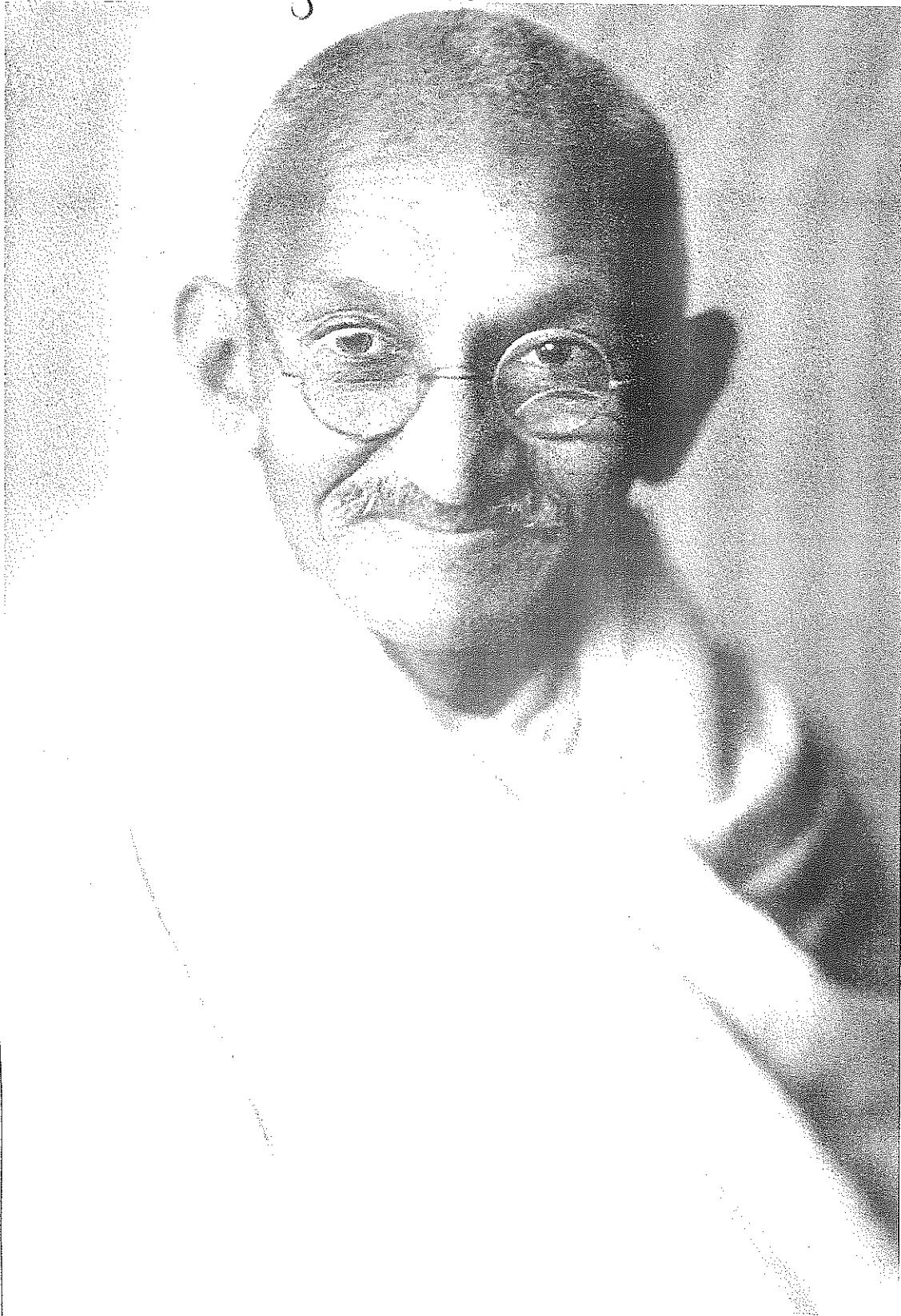


India Freedom Movement
Strategies + Qualities - Level 2.5



Source : Easwaran, Eknath. Gandhi The Man : How
One man changed himself to change the world.
Nilgiri Press 2011

India-Strategies + Qualities - 2.5

~~BUT IT WAS NOT~~ until thirteen years later, In 1906, when Gandhi was thirty-seven, that this deep conviction blossomed into the inspiration for mass nonviolent resistance. Gandhi had just returned from his ambulance duty during the Zulu "rebellion," fresh from his decision to devote his life completely to community service. The opportunity was waiting. The white government of the Transvaal had introduced new legislation to deprive South African Indians of what civil rights they still retained under the law. If the "Black Act" were passed it would mean the end of the Indian communities in South Africa. A great crowd of Indians gathered in Johannesburg at Gandhi's suggestion to decide on a course of resistance. Gandhi had not come prepared with any plan; he only knew that it was "better to die than to submit to such a law." But in the midst of that passionate crowd, ready for any extreme of violence, the inspiration came to him to offer an even higher challenge: to refuse to obey such degrading legislation and accept the consequences without violent retaliation but without yielding an inch in their demand for fair and equal treatment under the law. Every man and woman present rose to meet the challenge and pledged nonviolent resistance even to the point of death. "Thus came into being," Gandhi wrote triumphantly, "the moral equivalent of war."



