but he was saved by the Police Superintendent and his wife. He forgave his assailants.

### **The Boer War**

Gandhi, however, remained a loyal citizen of the British Empire. In that spirit, he decided to help the British during the Boer War. The Boers were the Dutch colonizers who ruled some of the South African colonies. They were simple and sturdy people with strong racial prejudices. The British wanted to rule whole of the South Africa. The British-Boer broke out in 1899. Gandhi's sympathies were with the Boers. But being a British citizen, he considered it his duty to help the British. He also wanted to show that Indians were not cowards and were ready to make sacrifices for the empire while fighting for their rights.

Gandhi raised an ambulance corps of 1100 persons. The work consisted of carrying the wounded on stretchers. At times, it required walking more than 20 miles. The corps had sometimes to cross the firing line. The Indians worked hard, their work was praised and the leaders of the corps were awarded medals. Indian community learnt a lot from this experience. Its stature increased. British won the war, although the Boers fought with determination, which made a deep impression on Gandhi.

### **The Fight continues**

In 1901, Gandhi returned to India. He travelled widely and worked closely with Gopal Krishna Gokhale, whom he considered his guru. He was about to settle down in Bombay, when he received an urgent telegram from South Africa to rush there. Gandhi again went to South Africa. He found that the condition of Indians had worsened. Gandhi had to devote himself to public work. In 1904, Gandhi started the journal 'Indian Opinion.'

### **The Phoenix Settlement**

In 1904, Gandhi happened to read Ruskin's book 'Unto This Last.' He was deeply impressed by Ruskin's ideas and decided to put them in practice immediately. They were: (I) That the good of the individual is contained in the good of all. (ii) that all work has the same value and (iii) that the life of labour is the life worth-living.

Gandhi purchased some land near Phoenix station and established the Phoenix settlement in mid-1904. The settlers had to erect structures to accommodate themselves and the printing press. 'Indian Opinion' was transferred to Phoenix. The settlers had to go through many trials to print the issue in time. Everyone had to join in the work. The settlers were divided in two classes. The 'Schemers' made their living by manual labour. A few were paid labourers. To make a living by manual labour, land was divided in pieces of three acres each. Stress was on manual labour. Even the printing press was often worked with hand-power. Sanitary arrangements were primitive and everyone had to be his own scavenger. The colony was to be self-supporting and the material needs were to be kept to the minimum. A spirit of self-reliance pervaded the colony. Gandhi, however, could stay there only for brief periods. He had to be in Johannesburg in connection with his work.



### **The Zulu Rebellion**

The Zulu 'rebellion' broke out in April 1906. It was not in fact a rebellion, but a man-hunt. The British wanted to crush the freedom-loving Zulu tribals. The operation to massacre them was, therefore, started under a flimsy pretext. Out of a sense of loyalty to the British empire, Gandhi offered the services of the Indian community, though his heart was with the Zulus. An ambulance corps of 24 persons was formed. Its duty was to carry the wounded Zulus and nurse them. The Zulus were flogged and tortured and left with festering wounds. Whites were not ready to nurse them. Gandhi was happy to nurse them. He had to work hard and walk miles through hills. It was a thought-provoking experience. He saw the cruelty of the British and the horrors of the war. While marching through Zululand, Gandhi thought deeply. Two ideas became fixed in his mind-Brahmacharya and the adoption of voluntary poverty.

## **Birth of Satyagraha**

The White rulers were bent on keeping South Africa under their domination. They wanted as few Indians there as possible and that too as slave-labourers. In Transvaal, Indians were required to register themselves. The procedure was humiliating. The registration was proposed to be made stricter in 1906. Gandhi realised that it was a matter of life or death for the Indians. A mammoth meeting was held in September 1906 to oppose the bill. People took oath in the name of God not to submit to the bill at any cost. A new principle had come into being—the principle of Satyagraha. The bill about registration was however passed. Picketing against registration was organised. A wave of courage and enthusiasm swept the Indian community. The Indian community rose as one man for the sake of its survival and dignity.

The agitation was first called ‘passive Resistance’. Gandhi, however, did not like that term. It did not convey the true nature of the struggle. It implied that it was the weapon of the weak and the disarmed. It did not denote complete faith in nonviolence. Moreover, Gandhi did not like that the Indian struggle should be known by an English name. The term ‘Sadagrah’ was suggested. Gandhi changed it to ‘Satyagrah’ to make it represent fully, the whole idea. Satyagraha means asserting truth through non-violence. It aims at converting the opponents through self-suffering.

Gandhi was ordered to leave the colony. He disobeyed and was jailed for two months. Indians filled the jails. Repression failed to yield the results. General Smuts called Gandhi and promised that the law would be withdrawn if the Indians agreed to voluntary registration.

## **An attempt of Gandhi's life**

Gandhi agreed. He and his co-workers were set free. Gandhi exhorted Indians to register voluntarily. He was

criticized for this by some workers. A Pathan named Mir Alam was unconvinced by Gandhi's arguments and vowed to kill the first man who would register himself. Gandhi came forward to be the first man to register himself. When he was going to the registration office, Mir Alam and his friends assaulted him with lathis.

Gandhi fainted with the words ‘He Ram’ on his lips. It was 10th February 1908. His colleagues tried to save him otherwise it would have been the last day for him. Mir Alam and his friends were caught and handed over to the police. When Gandhi regained consciousness, he inquired about Mir Alam. When told that he had been arrested, Gandhi told that he should be released. Gandhi was taken by his friend Rev. Doke to his house and was nursed there. Rev. Doke later became his first biographer.

