

Barrister Gandhi to Mahatma Gandhi

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Barrister Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was invited to South Africa to assist the senior advocates of a leading Indian merchant firm Dada Abdulla & Co. Gandhi put two questions when the offer came : “(1) How long do you require my services?, (2) What will be my payment?.” The offer was accepted and Barrister Gandhi left the shores of India. That was in 1883. He arrived at Natal in South Africa. After meeting his ‘employer’ (the client) and getting preliminary briefing, he started his professional sojourn in South Africa.

The Satyagrahi in Gandhi was in fact born on a train travel to Pretoria to attend his client’s work. Gandhi was travelling in a first class compartment. On the insistence of a ‘white’ passenger, he was thrown out of the compartment by the railway police just when the train started. He had to spend the whole night in the railway platform under biting cold condition with no blanket or second dress to cover his body.

Later when he was on a train journey to Durban from Johannesburg, at the railway station a ‘vegetarian’ friend Henry Polak gave

him a book to read on the train. It was Ruskin Bond’s “Unto This Last.” Gandhi paraphrased the contents of the book in three sentences: 1) That the good of the individual is contained in the good of all; 2) That a lawyer’s work has the same value as the barber’s inasmuch as all have the same right to earning their livelihood from their work; 3) That life of a labour, ie., the life of the tiller of the soil and a handicraftsman, is the life worth living.

First Satyagraha Movement

The first Satyagraha movement was organised by Gandhiji in 1906 at Transvaal. Gandhiji translated the word “Satyagraha” to “soul force” in English. This struggle went on for years. At one stage 40,000 Indians, men and women, the poor and the rich, went to jail by defying the unjust laws of the apartheid South African Govt. Finally the government conceded the Indians’ demand which was abolition of the “black” ordinance that made Indians to get themselves registered and to give finger impression including thumb, as if they were criminals.

Gandhiji’s Satyagraha movement in India started from Champaran in Bihar. That was

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in 1915. The British indigo planters have exploited the poor farmers there compelling them cultivate indigo in their fields. After a fact finding mission Gandhiji started his Satyagraha. The 'fair' Governor of Bihar abolished the unjust orders which forced the farmers to grow indigo in their fields that made the plantations rich and the farmers pauper.

Discovery of the first tool of freedom movement of India

Gandhiji penned down the first draft of 'Hind Swaraj' in 1908 during a voyage to England from South Africa. We find the mention of Charka there. At that time he had only heard about it and not seen. But he visualised an essential element of freedom from colonialism in discarding the use of mill woven cloth from England manufactured from raw materials (cotton) taken from India, if the yarn can be made in India on the spinning wheel that was so simple and handled generally by women spinners. When he came to India and established the Satyagraha Ashram at Sabarmati he could not find a spinning wheel or spinners. In 1917, Gandhiji's disciple Ganga Behn Majumdar started a search for the spinning wheel, and found one in Vijapur in the Baroda State. Quite a few people there had spinning wheels in their homes, but had long since consigned them to the lofts as useless lumbers. They now pulled them out, and soon Vijapur Khadi gained a name for itself. And Khadi and the spinning wheel rapidly became the symbol of India's independence movement.

The beginning of Hartal

Hartal or passive participatory Satyagraha

was born in 1919. It was against the Rowlett Act that gave oppressive and autocratic power to the Government of India, which could be used against Indians. The Govt. did not heed the opposition of the Congress leaders in the Provincial Assembly, to the bill.

Gandhiji was in Madras (now Chennai) when the Bill was gazetted and became an Act. The next day, Gandhiji told his host at Madras C.Rajagopalachari "An idea came to me last night in dream that we should call upon the country to observe a general hartal. Satyagraha is a process of self-purification, and ours is a sacred fight, and it seems to me to be in the fitness of things that it should be commenced with an act of self-purification. Let all people of India, therefore, suspend their business on that day and observe the day as one of fasting and prayer..."

Rajaji heartily approved. People had very short notice. Messages went around the country. The response in those days of remote communication comparing today's 'breaking news' scenario, was a wonder. On the scheduled date that was within a week's time, the whole of India from one end to the other, towns as well as villages, observed a complete hartal. It was totally peaceful and a most wonderful spectacle.

Gandhiji wrote later "The Rowlett Act was a dead letter even when it was promulgated, and that black act taught us a great lesson..."

Salt Satyagraha

In 1930, the Indian freedom movement had come to a standstill. Gandhiji was wondering what to do next. He was searching for a cause which would appeal to all - rich and

poor, Hindus and Muslims. The Government had imposed a tax on salt. Suddenly it flashed in Gandhiji's mind. Salt would be the centre of the next fight.