“Civil disobedience is the inherent right of a citizen. He dare not give it up without ceasing to be a man. Civil disobedience is never followed by anarchy. Criminal disobedience can lead to it. Every state puts down criminal disobedience by force. It perishes, if it does not. But to put down civil disobedience is to attempt to imprison conscience.”

“Disobedience to be civil must be sincere, respectful, restrained, never defiant, must be based upon some well-understood principle, must not be capricious and, above all, must have no ill will or hatred behind it.”

THE MOVEMENT SPREAD SWIFTLY through South Africa. What Gandhi proposed was an entirely new method of fighting. Instead of fanning hatred with hatred, violence with violence, he argued that exploitation could be overcome simply by returning love for hatred and respect for contempt, in a strong, determined refusal to yield to injustice. It was a style of resistance which demanded the highest courage, and such depth of commitment that every temporary setback only strengthened the resisters' determination more. Thousands of men, women, and children courted jail sentences in open but disciplined defiance of South African exploitation.

One of the first developments in Gandhi's campaign brought him straight to the head of the Transvaal government, General Jan Smuts. Gandhi had already developed the essentials of his later style, and it is easy to picture him sitting before this able Boer soldier and informing him quietly: "I've come to tell you that I am going to fight against your government."

Smuts must have thought he was hearing things. "You mean you have



The Great March
to the Transvaal,
South Africa,
November 1913

come here to tell me that?" he laughs. "Is there anything more you want to say?"

"Yes," says Gandhi. "I am going to win."

Smuts is astonished. "Well," he says at last, "and how are you going to do that?"

Gandhi smiles. "With your help."

Many years later Smuts admitted – not without humor – that this is exactly what Gandhi did. By his courage, by his determination, by his refusal to take unfair advantage, but especially by his endless capacity to



“stick it out” without yielding and without retaliation, Gandhi managed at last to win the general’s respect and friendship, and in 1914 the laws most offensive to the Indians were repealed and basic civil rights voted into law.

«Truth resides in every human heart, and one has to search for it there, and to be guided by truth as one sees it. But no one has a right to coerce others to act according to his own view of truth.»

AHIMSA IS OUR DHARMA, the central law of our being, written into our every cell. The "law of the jungle," Gandhi used to say, is all right for animals; violence is their dharma. But for men and women to be violent is to reverse the course of evolution and go against their deepest nature, which is to love, to endure, to forgive.

“I hold myself to be incapable of hating any being on earth. By a long course of prayerful discipline, I have ceased for over forty years to hate anybody. I know this is a big claim. Nevertheless, I make it in all humility.

But I can and do hate evil wherever it exists. I hate the system of government that the British people have set up in India. I hate the ruthless exploitation of India even as I hate from the bottom of my heart the hideous system of untouchability for which millions of Hindus have made themselves responsible. But I do not hate the domineering Englishmen as I refuse to hate the domineering Hindus. I seek to reform them in all the loving ways that are open to me. My noncooperation has its roots not in hatred, but in love.”

For centuries, millions of people in India had been subjected to great cruelty and discrimination by the higher classes in the name of the caste system. Gandhi, having learned from personal experience the great truth “As ye sow, so shall ye reap,” saw a deep underlying connection between India’s exploitation of these impoverished millions and Great Britain’s exploitation of the Indian people. One of the first steps he took to restore India’s self-respect and unity was to begin the liberation of these lower classes. The former name for these people – a terrible one in Sanskrit – means “those who cannot be touched.” The name itself perpetuated their sense of inferiority and shame. But Gandhi began to

change this status overnight by giving them a different title: Harijans, the children of God.

He campaigned from the Himalayas south to Ceylon. Everywhere the message was the same: "All of us are one. When you inflict suffering on others, you are bringing suffering on yourself. When you weaken others, you are weakening yourself, weakening the whole nation." On some occasions he would shame all India by refusing to enter the great temples whose gates had been closed for centuries to low-caste Hindu worshippers. "There is no God here," he would tell the crowds who gathered to hear him. "If God were here, everyone would have access. He is in every one of us." Because of the love the people bore him, such words went in very deep. Temples and homes throughout India, after centuries of exclusion, began to open their doors to all.

Wherever Gandhi went he collected money for the Harijans. Many Indian women, particularly in the villages, used to wear every gold ornament they owned, and there was a saying that a man's best bank is his wife's neck. Gandhi found this a little ostentatious when so much of the country was near starvation, and he took every opportunity to appeal to such women to give up their gold necklaces, earrings, and bangles to be sold for Harijan service. Not even children were safe from this prince of beggars. He was so irresistible that whenever his train pulled into a station, no matter what time of the day or night, great crowds of people of all ages would be waiting to press their money and jewelry into his outstretched hands.

Trains in India have three classes. In those days, first-class accommodations were meant only for the ruling classes – the British – while the second class was taken by the upper strata of Indian society. The third class – crowded, dirty wooden benches – was left for the vast majority of Indians, the poor. Gandhi, who dramatized his unity with the poor by sharing their way of life completely, always preferred to travel third

class on these campaigns. When someone asked him why, he answered simply: "Because there is no fourth."