## **Gandhi betrayed**

Smuts however, betrayed Gandhi. The agitation was again resumed. The voluntary registration certificates were publicly burnt. Meanwhile, Transvaal passed Immigration Restriction Act. This too was opposed by the Indians. They crossed Transvaal border illegally and were jailed. Gandhi, too, was arrested and convicted. The fight continued in spite of the repression.

## **Tolstoy Farm**

Gandhi realised that the fight would be a long one. He, therefore, desired to have a center where the Satyagrahis could lead a simple community life and get training for the struggle. Phoenix was at about 30 hours distance from Johannesburg. Gandhi's German friend Kallenbach therefore bought 1100 acres of land at a distance of about 20 miles from Johannesburg, where Tolstoy Farm was established. The community was named after Tolstoy to pay respect to the great Russian writer whose book ‘The Kingdom of God is within You’ had greatly influenced Gandhi and made him a firm

believer in non-violence.

The inmates numbered about 50-75. It was a heterogeneous group. It was a tribute to Gandhi's leadership that they remained together happily under hard conditions. The inmates erected sheds to accommodate themselves. They did all their work themselves. Drinking, smoking and meat-eating were prohibited. All ate in the community kitchen. Small Cottage Industries were started for self-sufficiency. Gandhi and his colleagues learnt shoe-making. A school was started. Gandhi himself undertook the responsibility of educating the children. The life was simple, hard, but joyful. Experiments at Tolstoy Farm proved to be a source of purification and penance for Gandhi and his co-workers.

### **The last phase of Satyagraha**

Satyagraha continued for four years. Gandhi discontinued his legal practice in 1910. After many ups and downs, the last phase of Satyagraha began in September 1913. A Black Law imposing three pounds tax on Indians provided occasion for it. Satyagrahis crossed Transvaal border defying the law. Even the women were invited to join. Indian workers in the Natal coal-mines struck work and joined the struggle. Gandhi led a large contingent of these workers. They were about 2200 in number. It was on epic march.

It aroused sympathy for Satyagraha and indignation for the South African Government throughout England and India. Indian National Congress supported the Satyagraha. Gandhi was arrested. The Satyagrahis marched to Natal without their leader. There, they were arrested and jailed. Thousands of labourers struck work in sympathy. The public outcry in India forced the Indian Government to express sympathy for the Indian cause. The repression having failed, General Smuts had to bow ultimately. Indian demands were accepted. The fight was over. Gandhi now could return to India where a great work awaited him.

It was South Africa which made Gandhi. He had gone there as a young, shy, Briefless Barrister. He returned as an extra-ordinary leader who had mobilised masses to an unprecedented extent for a novel fight. In South Africa, Gandhi's ideas were shaped. He was influenced by Ruskin, Tolstoy and Thoreau. He made a deep study of religions there and became a staunch believer in nonviolence. The principle of Satyagraha was born in S. Africa.

### **Gandhi in India: Rise of leadership**

Gandhi returned to India in January 1915. He was welcomed and honoured as a hero. He spent a year touring the country at the instance of Gokhale, his guru. He travelled mostly in third class railway compartments. He saw the conditions in the country firsthand. He founded the Satyagraha Ashram in May 1915 and started getting involved in the social and political life of the country. The Champaran Satyagraha was his first major struggle.

### **Champaran Satyagraha**

Champaran was a district in Northern Bihar. When Gandhi was called there, it was virtually under the rule of European indigo planters. They cruelly exploited and terrorised the tenants. Under the 'tinkathia' system, the tenants had to cultivate indigo in 3/20th part of the land. The tenants were oppressed and fear-stricken. The British administration supported the planters.

Gandhi was invited to visit Champaran by Rajkumar Shukla, a peasant from the area, in December 1916. Gandhi was first reluctant. But Shukla's persistent requests made him change his mind. He went to Champaran in April 1917 to know the conditions there and the grievances of the peasants. Before visiting the district, Gandhi visited Muzaffarpur and Patna. He discussed the matter with lawyers and social workers. Gandhi declined to seek legal remedies as he felt that

law courts were useless when the people were fear-stricken. For him, removal of fear was most important. He made request to the lawyers for clerical assistance. Many of them gladly offered the same.

Gandhi first met the planters and the District Commissioner. They were hostile. Gandhi was ordered to leave the area. He ignored the order. He was then summoned to the court. The news electrified the area. Crowds gathered at the court. Gandhi pleaded guilty, saying that he was obeying a higher law, the voice of conscience. The case against him was later dropped. Gandhi and his co-workers met thousands of the peasants. They recorded about 8000 statements. Efforts were made to ensure that they were true. Recording was done in the presence of police officials. Undue publicity and exaggeration were avoided. Planters' campaign of slander was ignored. The masses in Champaran overcame their fear. Public opinion in the country was aroused. The Government ultimately appointed an enquiry committee in June 1917, with Gandhi as a member. The committee recommended abolition of tinkathia system and partial refund of money taken illegal by the planters. The Satyagraha was thus successful. Champaran Satyagraha was the first Satyagraha on the Indian soil. It was Gandhi's first major political work in India. It was carried out strictly in accordance with the principles of Satyagraha. Attention was paid to constructive work like sanitation, education and primary health-care.

### **Ahmedabad Satyagraha**

A dispute between the textile mill-owners and the la-



bourers at Ahmedabad arose in 1918, about the grant of bonus and dearness allowance. The labourers wanted 50% increase allowance due to steep rise in prices. The mill-owners were ready to give only 20% increase. Gandhi was approached to find a solution. He persuaded both the parties to agree to arbitration. But after a few days, some misunderstanding led to a strike. The mill-owners seized the opportunity and declared lock-out. Gandhi studied the case. He thought that 35% increase would be reasonable. He advised the labourers to demand the same. Regular strike began on the 26th February 1918. Thousands of labourers struck work. They took a pledge not to resume work till their demand was met or arbitration was agreed upon. They also decided to observe non-violence and maintain peace.

