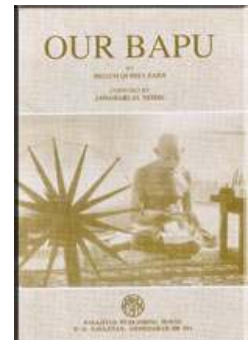


# Our Bapu

By: Begum Qudsia Zaidi



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## FOREWORD

By Jawaharlal Nehru

About a year ago, Qudsia Zaidi asked me to write a foreword to a little book about Gandhiji, which she had written especially for children. I pleaded lack of time and a reluctance to accept this suggestion. She was, however, insistent and did not wish to hurry me at all. It became difficult for me to continue to say no to her, because she had put her heart in the little book she had written. It was something much more than a book to her and the story of Gandhi obviously meant a great deal to her.

For a year her manuscript has been with me, a constant reminder of what I was expected, and yet was so reluctant, to do. At last I took this manuscript with me to Sonamarg in the Upper Sind Valley of Kashmir, and there, in sight of the high mountains and the glaciers, I thought again of the story of Gandhi.

Why was I reluctant to write anything on this subject ? I do not quite know myself, but whenever I think of Gandhiji, I have a feeling of inadequacy about myself. Whenever I think of writing about him, the conviction grows that I cannot do any justice to the theme. Those of us, who lived and grew up in the shadow of that personality, had visions of greatness and of many-sided vitality, which cannot easily be expressed to others. It was a personal and powerful experience which moulded our own lives. How can that personal experience be expressed adequately in writing ? And so, whatever one writes about Gandhiji, seems trite, rather insignificant and utterly inadequate.

And yet this generation that had seen him and touched him and knew him somewhat, will pass away. Indeed it is passing already. He will be remembered then by records and writings and by tradition which plays such an important part in the history of a race.

It is four and a half years since he died. He belongs not only to history but to the myth and legend of India, one of the great ones who come from time to time to enlighten us and ennoble us and to fill us with a new vitality.

It is right that our children and our children's children should know something of this story which has a certain epic quality about it, and even though they may miss the living presence, yet they will learn something not only about Gandhiji but about the ancient spirit and eternal message India, which he represented so magnificently.

I welcome this little book therefore and wish it success.

New Delhi,

September 1, 1952

## INTRODUCTION

### Hari Learns About Gandhi

It was six in the evening when little Hari returned home. He found the house very quiet. His father was not at his hookah<sup>1</sup> nor was his mother cooking in the kitchen. The silence and the stillness frightened him. He looked for his mother all over the house and at last found her sitting in a corner and sobbing.

Hari had never seen his mother in tears before. And when he saw her crying, he too burst into tears. After a little while, he asked his mother in a voice that was choked with tears: "Whatever is the matter, mother? Why are you crying?" Hari's heart missed a beat, as she spoke in slow, broken words: "Gandhi ... Gandhi ,,. is dead." "How did it happen, mother ? Only yesterday father took me to his prayer meeting. And I went up to him and touched his feet. He stroked my cheek tenderly and said, 'Well, son, I hope you are not being rowdy and naughty anymore ?' Mother dear, only yesterday he was quite hale and hearty." But at these words, the mother cried even more bitterly than before. With sobs and tears, Hari asked again, "But how did it happen, mother ? How did Gandhi pass away?"

"How shall I tell you, my child ? A mad man shot him dead yesterday. Our beloved Gandhi was killed."

"But, mother dear, Gandhi could not have harmed that man in any way. He was good, so very good."

"Yes, my child, this is a strange world, and those who are truthful and love God are not liked by many. Truth is bitter and very few can bear to be told that which is not pleasant,"

Hari could control himself no longer. He flew into a rage and shouted: "Just let me have father's gun, mother, and I shall kill the rascal who killed our Gandhi ."

"No, no, my child," said the mother, "you mustn't do any such thing. That would be very wrong. Gandhi has taught us that it is a sin to kill. You saw him and met

him, Hari. but you have hardly understood him, I fear. Let me tell you something about him. You may be surprised to know that as from you or from any other common child. But as he grew up, he strove to reach the heights of greatness. By love and service alone he became a saint as great as Gautama Buddha.<sup>2</sup>Our country has never had a truer servant, yet he was its uncrowned king as well. He reigned over the hearts of over four hundred million men and women. And men and women not merely bowed before him and paid him homage, they loved him from the bottom of their hearts. From the richest man in the country to the poorest beggar, everyone looked upon Gandhi as a father, and called him Bapu.<sup>3</sup> For his heart grieved with others in their sorrow and rejoiced with them in their happiness. His love of the poor was boundless. In fact, he himself lived like any other poor man in the country, wearing only a khadi<sup>4</sup> dhoti<sup>5</sup> and a khadi chadar.<sup>6</sup> He drank goat's milk and lived on boiled vegetables. He was, indeed, a very great saint."

"And, mother, how fond Gandhi was of little children! How he used to joke with them, and talk to them, and take them out for long walks! In the company of children, he would himself become a child. Mother dear, do tell me the life-story of Gandhi-the whole story."