On one occasion during these campaigns an obviously well-off missionary came to Gandhi to get his advice on how to help the outcaste people of the Indian villages. Gandhi's answer challenged the very basis of his life: "We must step down from our pedestals and live with them — not as outsiders, but as one of them in every way, sharing their burdens and sorrows."

This is the heart of Gandhi's approach. He taught, above all, by personal example. He went and lived with the Harijans; and to encourage them to improve their health and sanitation, he himself became their servant. Hundreds of his followers made their homes in poor villages throughout India, living with the people, teaching and encouraging them by their own example to release themselves from the bondage of ignorance, squalor, superstition, and the utter poverty which followed three hundred years of foreign exploitation. Gandhi once wrote to one of these workers, an Englishwoman named Mary Barr, that if the suffering of the poor masses of India could be alleviated without removing the British mountain from Indian soil, he would not fight for India's independence but would remain loyal to the empire. But it was the poor who suffered most from British domination, and so it was for their sake that he was drawn at last into the struggle for Indian freedom.

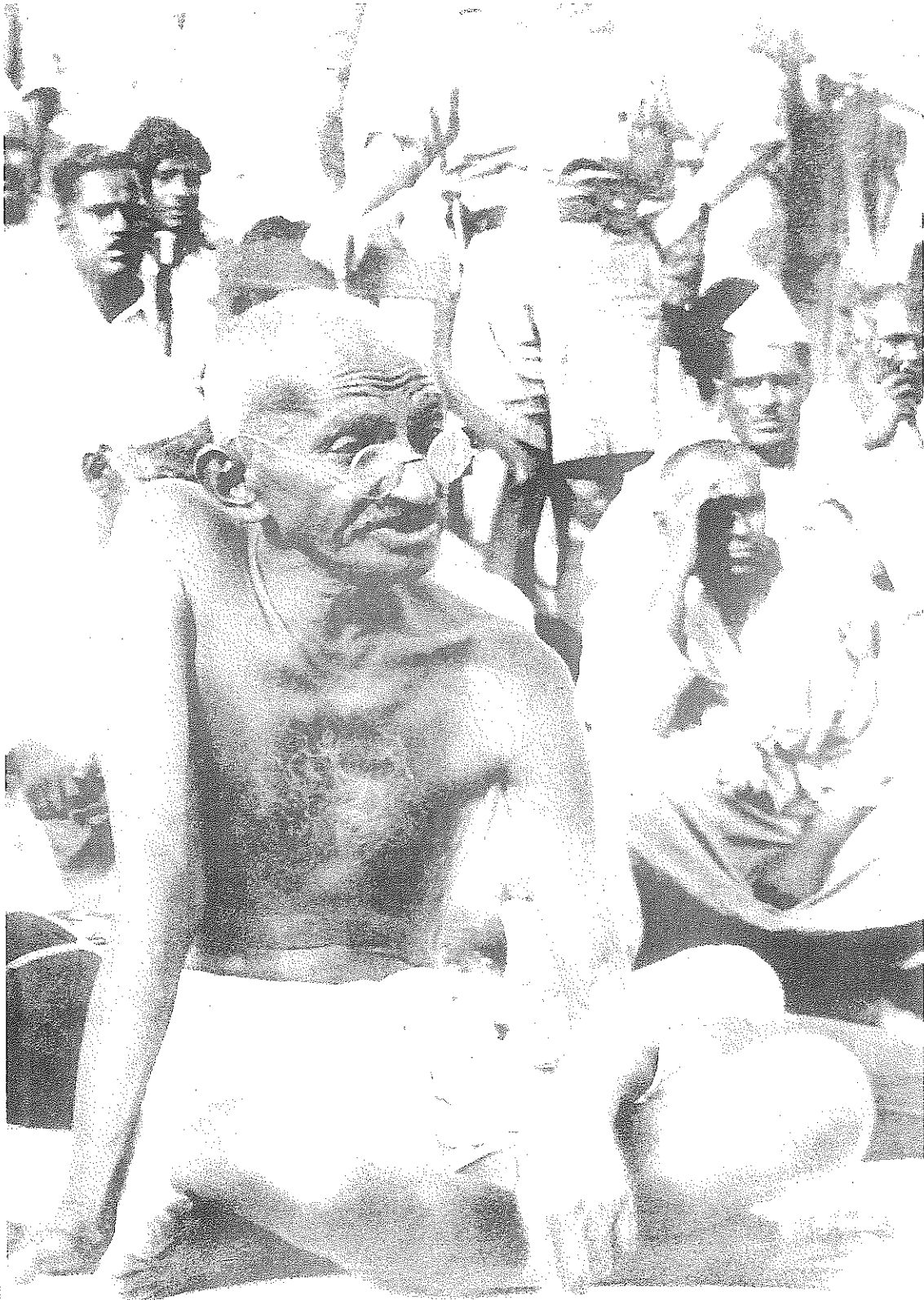
“To see the universal and all-pervading Spirit of Truth face to face one must be able to love the meanest of creation as oneself. And a man who aspires after that cannot afford to keep out of any field of life. That is why my devotion to Truth has drawn me into the field of politics; and I can say without the slightest hesitation, and yet in all humility, that those who say that religion has nothing to do with politics do not know what religion means.”