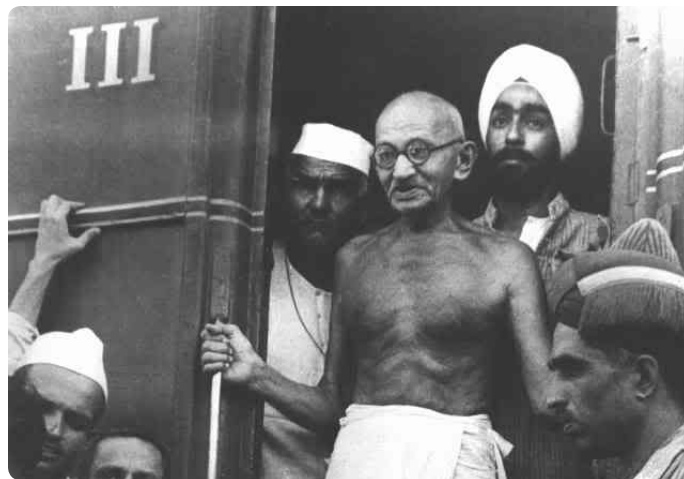
Gandhi had friends in both the camps. The mill-owners being led by Shri Ambalal Sarabhai. His sister Ansu-yaben was leading the labourers. During the strug-

gle, Gandhi's co-workers regularly visited the labourers' quarters to solve their problems and to keep high their morale. Daily meetings and prayers were held. Bulletins were issued. Gandhi did not like charity. Efforts were made to find alternative employments for the workers. However, after a fortnight, the workers started getting tired. It was difficult to face starvation. It was unbearable for Gandhi that they should break the vow. He then decided to undertake an indefinite fast. This strengthened the workers. It brought moral pressure on the mill-owners. They consented to arbitration after three days. Gandhi broke his fast. The Satyagraha was successful. The arbitrator studied the case for three months and recommended 35% increase in dearness allowance. The workers' demand was thus fully met. However, Gandhi's fast did involve in an element of coercion. But it was a spontaneous decision. The situation demanded some drastic action. The Satyagraha was significant in many respects. It was the first Satyagraha by industrial workers. It was wholly peaceful. It showed how workers could fight non-violently. It also gave rise to a strong Gandhian Labour Union.

### **Kheda Satyagraha**

Kheda was a district in Gujarat. In 1917, there was a crop failure due to famine. Peasants were unable to pay the land revenue. The rules permitted suspension of revenue collection when the crops were less than four annas. According to the peasants' estimate, the crops were less than four annas. Gandhi's inquiries, as well as inquiries by independent observers, showed that the peasants were right. The Government, however, thought otherwise. It even turned down a suggestion of an impartial enquiry. It started coercing the peasants to collect revenue. Petitions etc. were of no avail. Satyagraha was therefore started on the 22nd March 1918.

Gandhi advised the peasants to withhold payment to revenue. Satyagrahis took a pledge not to pay the



same and resolved to be ready to face the consequences. Volunteers went to villages to keep up the morale of the peasants. As in Champaran, Gandhi's main concern was to remove the fear from the peasants' minds. The officials started attaching the property of the peasants including cattle and even standing crops. Notices were sent for attachment of the land. An occasion for civil disobedience arose when standing onion crop was attached at one place. Gandhi advised one Mohanlal Pandya and a few volunteers to remove the crop. This was done. The volunteers were arrested. Pandya earned the nickname 'Onion Thief.'

The struggle went on for about four months till July 1918. It tested the people's patience. The Government discontinued coercive measures. It advised that if the well-to-do peasants paid up, the poor ones would be granted suspension. In one sense, the Satyagraha was thus successful. The peasants' demand was not, however, fully met. Gandhi was not satisfied. He wanted people to come out stronger after Satyagraha. However, the Satyagraha resulted in awakening the peasants. It educated them politically. It was the first peasant struggle under Gandhi's leadership, the first nonviolent mass civil disobedience campaign organised by Gandhi in

India. The peasants became aware of their rights and learnt to suffer for them.

### **The Rowlatt Act**

British Government appointed a Committee in 1917 under the chairmanship of Justice Rowlatt, (1) to enquire and report to the Government about the nature and extent of anti-government activities, and (2) to suggest legal remedies to enable the Government to suppress those activities. The Committee submitted its report in April 1918. Its work was carried out in secrecy. The Committee's recommendations were embodied in two bills.

The first bill sought to make a permanent change in the Criminal Law. The second bill intended to deal with the situation arising out of the expiry of Defence of India Rules. The first bill made punishable the possession of an antigovernment document with mere intention to circulate it. The second bill also gave sweeping powers to the officers. There were other harsh provisions also. The bills shocked the entire country. All the leaders considered the bills unjust, unwarranted and destructive of elementary human rights and dignity. The second bill was eventually dropped and the first one passed as a Law in March 1919.

### **Satyagraha against the Rowlatt Act**

India had helped the British in the World War. She expected substantial political rights. Instead, she received the Black Rowlatt bills.