In February the Congress Working Committee met in Wardha. Gandhiji proposed that they start a satyagraha to break the salt laws. The Congress leaders were amazed – “Salt! Are we to start making salt now?” Jawaharlal Nehru, the Congress President was bemused. Gandhiji, in his own humorous way brought everyone round to his way of thinking.

There was a three week training and preparation camp in the Sabarmati Ashram. It was decided that Gandhiji would walk with only a few satyagrahis to Dandhi on the Arabian sea shores. First Bapu (as Gandhiji was affectionately called) would make salt. Then others would follow. Then the movement would engulf the whole nation. Gandhiji selected 79 satyagrahis to go with him. They were all present and past workers of Sabarmati Ashram.

First Gandhiji wrote to the Viceroy, Lord Irwin, asking him to withdraw the salt tax. He received a negative response. The march commenced on March 12, 1930. People started converging on the Sabarmati Ashram the previous day. There was a big concourse of people. Sathyagrahis did not have any weapons. Each had a shoulder bag, that was all. Only Pandit Khare, Gandhiji's musician had a stringed instrument, ektara, in his hand. The eighty satyagrahies started the march on foot.

A wave of enthusiasm swept the country. People broke the salt law everywhere. Women joined the movement. In places where there

was no sea, the law was broken by selling the salt made by the satyagrahis. Everybody was arrested, including Gandhiji. Gandhiji was placed in Yerwada Jail. One lakh people went to jail on this occasion.

Salt became the second symbol of freedom, after the charkha.

Where was Gandhiji on Independence Day?

Many people thought he was in Noakhali. But he was actually in Calcutta. He meant to go back to Noakhali. But Muslims from Calcutta requested him to bring peace to Calcutta which was burning with communal violence.

Gandhiji stayed in a muslim home in Beliaghata, a filthy locality full of hooligans, which was one of the most disturbed areas of the city. On August 13th, Hindu youths surrounded Gandhiji's house and shouted slogan against Suhrawardy and Gandhi. Gandhiji pacified the crowd.

On August 14th, there was no ugly incident in Calcutta. Calm prevailed around the Gandhi residence. In the evening he addressed a prayer meeting in Beliaghata, attended by over ten thousand people. Gandhiji appealed for peace and asked people to observe the Independence Day with fasting and prayer.

So while the rest of India celebrated the birth of Independence, Gandhiji fasted, prayed and was spinning. His residence became a place of pilgrimage for the people of Calcutta. His presence brought peace to the city. Rajaji said at that time “Gandhiji has achieved many things, but there has been nothing, not even independence, which is so truly wonderful as

his victory over evil in Calcutta.” On the day Lord Mountbatten wrote to Gandhiji: “In the Punjab we have 55,000 soldiers and large scale rioting on our hands. In Bengal our forces consist of one man and there is no rioting. As a serving officer, as well as an administrator, may I be allowed to pay my tribute to the one-man boundary force!”

The whole face and body of Gandhiji was glowing like a true MAHATMA that he was.

Einstein and Gandhiji

People generally quote one sentence of the great scientist Einstein on Gandhiji. It is “Generations to come, it may be, will scarce believe that such a one as this ever in flesh and blood walked upon this earth.”

For the benefit of the young readers of today, a passionate statement of Einstein on Gandhiji that was made in July 1944, is reproduced.

“A leader of his people, unsupported by any outward authority, a politician whose success rests not upon craft or mastery of technical devices but simply on the convincing power of his personality, a victorious fighter who has always avoided the use of force, a man of

wisdom and humility, armed with resolve and inflexible consistency, who has devoted all his strength to the uplifting of his people and the betterment of their lot, a man who has faced the stubbornness of Europe with the dignity of the simple human being and thus at all times risen superior.”

The Talisman

This is frequently quoted by speakers and writers and it will remain relevant to every individual and professional perpetually. It goes like this:

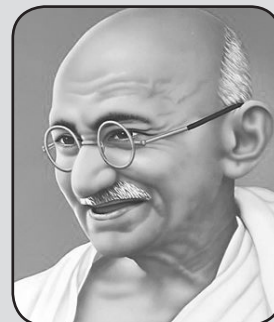
“I will give you a talisman, whenever you are in doubt, or when the self becomes too much with you, try the following experiment.

Recall the face of the poorest and the most helpless man whom you may have seen and ask yourself, if the step you contemplate is going to be of any use to him. Will he be able to gain anything by it? Will it restore him to a control over his own life and destiny? In other words, will it lead to Swaraj or self-rule for the hungry and also spiritually starved millions of our countrymen?