IN THE EARLY STAGES of India's struggle for independence there were many harsh incidents which deface the pages of British history. When Gandhi returned from South Africa, during the First World War, India was seething with the threat of violent revolution under the repressive cover of martial law. At last satyagraha seemed to be the only remedy for the brutality of colonial misrule, and prisons began to fill as thousands of men and women responded to Gandhi's challenge to cease all cooperation with the institutions of British government. Punishment was swift, and jail terms severe. But each arrest only seemed to inspire others to give up their government jobs, stop paying taxes, and court imprisonment themselves.

Finally Gandhi too was arrested, on the charge of inciting sedition. His trial – the only one the government ever granted him – gave him a forum for a detailed, scathing indictment of British exploitation. India and the rest of the world began to see that it was not Gandhi, but imperialism itself which was on trial.

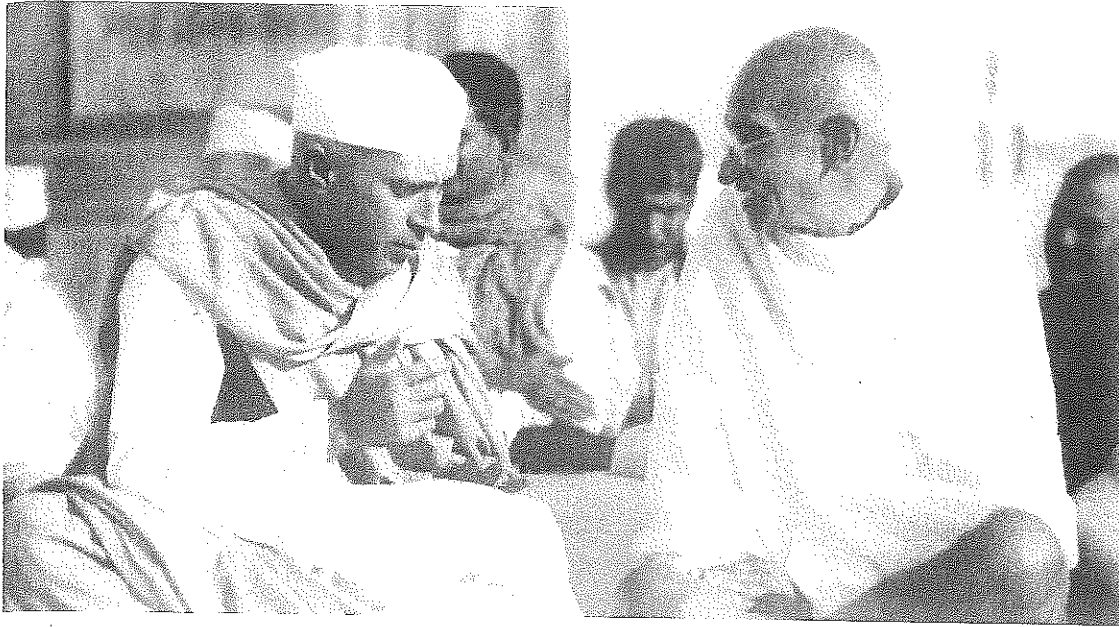
«I have no desire whatsoever to conceal from this court the fact that to preach disaffection toward the existing system of Government has become almost a passion with me. . . .

Little do town dwellers know how the semi-starved masses of India are slowly sinking to lifelessness. Little do they know that their miserable comfort represents the brokerage they get for their work they do for the foreign exploiter, that the profits and the brokerage are sucked from the masses. Little do they realize that the Government established by law in British India is carried on for this exploitation of the masses. No sophistry, no jugglery in figures, can explain away the evidence that the skeletons in many villages present to the naked eye.»



“I believe that I have rendered a service to India and England by showing in noncooperation the way out of the unnatural state in which both are living. In my opinion, noncooperation with evil is as much a duty as is cooperation with good. But in the past, noncooperation has been deliberately expressed in violence to the evil-doer. I am endeavoring to show to my countrymen that violent noncooperation only multiplies evil, and that as evil can only be sustained by violence, withdrawal of support of evil requires complete abstention from violence.

Nonviolence implies voluntary submission to the penalty for noncooperation with evil. I am here, therefore, to invite and submit cheerfully to the highest penalty that can be inflicted upon me for what in law is deliberate crime, and what appears to me to be the highest duty of a citizen. The only course open to you, the judge and the assessors, is either to resign your posts and thus dissociate yourselves from evil, if you feel that the law you are called upon to administer is an evil, and that in reality I am innocent, or to inflict on me the severest penalty, if you believe that the system and the law you are assisting to administer are good for the people of this country, and that my activity is, therefore, injurious to the common weal.”