Gandhi had decided to help the British war efforts during the war. He undertook a recruiting campaign and worked hard which ruined his health. While he was recovering, he heard about Rowlatt bills. He was shocked. He took up the matter and started propaganda against the bill. Gandhi carried out propaganda against the bill. A separate body called Satyagraha Sabha was formed. A Satyagraha pledge was drafted and signed

by selected leaders. The Government was, however, adamant. It then suddenly it occurred to Gandhi that a call for nation-wide hartal should be given. Everybody in the country should suspend his business and spend the day in fasting and prayers. Public meetings should be held everywhere and resolutions passed for withdrawal of the Act.

The programme was taken up. 30 March was fixed as the day of the hartal, but it was later postponed to 6th April. The notice was very short. Still the masses rose to the occasion. The country rose like one man. Hartal was observed throughout India. Communal prejudices were forgotten. All fear disappeared. In Delhi, Swami Shraddhanand, the Hindu sanyasi was invited to Jama Masjid. It was also decided that civil disobedience should be offered to selected laws which could easily be disobeyed by the people. Gandhi suggested breaking of the Salt law and the sale of the banned literature. The civil disobedience was a great success. Throughout India, meetings were held and processions taken out.

The public awakening was unprecedented. It startled the British. Repression was let loose. Processions were broken up by mounted police and firing was done at several places. Many persons were killed. At some places, people lost balance in the face of repression. In such a situation, Gandhi thought it fit to suspend the Civil Disobedience Campaign. It was done on the 18th April. Satyagraha against the Rowlatt Act was historic. It was the first nation-wide struggle, in which crores of people participated and showed exemplary courage. The Indian freedom movement was transformed into a truly people's movement. The period also witnessed Hindu-Muslim friendship to an extent that was never surpassed thereafter.

### **Jallianwala Bagh**

Satyagraha in Punjab was also quite successful. Its leaders Dr. Satyapal and Dr. Kitchlew were arrested.

People observed hartal and took out a procession in Amritsar to demand their release. It was fired upon, and many persons were killed. The crowd therefore became violent and killed 5-6 Englishmen. Some public buildings were burnt. Army troops were rushed in to stop the violence. This was on April 10th 1919. On April 11, a peaceful funeral procession was taken out.

General Dyer then took command of the troops. Meetings and gatherings were prohibited. Still a large meeting was held on April 12th at Jallianwala Bagh. General Dyer took no steps to prevent the meeting. But when the meeting was taking place, he surrounded the place and without any warning, gave orders of firing. The crowd of nearly 10,000 men and women was peaceful and unarmed. They had no idea that they would be fired upon. When the firing started the people became panicky. There was only one exit. Bullets were showered on the trapped people. 1650 rounds were fired. About 400 persons were killed and 1200 injured. General Dyer did this deliberately to teach the Indians a lesson. Jallianwala Bagh massacre shocked the country. It showed how brutal the British power could get. It was followed by many more atrocities. They turned Gandhi fully against the British Empire.

### **Amritsar Congress**

The annual session of the Indian National Congress was held at Amritsar in Punjab in December 1919.



Most of the leaders in jails were released before or during the session. The session was attended by 8000 delegates including 1500 peasants. It was the last Congress session attended by Lokmanya Tilak. The Moderates, however, did not attend it. Pandit Motilal Nehru was in the Chair. The Congress was now acquiring a mass character. The proceedings were conducted mainly in Hindustani.

The Congress passed a resolution for removal of General Dyer, the butcher of Jallianwala Bagh. Recall of the Punjab Governor and the Viceroy was also demanded. It was decided to erect a memorial for the Jallianwala Bagh martyrs. Gandhi moved a resolution condemning violence on the part of the people and got it passed. It was a very significant event. The resolution also urged the people to remain peaceful. The Congress also reiterated the demand for responsible Government. The Montague Reforms were considered inadequate, disappointing and unsatisfactory. But it was decided to work the reforms. Revival of hand-spinning and hand-weaving was recommended. The Congress appointed a subcommittee for reconsideration of the Congress Constitution with Gandhi as the Chairman. It was the first Congress session in which Gandhi took an active part. His leadership was strengthened in Amritsar Congress.

### **The Khilafat question**

During the First World War, Turkey sided with Germany against the British. The Sultan of Turkey was the Khalifa, the religious head of the Muslim world. The future of Khalifa, therefore, became a matter of concern for Indian Muslims. The British Government promised them that the Khilafat would not be violated and favourable peace terms would be offered to Turkey. But when Turkey was defeated in the war, the promises were forgotten. Turkish Empire was broken. Indian Muslims felt agitated over this.

Gandhi sympathised with the Khilafat cause. He felt that Hindus should help the Muslim in their need. For him, it was an excellent opportunity to forge communal unity, bring Muslims in the freedom movement and form a common front against the British. The Khilafat Committee was formed. It demanded that terms of treaty with Turkey should be changed to satisfy the Indian Muslims. Gandhi suggested the programme of Non-Cooperation with the British Government. This programme was adopted by the Committee in May 1920.

### **The Non Co-operation Movement**

The redressal of injustice of Punjab and Khilafat and the attainment of Swaraj became the key issue. The masses were getting awakened. Gandhi announced the inauguration of Non-violent Non-Co-operation Movement on the 1st August 1920. A special session of Congress in September accepted the programme. The Nagpur Congress in December 1920 endorsed it enthusiastically. The programme consisted of the following points:

- Surrender of titles and honours given by the British Government
- Boycott of law-courts
- Boycott of educational institutions
- Boycott of councils and elections
- Boycott of foreign cloth
- Boycott of Government functions
- Picketing of liquor shops
- Refusal to get recruited in the army

The programme was not just negative. It included the building of new institutions. National Education was encouraged. Stress was laid on Khadi. Charkha became the symbol of freedom.