Then you will find your doubt and yourself melting away.”



NOTE: This article is based on the reading of “The Story of my experiments with truth”, “Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi” published by Navajeevan Trust as well as books written by various authors, past and present. It is a free flow article though the contents are essentially published earlier in various books. For the benefit of the readers who wish to go through details of Gandhiji’s thoughts and deeds, a list of Gandhiji’s writings and books written by various authors on Gandhiji (which is not exhaustive) is given separately.



Books written by Mahatma Gandhi:

Published by Navajeevan Book Trust

- An Autobiography – The story of My Experiments with Truth
- Hind Swaraj on Indian Home Rule
- Key to Health

These are Compilations of Mahatma Gandhi's Writings

- Gandhi Anthology – Part I
- A Gandhi Anthology – Part II
- All men are Brothers
- Constructive Programme – Its Meaning and Place
- Epigrams from Gandhi
- Ethical Religion
- From Yervda Mandir (Ashram Observances)
- Mohan Mala (A Gandhian Rosary)
- My Views on Education
- Selected Letters
- Selections from Gandhi
- The Gita According to Gandhi
- The Mind of Mahatma Gandhi
- The Moral Basis of Vegetarianism
- The Teaching of the Gita
- The Words of Gandhi
- Towards New Education
- Trusteeship
- Character & Nation Building
- Discourses on Gita
- Gandhiji Expects
- India of My Dream
- Industrial and Agrarian Life and Relations
- My God
- My Religion
- Truth is God
- Nature Cure
- Panchayat Raj

- Pathway to God
- Prayer
- Ramanama
- Satyagraha in South Africa
- Self Restraint Vs Self Indulgence
- The Essence of Hinduism
- The Law and the Lawyers
- The Message of Gita
- The way to Communal Harmony
- Truth is God
- Village Industries
- Village Swaraj

List of Some Indian & Foreign Books on Gandhiji

1. Gandhian Values and 20th Century Challenges - by Dr. J. D. Sethi
2. Human Touch
3. MAHATMA GANDHI Essays and Reflections on his life and work |
4. Mahatma Gandhi As A Students | E-Book
5. Nonviolence After Gandhi Edited by : G. Ramachandran & T. K. Mahadevan
6. Nonviolence And Social Change Editor Dr. J. S. Mathur and Dr. P. C. Sharma |
7. The Making Of A Social Reformer: Gandhi In South Africa - by Surendra Bhana and Goolam H. Vadeh
8. Is Gandhi Out of Date? - by Vishwanath Tondon
9. Abridged Gandhi-Ganga (Inspiring Stories)|
10. A Pinch of Salt Rocks An Empire-(Salt March-Dandi March)-By Sarojini Naidu
11. To Students (Abridged) - by M. K. Gandhi
12. This Was Bapu - Compiled by R. K. Prabhu|
13. Gandhi's Life In His Own Words - Compiled by Krishna Kripalani

14. Sudarshan Kapur – Raising Up a Prophet – The African – American Encounter with Gandhi (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992)
15. Thomas F. Jackson, From Civil Rights to Human Rights (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007).
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17. Martin Luther King Jr – Stride Toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1958)
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24. Datta, Dharendra M. – The Philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi – Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1953
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27. Gandhi, Rajmohan – Gandhi, The Man, His people, and the Empire Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008
28. Green Martin – Gandhi: Voice of a New Age Revolution – New York: Continuum, 1993
29. Huttenback, Robert A – Gandhi in South Africa, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1971
29. Walker, Roy – Sword of Gold – A Life of Mahatma Gandhi, London: Indian Independence Union, 1945
30. E.S. Ready, ed. Mahatma Gandhi: Letters to Americans (Mumbai: Bharatiya Vidya, 1998)
30. Swami Vishwananda – A Souvenir of Dr. Martin Luther King’s visit to India February – March 1959 (New Delhi – Gandhi National Memorial Fund, 1959)
31. Anand Y (2006) – Albert Einstein and Mahatma Gandhi, New Delhi: National Gandhi Museum
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32. Tendulkar, Suresh D. (2010) – Inequality and Equity During Rapid Growth Process – New Delhi, Oxford University Press
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34. Birla G.D – In the Shadow of the Mahatma – Bombay: Orient Longmans – 1953
35. Bose, Nirmal. K – Days with Gandhi – Calcutta: Nishana, 1953
36. Chatterjee, Margaret – Gandhi’s Religious Thought – New Delhi: Macmillan, 1983
37. Weber, Thomas – On the Salt March, New Delhi: Harper Collins, 1997