Gandhi with
Jawaharlal Nehru,
the newly-
elected Congress
president,
December 1936

IT WAS IN THESE early years of noncooperation that Gandhi attracted some of his closest friends and co-workers, men and women from very different backgrounds and nationalities who shared one central experience: each had come to Gandhi to observe and stayed to serve. Just to meet him was to run the risk of being turned into a hero, and the lives of countless numbers of ordinary men, women, and even children were transformed completely by this one little man, who demanded – and got – from everyone the highest order of selflessness and love. Even his enemies were not immune. “Don’t go near Gandhi,” new British administrators were warned when they went to assume their duties in India. “Don’t go near Gandhi; he’ll get you.”

Jawaharlal Nehru was one of the first in India to suffer this fate. His father, Motilal Nehru, was a powerful lawyer from a very cultured and wealthy Hindu family. When young Jawaharlal returned to India from Cambridge, used to playing cricket and skiing in the Alps, he was a complete stranger to his own land and people. But though at home with British customs he still chafed under British rule, and fell in immediately

with the passionate young revolutionaries for whom nonviolent noncooperation seemed too slow a road to freedom.

Gandhi disarmed him completely. "You people are always talking about revolution," he told them. "I am making one. What is revolutionary about violence? If you really love your people, help me show them how to turn their backs on violence and throw off their fear."

The challenge went straight to Nehru's heart. It did not matter that he and Gandhi were poles apart in many of their attitudes and beliefs; the man himself was too magnificent to resist. Nehru gave up his fine clothes and expensive habits and began to pour all his wealth and talent into Gandhi's movement for independence.

It was too much for his father. Motilal Nehru had given Jawaharlal the best upbringing that money could buy, and because he loved his son deeply it must have hurt him a great deal to see all these things apparently thrown away. At last he went to Gandhi for a private confrontation. "You have taken our only son," he pleaded. "Give him back to us, and I will put my wealth at the disposal of your campaigns."

Gandhi listened to him patiently, but only shook his head. "Not only do I want your son," he said with a mischievous smile, "I want you, and your wife, and your daughters, and the rest of your family too." And he got them, one by one, beginning with Motilal himself.

Gandhi was the most bewildering opponent any nation ever faced. Every move he made was spontaneous; every year that passed found him more youthful, more radical, more experimental. British administrators were baffled and exasperated by this little man who withdrew when they would have attacked, attacked when they would have withdrawn, and seemed to be getting stronger day by day. No one knew what he was going to do next, for his actions were prompted not by calculations of what seemed politically expedient, but by a deep intuition which often came to him only in the eleventh hour.

NEVER WAS THIS MORE evident than in the Salt Satyagraha of 1930, which brought Gandhi and the Indian struggle to the attention of the world. Up until that time, for the sake of compromise, India had been seeking only dominion status within the British Empire. But ten years of bitter repression had passed since the era of noncooperation began, and Great Britain had only tightened its hold on the Indian people. On the first of January, 1930, at the stroke of midnight, the Indian Congress party raised the flag of a new nation to usher in the struggle for complete independence.

Everyone looked to Gandhi to see what would happen next. A new satyagraha campaign seemed imminent, but no one, including Gandhi, had any idea of what it would be or when it would be launched. Weeks passed. The threat of violence mounted higher, but Gandhi remained silent. The government waited anxiously, afraid to arrest him, afraid to leave him free.

Finally, after weeks of deliberation, the answer came to Gandhi in a dream. It was breathtakingly simple. The government had imposed a law forbidding Indians to make their own salt, making them dependent on a British monopoly for what is, in a tropical country, a necessity of life. To Gandhi it was the perfect symbol of colonial exploitation. He proposed to march with seventy-eight of his most trusted ashram followers to the little coastal town of Dandi, some two hundred forty miles away, where salt from the sea lay free for the taking on the sand. When he gave the signal, everyone in India was to act as if the salt laws had never been enacted at all.