The Congress was completely reorganised and a new constitution drafted by Gandhi was adopted to make



it a mass organisation and a useful tool for the struggle. The movement started with hartal, fasting and prayers. It soon spread like wildfire. The freedom movement had become a mass movement. Gandhi declared the Swaraj could be won within one year if the programme was fully implemented. People showed great unity, determination and courage. Hundreds of National schools were established. Tilak Swaraj Fund was over-subscribed. About 20 lakh charkhas began to be plied in the country. The boycott shook the Government.

1921 was the year of the rise of Indian Nationalism. Gandhi became a Mahatma, the most loved and revered figure in the country. Masses looked to him as a saint, as an incarnation of God who had come to free them from slavery and poverty. The Government started repression. Arrests were made. Firing took place at some places. The country boycotted the visit of Prince of Wales, the British Prince in November 1921. Disturbances broke out at Bombay and Gandhi had to fast to control the situation. By the end of 1921, the number of prisoners had risen to 30,000. Processions and meetings were being broken up.

The masses were getting impatient. Call was given for Civil Disobedience. Gandhi wanted to start the campaign step-by-step. He chose Bardoli in Gujarat for starting the campaign. Notice was given to Government

on the 1st February 1922. However, the movement had to be called off within a few days. On the 5th February, a mob including Congressmen set fire to a police station at Chauri Chaura in U.P., killing about 22 policemen. Gandhi was shocked. He realised that people had not fully accepted non-violence. He persuaded the Congress to suspend the agitation. Gandhi was arrested in March and was sentenced to 6 years' imprisonment. He was kept in the Yeravda jail near Pune.

Gandhi was freed from jail in 1924 on the ground of health. The country was witnessing a wave of communal riots. Gandhi fasted for 21 days in October 1924. He toured the entire country. He laid stress on the charkha and the removal of untouchability. Political atmosphere in the country began to change slowly. There was a wave of labour strikes in 1928-29. Armed revolutionaries stepped up their activities. There was widespread discontent among the peasants. The historic Satyagraha at Bardoli in Gujarat showed its intensity.

### **Bardoli Satyagraha**

Bardoli was a tehsil in Gujarat. Government increased the land revenue assessment there by 30%. Protests brought it down to 22%. The peasants thought it unjust. Vallabhbhai Patel studied the case. He was convinced that the peasants were right. The peasants decided to withhold the payment until the enhancement was cancelled or an impartial tribunal appointed for setting the case. Gandhi blessed the Satyagraha. It started in February 1928.

Vallabhbhai Patel led the struggle. He organised sixteen camps under the charge of 250 volunteers. His organisation was superb. It earned him the title 'Sardar'. The government tried its best to terrorise the people and extract the payment. It tried flattery, bribery, fines, imprisonment and lathi-charge. Pathans were brought in to threaten the people. The cattle was taken away and lands auctioned at several places. Patel kept up the peo-

ple's morale. His volunteers were arrested. People imposed a social boycott on the Government officials and against those who bought auctioned property. Seven members of the Legislative Council resigned in protest against the Government repression. Several village officials, too, resigned their posts. The Government issued an ultimatum for payment. Patel demanded that:

- The Satyagrahi prisoners should be released.
- The lands sold and forfeited, should be returned.
- The cost of seized movables should be refunded.

All the dismissals and punishments should be undone. Gandhi and Patel promised to call off the agitation if these demands were met and an inquiry ordered. The Government ultimately yielded. An Inquiry Committee was appointed. The Committee recommended an increase of 5.7% only. The satyagraha was thus successful. The Bardoli struggle was very well organised one. The peasants remained united against all odds. Women took part in the struggle on a large scale. The struggle became a symbol of hope, strength and victory for the peasants in the country.

### **Rising discontent**

The discontent against the British Government was increasing. The Government appointed Simon Commission to decide about the grant of political rights of India. Indian leaders had not been consulted. There was no Indian Member in the Commission. The country boycotted Simon Commission.

Gandhi had regarded himself as a 'Prisoner' and refrained from political activities till 1928, when his jail term was to expire. He thereafter took the reins of Congress in his hands. Congress resolved in 1929 to fight for complete independence. Confrontation with the Government became imminent. Gandhi launched Civil Disobedience Campaign-the famous Salt Satyagraha.

## **The Salt Satyagraha**

Gandhi wrote to the Viceroy, listing eleven demands which, according to him, formed the substance of self-government. They were rejected. Gandhi then decided to start Civil Disobedience by breaking the Salt Law, which heavily taxed the salt, an article of daily consumption for the poorest of the poor. He started his epic Dandi March on the 12 March 1930 from Ahmedabad.

A carefully selected band of 78 Satyagrahis accompanied Gandhi in this March to Dandi, a deserted village on the sea-coast, at about 240 miles from Ahmedabad. As the March progressed, the atmosphere in the country was electrified. Several village officials resigned their posts. Gandhi declared that he would not return to Sabarmati Ashram till Independence was won. Congress Committee met on the 21st March to plan the strategy.

Gandhi reached Dandi on the 6th April and broke the Salt law symbolically by picking up a pinch of salt. It was signal for the nation. Civil Disobedience campaign was started throughout the country. Salt Law broken at many places by illegal production of salt and its sale. Gandhi went to the surrounding places and started a campaign to cut toddy trees. Picketing of liquor and foreign cloth shops was started. Women were on the forefront in picketing the liquor shops. The whole country was stirred. Some other laws like Forest Laws were also taken up for disobedience at some places.

Government intensified the repression. Most of the important leaders including Gandhi were arrested. But the agitation grew in strength. People bravely faced police brutalities and even firing at many places. A wave of strikes and hartals swept the country. At Peshawar, soldiers of Garhwali regiment refused to fire on the unarmed people. They were court-martialled. Before his arrest, Gandhi hit upon a novel idea to raid salt depots. The Dharasana raid, in which several non-vi-



olent Satyagrahis were mercilessly beaten, sent shockwaves throughout the world. It lowered the British prestige. The movement progressed till January 1931. The boycott of foreign cloth, liquor and British goods was almost complete. Gandhi and other leaders were subsequently released from jail. Government started negotiations. Gandhi-Irvin Pact was signed in March. The Satyagraha was discontinued. This was a major Satyagraha, during which 111 Satyagrahis died in firings and about one lakh persons went to jail.

## **A phase of repression**

Gandhi took part in the Round Table Conference in England in 1931 as the representative of the Congress. It was a frustrating experience for him. The British were bent on prolonging their rule by following the policy of Divide and Rule'. Gandhi stayed in London in a poor locality. He even met the unemployed textile mill-workers who had lost the jobs due to Gandhi's movement of Swadeshi and Boycott. He explained to them the rationale behind Khadi. The workers showered love on him.

The Round Table Conference yielded nothing. Gandhi returned in December 1931. He was arrested and the Civil Disobedience Campaign was resumed. The Congress was declared illegal. The Government was determined to crush the movement. The leaders and a large number of workers were arrested. Ordinances

were issued to arm the Government with wide powers. Gandhi was lodged in the Yeravda jail.

### **Yeravda Pact**

While Gandhi was in Yeravda jail the British Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald announced the provisional scheme of minority representation, known as the Communal Award. The depressed classes (now known as Scheduled Castes) were recognised as a minority community and given separate electorates.

Gandhi was shocked. It was an attempt to divide and destroy the Hindu Society and the Nation and in turn to perpetuate India's slavery. It was not good for the depressed also. Gandhi announced his decision to fast unto death from the 20th September 1932. He was fully for the representation to the depressed classes, but he was against their being considered as a minority community and given separate electorates. Gandhi's decision stirred the country. Indian leaders began hectic efforts to save Gandhi's life. But Dr. Ambedkar described the fast as a political Stunt. Gandhi's decision awakened the Hindu Society. It dealt a blow to the orthodoxy. Hindu leaders resolved to fight untouchability. Several temples were thrown open to the Harijans.

The fast began on 20th September. Attempts to evolve an alternative scheme were continuing. Gandhi's health started deteriorating. He had several rounds of discussions with Dr. Ambedkar. At last, an agreement was reached on the 24th September. The Government was urged to accept the same. The British Government ultimately gave its consent. Gandhi broke his fast on 26th September. The agreement is known as the Yeravda Pact or the Poona Pact. It provided for doubling the number of representatives of depressed classes. Separate electorates were however, done away with. It was decided that for every reserved seat, members of the depressed classes would elect four candidates and the representative would be elected from them by joint electorate.



The system of primary election was to be for ten years.

### **Anti-untouchability Campaign**

Yeravda Pact gave a great boost to the anti-untouchability work. Harijan Sevak Sangh was established. 'Harijan' Weekly was started. After his release, Gandhi put aside political activities and devoted himself to Harijan service and other constructive work. All-India Village Industries Association was also formed. Gandhi gave the Sabarmati Ashram to the Harijan Sevak Sangh and later settled at Wardha. He toured the entire country and collected Harijan Fund. The massive anti-untouchability propaganda launched by him had spectacular results. He had, of course, of face opposition. Even a bomb was once thrown at him. The campaign destroyed the legitimacy of untouchability. It cleared the way for legal ban. In 1936, Gandhi settled down at Sevagram, a village near Wardha. In 1937, he presided over the Educational Conference, which gave rise to the scheme of Basic Education.

### **India and the War**

While Gandhi was busy in the constructive work, elections to the provincial assemblies were held in 1937. Congress Ministers were formed in several provinces. the Second World War began in 1939. The British

Government dragged India into the War without consulting Indian leaders. Congress Ministries resigned in protest. The Congress expressed sympathy for the Allied powers' fight against Nazism and Fascism and offered co-operation provided responsible Self-Government was granted. Gandhi was however against any co-operation in war efforts on the ground of Nonviolence. When the Government turned down the Congress demand, Gandhi was requested to resume the leadership.

Gandhi decided to launch Anti-War individual Satyagraha against curtailment of freedom. It was inaugurated by Vinoba in October 1940. Pandit Nehru was the Second Satyagrahi. The Satyagrahis were arrested. By May 1941, the number of Satyagrahi prisoners had crossed 25000.

### **Cripps Mission**

The War was approaching India's borders with the advance of Japan. England was in difficulties. It could not afford any agitation in India. There were various other pressures on the British Government to make political concessions. As a result, Sir Stafford Cripps was sent to India in March 1942.

Cripps discussed the matter with the Indian leaders. He proposed Dominion Status with power to the States and the provinces to secede and convening of a constitution-making body after the War. But the adherence to the constitution drafted by that body was not to be obligatory. Indian leaders including Gandhi found the Cripps Proposals disappointing. They were aptly termed as post dated cheque on a crashing bank. The Muslim League wanted a definite pronouncement about Pakistan and therefore criticised the Cripps proposals. Congress rejected the Cripps scheme because it did not provide for the participation of the people of the states and the principles of non-accession was against Indian unity. The Cripps Mission failed.