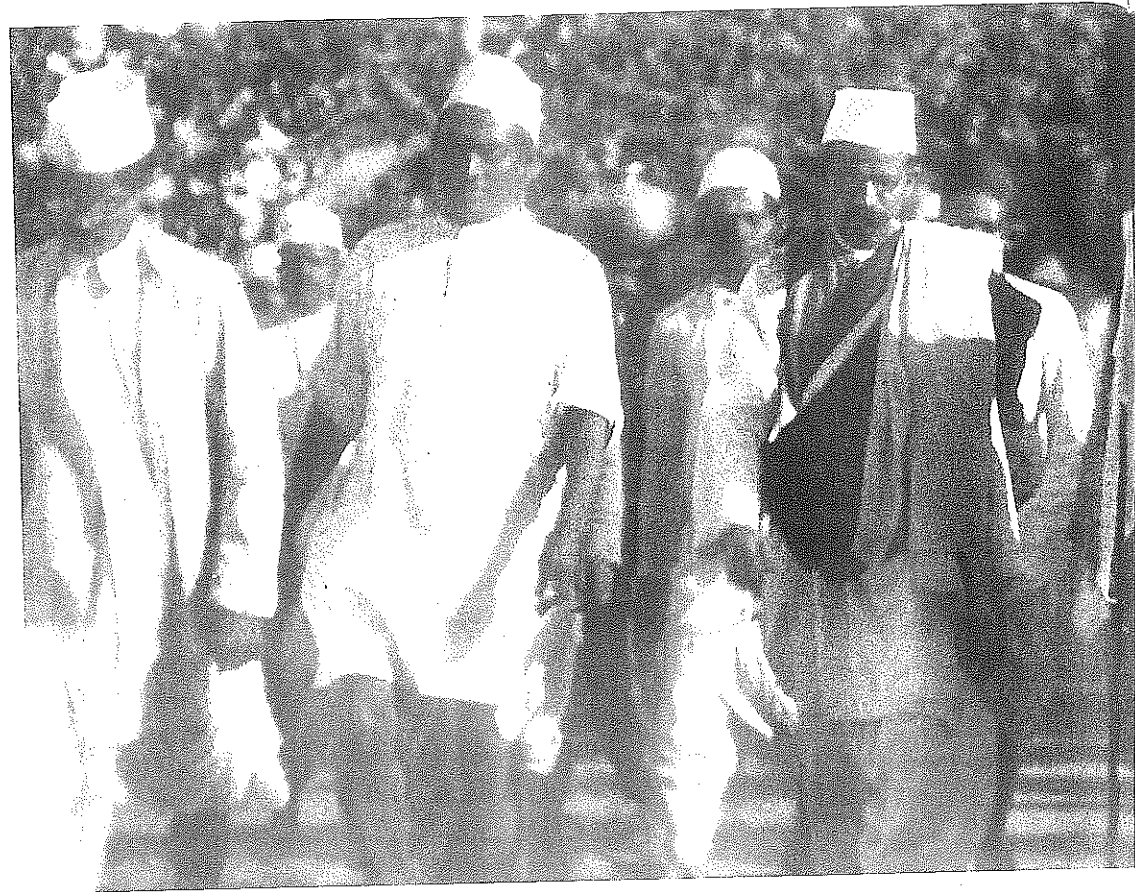
When the scheduled morning arrived an immense crowd gathered outside Gandhi's ashram to catch what might be a final glimpse of this little figure who was about to turn all India upside down. It was an epic march, with the attention of news audiences everywhere riveted on every stage of the way. Gandhi was sixty-one, but he had never been in

better shape. He marched with the light, brisk step of an athlete, covering about twelve miles a day, stopping at every village on the way to preach the gospel of ahimsa and the duty of nonviolent noncooperation. Everywhere he passed people streamed out to meet him, lining the roads between towns and strewing his path with flowers. By the time he reached Dandi, twenty-four days later, his nonviolent army of seventy-eight had swelled to several thousand.

Throughout the night of their arrival Gandhi and his followers prayed for the strength to resist the violence which might easily sweep away so large a crowd. Then, at the moment of dawn, they went quietly down to the water, and Gandhi, with thousands of eyes watching every gesture, stooped down and picked up a pinch of salt from the sand.

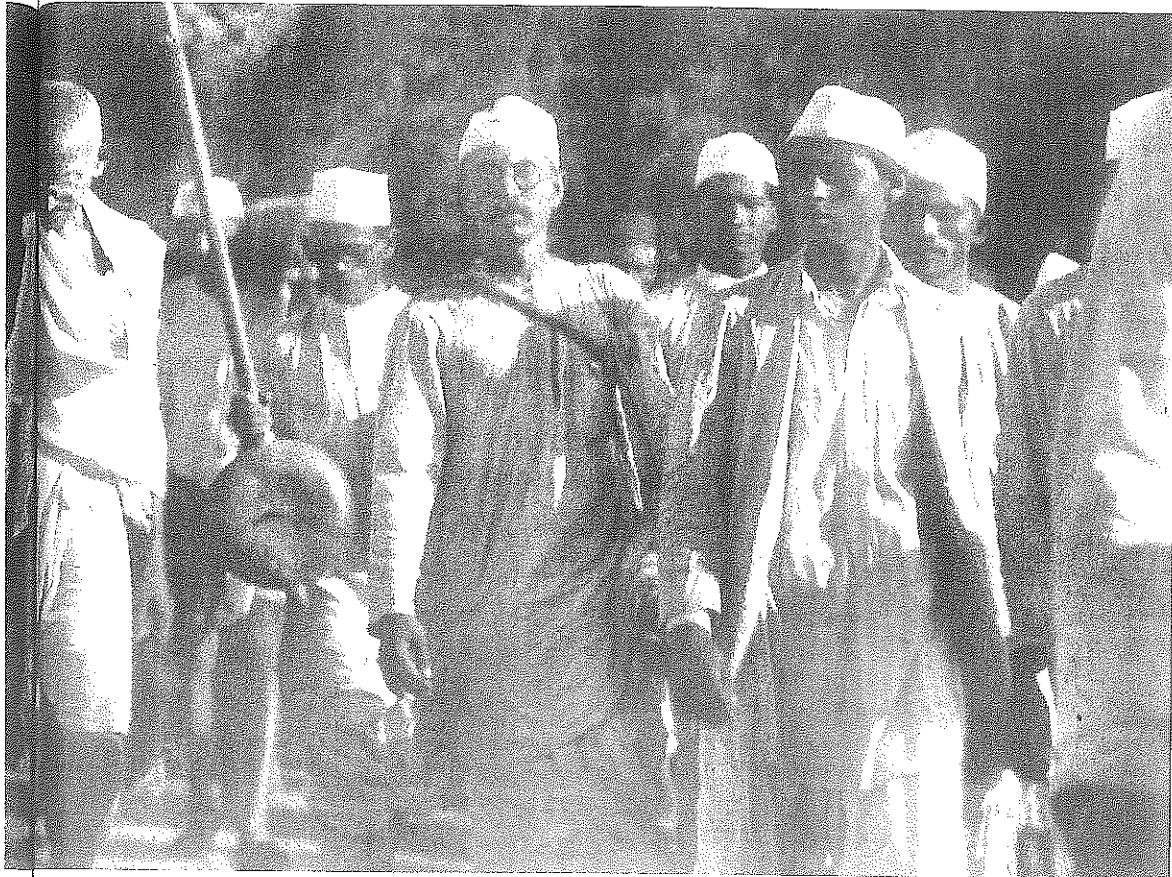
The response was immediate. All along India's coastline huge crowds of men, women, and children swept down to the sea to gather salt in direct disobedience of the British laws. Their contraband salt was auctioned off at premium prices to those in the cities who could break the law only by buying. The whole country knew it had thrown off its chains, and despite the brutality of the police reprisals, the atmosphere was one of nationwide rejoicing. Months later, while negotiating at tea-time with Lord Irwin, Gandhi took a little paper bag out of the folds of his cloak and, before the viceroy's astonished eyes, dropped a little of its contents into his cup. "I will put a little of this salt into my tea," he explained mischievously, "to remind us of the famous Boston Tea Party." Lord Irwin had the grace to join in his laughter.