### **The 'Quit India' Movement**

The country wanted nothing but Complete Independence. The Congress passed the historic 'Quit India' resolution on 8th August 1942. Gandhi and other leaders were arrested. The country now rose in revolt. With most of the leaders in jail, it fought in the way it thought fit. Railway lines and telegraphic communications were interfered with. Government property was burnt or destroyed in several places. The people displayed unprecedented courage and heroism. Unarmed people faced police lathis and bullets. Young boys suffered flogging without flinching. Government machinery was paralysed and parallel Government was set up at some places.

Many workers went underground. About 1000 people died in firings during the movement. About 1600 were injured and 60000 people were arrested. It was noteworthy that violence was done to Government property only. Englishmen were safe throughout the Movement. There was little personal violence. Thus, while the masses rose to great heights of heroism, they also displayed remarkable restraint. It was surely Gandhi's contribution. The rebellion was, however, gradually put down.

Gandhi was in Agakhan Palace jail. He was blamed by the British for the disturbances. He could not tolerate questioning of his faith and honesty and fasted for 21 days. Gandhi lost his wife Kasturba and his Secretary Mahadev Desai in the Agakhan Palace. It was a great blow to him. His health was not in a good condition. He was finally released in May 1944 on health grounds. He then started efforts to break the political stalemate.

### **Background of the Partition**

The Hindu-Muslim unity, forged at the time of the Khilafat agitation, collapsed thereafter. The country witnessed a wave of communal riots. The British encouraged Muslim communalism and used it to obstruct the path of the Freedom Movement. M. A. Jinnah, an

erstwhile liberal leader, who had been sidelined when the Congress became a mass organisation, assumed the leadership of Muslim communalism.

The Muslim League under his leadership became more aggressive, unreasonable and violent. The two-nation theory—that Hindus and Muslims were two separate Muslim homeland called ‘Pakistan,’ consisting of the Muslim-majority provinces. Jinnah’s shrewdness, ambition and ruthlessness, communalisation of large sections of society and the British support for Jinnah, brought about such a situation that the Muslim demands became an obstacle in the way of India’s Independence. Jinnah kept the demands fluid and utilised every opportunity to frustrate the Nationalist Movement and further his end with the support of the British rulers.

The two-nation theory was an untruth. The Hindus and Muslims had lived together in India for centuries. Gandhi fought this untruth with all his might. He did everything possible, including meeting Jinnah several times. But he failed. Jinnah wanted recognition of the League as the sole representative of the Muslims. It was not acceptable to the Congress.

### **Cabinet Mission**

The War ended in 1945. After an election, Labour Party’s Government came to power in England. England had been extremely weakened financially and militarily. The Azad Hind Sena had shown that even the army was not untouched by nationalism. Mutiny of the naval ratings in February 1946 gave the same indication. The people were in an agitated mood. The British rule had lost legitimacy in the eyes of the people. The British, therefore, decided to withdraw from India.

Cabinet Mission was sent to India to help in the formation of Interim Government and to purpose a scheme regarding the transfer of power. The mission proposed that the provinces be divided in three groups, in one of which Hindus were in the majority while in

the other two Muslims. Subjects like defence, foreign affairs, communications etc, were to be with the Central Authority and the groups were to be free to frame constitutions about other subjects. Gandhi found the proposals defective. Muslim League declared ‘Direct Action’ to get Pakistan. ‘Direct Action’ meant unleashing of violence. The Hindus retaliated. In Calcutta alone, over 6000 people were killed 4 days. The Hindu communalism too became stronger.

### **The Noakhali massacre**

In the Noakhali area of East Bengal, where Muslims formed 82% of the population, a reign of terror was let loose in a planned and systematic way in October 1946. The Hindus were killed and beaten, their property was burnt, thousands of Hindus were forcibly converted and thousands of Hindu women were abducted and raped. Temples were defiled and destroyed.

The League Government in Bengal aided the goondas. Even ex-serviceman joined in committing the atrocities. In Noakhali, about three-fourth of the land belonged to the Hindu landlords and the tenants were mostly Muslims. The peasant unrest was naturally there. It was now turned along communal channels. The Noakhali massacre had few parallels in the history. It showed to what level communal politics could stop to. It was meant to terrorise, kill, convert or drive away the Hindus from Muslim-majority areas so that Pakistan could become a reality.

### **Gandhi’s Noakhali March**

Gandhi was deeply shocked. He could not bear the defeat of his long-cherished principles. On 6th November 1946, he rushed to Noakhali. It was to be his final and perhaps the most glorious battle.

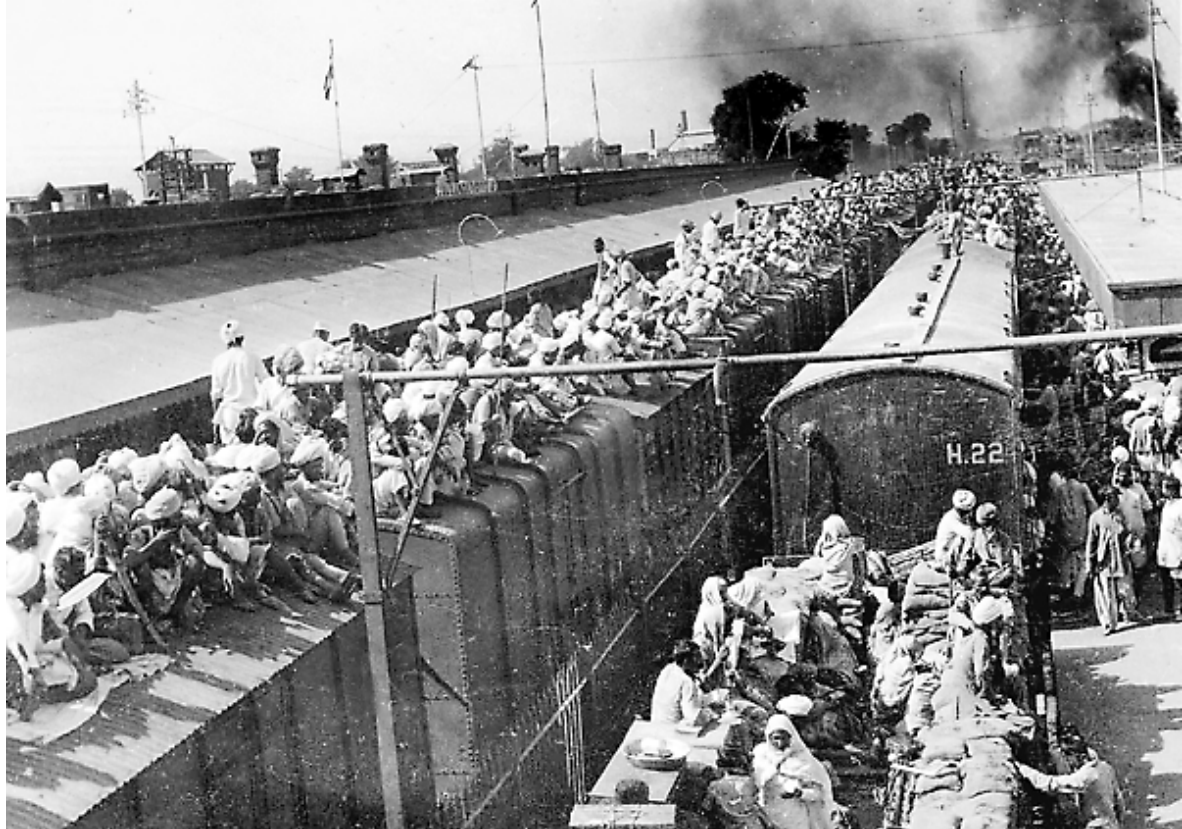
Gandhi reached Shrirampur and camped there for a few days. He sent his associates including Pyarelal and Sushila Nanyar to different villages which were most-

ly deserted by the Hindus. He did all his personal work himself. He worked like a possessed man. He walked barefooted, went from house to house, talked to Hindus and Muslims, heard their points of view, and reasoned with them and addressed meetings.

He wanted to instill fearlessness into the Hindus. He exhorted them to die non-violently, if need be, but not to submit to terror. He did not appease the Muslim. He told the truth bluntly. He wanted to win their confidence and make them see reason and earn the confidence of the Hindus. He did not only preach, he served the village poor. He was testing his Nonviolence. It was very difficult to establish mutual trust. The League had made poisonous propaganda against him. But Gandhi's mission began to yield results. It boosted the morale of Hindus. Passions began to subside. Some evacuees started returning home. Some even returned to their original faith. Gandhi gradually succeeded in earning the love and confidence of even the Muslims.

### **India wins Independence**

Noakhali had its reaction in Bihar, where Hindus resorted to violence. The country was seized by communal madness. Gandhi went to Bihar and brought the situation under control. The situation in the country was explosive. Civil War was imminent. The Congress ultimately consented to the partition of India. Despite Gandhi's bitter opposition, he could not do anything



to prevent the partition.

While the country was celebrating the Independence Day on 15th August 1947, Gandhi was in Bengal to fight communal madness. Partition was followed by riots, a massacre of unparalleled dimensions. It witnessed movement of about one crore persons and killing of at least six lakh persons. Calcutta was once more on the verge of riots. Gandhi undertook a fast which had a magical effect. Lord Mountbatten described him as 'one-man peace army'. Gandhi continued to plead for sanity in those turbulent days.

### **Gandhi's death**

It was January 1948. Communal feelings were high due to the partition of the country. Hindu communalists thought that Gandhi was pro-Muslim. His fast for communal amity which resulted in the Government of India honouring its obligation of giving Rs. 50 Crores.

to Pakistan had further angered them. Gandhi was staying at the Birla house in New Delhi. He used to hold evening prayer meetings regularly. He used to speak on various issues. Once a bomb was thrown during his prayer meeting. Still, Gandhi did not permit security checks.

On 30th of January 1948, about 500 people had gathered for the prayer meeting on the lawns of the Birla House. Gandhi was a bit late as Sardar Patel had come to see him. At 5.10 p.m. he left the room and walked to the prayer ground. He was supporting himself on the shoulders of Abha and Manu, his grand daughter-in-law and granddaughter respectively. People rushed forward to get his darshan and to touch his feet.

Gandhi folded his hands to greet them. When he was a few yards away from the prayer platform, a young man came forward. He saluted Gandhi, suddenly took out a small pistol and fired three shots. The bullets hit Gandhi on and below the chest. He fell to the ground with the words. 'Hey Ram' on his lips. He died within minutes. The crowd was shocked. The assassin was Nathuram Godse, a worker of Hindu Mahasabha. He was caught and handed over to the Police.

Gandhi's body was taken to Birla House. People thronged the place and wept bitterly. The whole world was plunged in sorrow. The next morning, Gandhi's body was placed on a gun-carriage and taken to Rajghat. Millions of people joined the procession to have the last darshan (glimpse) of the Mahatma. His son Ramdas lit the funeral pyre. The Mahatma had become a martyr for communal unity.

—*The Gandhi Research Foundation*



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# 1870s

*Photo:  
Gandhi's father,  
Karamchand Gandhi  
(1822 - 1885), Diwan  
(Chief Minister) of  
Porbandar.*





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