Civil disobedience erupted spontaneously throughout the country for weeks after Gandhi's signal. Thousands were arrested; many more were beaten or killed without a hint of violent retaliation. Unaccountably, Gandhi remained free. He alone maintained order in that vast, unpredictable movement which was shaking the Indian subcontinent from the Himalayas to the sea.



One night following another massive arrest a crowd had gathered for the evening prayer meeting at Gandhi's work camp, a few small open huts of palm and date leaves halfway between Dandi and the sea. That night Gandhi's talk was more serious than usual, and after the prayers and singing a long list of those arrested was read aloud by the fading light of a hurricane lamp. Usually the crowds broke up after these meetings, and Gandhi and his co-workers retired for the night. But this evening few could sleep. Gandhi's arrest seemed imminent, and everyone was full of suspense and speculation, anxious for his welfare.

The police officials arrived at midnight, accompanied by thirty men with readied guns. In the darkness it was impossible for them to make out Gandhi anywhere, or guess where he might be hiding.



Leaving Ahmedabad
on the morning of
March 12, 1930, the
first day of the Salt
March

At last someone pointed out a little white bundle in one of the open sheds. "That is Gandhiji." In the midst of the confusion the leader of this national earthquake was sleeping like a baby, absolutely certain that the Lord would take care of him.

The British official awakened the sleeper and shone a flashlight into his face. "We have come to arrest Mr. M. K. Gandhi."

"I am Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi," the little figure answered politely. "I am at your service."

"Please get your things ready. We will give you the time you need."

"I am ready now," said Gandhi, indicating the small bundle on the floor. "This is all I need."

While the policemen watched he set about brushing his few teeth in

his usual unhurried way. Then after a short prayer he turned to the official in charge and walked briskly to the car outside, chatting cheerfully to his escorts. He knew that it might be years before he returned, yet there was no trace of apprehension or resentment in his manner. The police were so impressed by the simple dignity of this little man that they seemed to be not his jailers but his prisoners. He was at his very best when being persecuted. He was at his strongest when under pressure. And he was free whether inside prison or out.

By this time over sixty thousand satyagrahis were in prison. Gandhi was an example to them all. For him jail was not a hardship but a crown of glory, for he knew that the capacity to suffer bravely for a higher ideal was the strength that would make every man and woman in India free. He embraced the prospect of imprisonment with such joy and good humor that people all over the country began to laugh off their own fear. British jails became the scenes of festive reunions as India's imprisoned political leaders found themselves joined by their families and friends. Gandhi sent them telegrams of congratulations. He himself was arrested so often that he seemed always to be either in prison, just released from prison, or about to be imprisoned again.

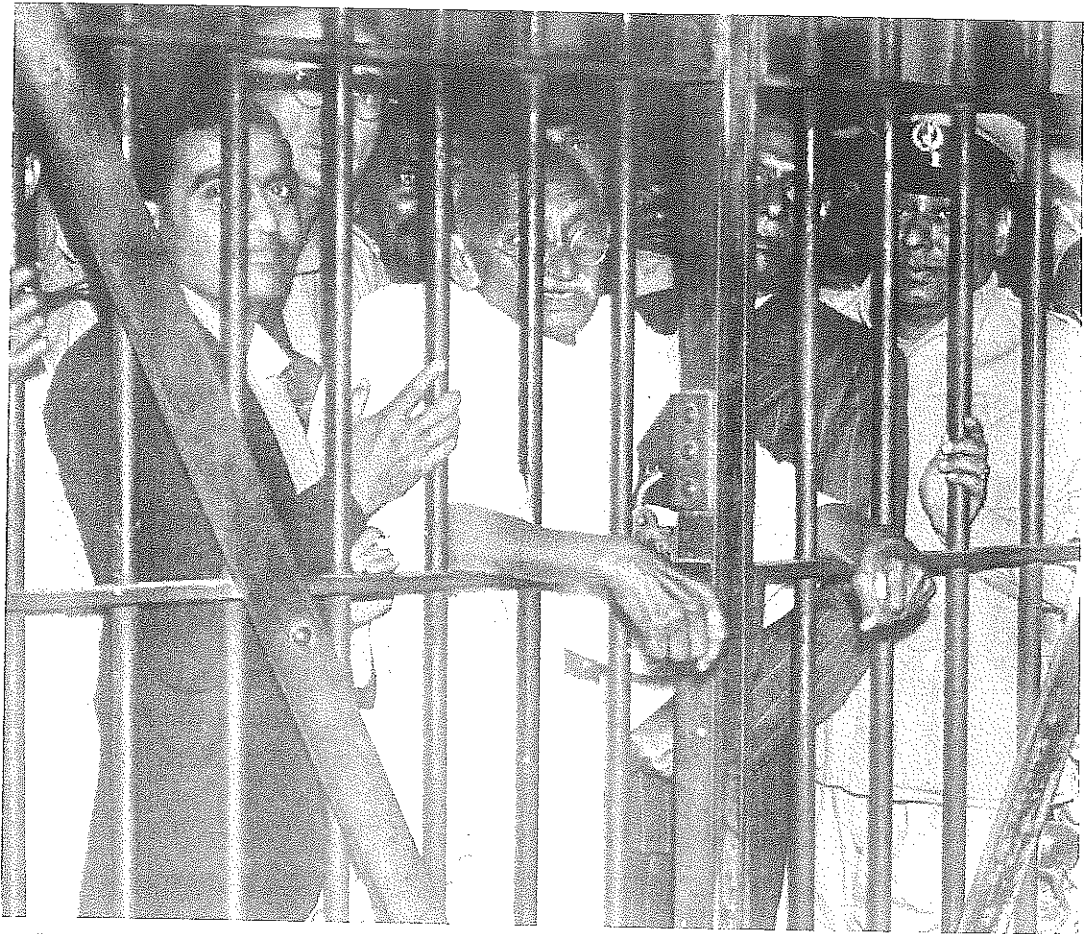
Gandhi was so detached from his physical environment that going to jail did not disrupt his work at all, and he drove some of his hardest bargains from behind jail walls. Usually the walls were those of Yeravda Prison, where he felt so much at home that once, when a British interrogator asked for his address, he answered, "Yeravda." When a man does everything in the spirit of worship, everywhere he goes is sacred, and Gandhi used to mark his jail letters *Yeravda Mandir*, which means "Yeravda temple." He started each day before dawn with meditation and prayer, in which he found the strength to withstand the trials of his situation. He was able to read the Bible, the Koran, and the Bhagavad Gita, and to conduct his usual voluminous correspondence every day.

“There is no time-limit for a satyagrahi nor is there a limit to his capacity for suffering. Hence there is no such thing as defeat in satyagraha.”

“Joy lies in the fight, in the attempt, in the suffering involved, not in the victory itself.”

In a meeting with G. D. Birla, Calcutta 1946





Gandhi visiting
political prisoners
in Calcutta,
January 1946

There was plenty of physical work to do, and plenty of would-be enemies, on both sides of the bars, to win over as friends. He looked after them all, even nursed them when they were ill, and every day he served in prison only added to his spiritual growth and made more converts to nonviolence and independence.

“I have learnt through bitter experience the one supreme lesson to conserve my anger, and as heat conserved is transmuted into energy, even so our anger controlled can be transmuted into a power which can move the world.”

FOR GANDHI IT WAS the acid test of ahimsa, and every resource in him flared up to meet the demand. He walked, worked, wrote, and spoke sixteen to twenty hours a day. Everywhere he went, by his personal example, he dissolved the barriers erected by religious customs, superstition, and mistrust. In each community some small miracle would occur: Muslim families took the risk of giving him shelter; murderers and looters came forward to give him their weapons, return what they had taken, or offer him money for the relief of the dispossessed. In one village, it is said, a notoriously fierce communal agitator came up to Gandhi in front of a crowd of paralyzed onlookers, put his hands around Gandhi's slender throat, and began choking the life out of him. Such is the height to which Gandhi had grown that there was not even a flicker of hostility in his eyes, not a word of protest. He yielded himself completely to the flood of love within him, and the man broke down like a little child and fell sobbing at his feet. For those who watched, it seemed a miracle. For Gandhi, who had grown used to the "miracles" of love, it only proved for the hundredth time in his own life the depth of the words of the Compassionate Buddha: "Hatred does not cease by hatred at any time; hatred ceases by love. This is an unalterable law."