"Very well, my son. I shall try to tell you something of the story of Bapu's life. I am not working today in the kitchen, for who can think of a meal to-night? Your father has gone to our neighbor's house to listen in to the radio for more news. In the meantime, I shall tell you the story of Bapu's life."

And then Hari's mother began to narrate the life-story of Bapu.

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1. *A water pipe smoked in the East.*
  2. *Great Indian prophet who preached love and non-violence*
  3. *An affectionate term meaning father.*
  4. *Hand-spun and hand-woven cloth.*
  5. *A long piece of cloth which many Indians wear instead of trousers*
  6. *A shawl wrapped round the shoulders.*

## 01. THE GANDHI FAMILY

"To the north of Bombay lies Porbandar, which is one of the states of Kathiawar. The capital of that state is a port and town of the same name. Many, many years ago, when your grandfather was very young, younger even than you are, there lived in Porbandar a man called Karamchand Gandhi. He was a bania by caste. Most banias are traders and not well-educated but all the members of his family were well-read and, for three generations, they had held the posts of Ministers<sup>7</sup> in different states of Kathiawar.

Karamchand was an honest, brave and large-hearted man. He was widely respected and his word was law unto the people. But he was rather hot-tempered, and the people were therefore afraid of him. He always spoke the truth, and wielded great power. He used to settle disputes even amongst the various rulers of Kathiawar.

Karamchand lived in Porbandar for a number of years. Then he took up office at Rajkot, one of the smaller Kathiawar states. There were no railway trains then, and the slow bullock-cart used to take five days to cover the distance between Porbandar and Rajkot. The ruler of Rajkot, popularly known as the Thakore Saheb, held Karamchand in high esteem, and, within a few years, he appointed him Dewan<sup>8</sup> of his state.

Karamchand was very unlucky in his family life. He had married thrice, and each time his wife had died, without bearing him any children. At the age of forty he was married for the fourth time to one Putlibai, and this union was blessed with one daughter and three sons.

Both Karamchand and Putlibai were deeply religious and very truthful. They would visit the local temple, every day, and offer worship, according to custom. But Putlibai was more religious than her husband. She would go daily to the temple for worship, and she would keep all the fasts prescribed by Hindu custom. Even when she fell ill, she would not give up her fasts.

Putlibai was not only deeply religious, she was also very clever and wise. She was greatly respected by the Ranis<sup>9</sup> of the Rajkot Palace, and the Queen Mother never did anything without consulting her. Between Putlibai's eldest child and her youngest, there was a difference of only six years. The youngest was born in 1869, that is, about eighty years ago. He was



nothing much to look at, but somehow he was the favourite of the entire family, and Karamchand, Putlibai and the other three children were very fond of him. The three elder children would rush into the room again and again to see their little brother and the little child would suck his tiny thumb and gaze at them with wide open eyes.

The father chose an auspicious day and named the infant, Mohandas. According to the practice in Kathiawar, the father's name, and the family name, were also added to the child's own name. And so he came to be known as Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi.

When Mohandas was five years old, he was sent to school. He would usually manage to learn his other lessons but he just could not remember the multiplication tables. Try as he might, he forgot them almost as soon as he learnt them.

Mohandas was about seven years old, when his father had to leave Porbandar for Rajkot. The children were sad to leave their oldhome, but within a few days they had already forgotten the old place and were happily settled in their new place. Putlibai was a little old fashioned. She took care to avoid the touch of people belonging to the lower castes. She was constantly telling Mohandas that he should immediately have a bath and change his clothes. Okha, the sweeper's son used to come to the house for cleaning it up, and it' ever, by mistake, Mohandas touched him, his mother would at once send him down to have a bath. Mohandas would carry out his mother's wishes and wash himself, but he

could never understand why Okha should belong to a lower caste or be looked upon as an untouchable. He soon began to wish that he could become an untouchable himself and show to the world that the meanest untouchable was in no way inferior to a high-caste Brahmin<sup>10</sup>.

In most things Mohandas was like any other child, but he was different in one respect, he would always tell the truth, no matter how much he might have to suffer for doing so. Once at School he was doing a test in English. An Englishman had come to inspect the school, and Mohandas was not able to spell a particular word correctly. The teacher tried to suggest by certain signs and gestures that he should look into his neighbours slate and copy out that word. When Mohandas did not take the hint, the teacher pressed the young boy's foot with his shoe so violently that the poor boy, was pale with pain. It just would not cross Mohandas's mind that the teacher, was asking him to look into his neighbour's slate and copy.

"But mother," asked Hari, "he must have been a funny teacher to encourage the boys to cheat. If our teacher caught us copying, he would at once turn us out of the class and give us a black mark."

"You are right, my son. But what is most remarkable is the honesty shown by Mohandas. He just would not cheat."

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7. *Administrative heads of state departments.*

8. *Prime Minister of a Princely State.*

9. *Queens.*

10. *A member of the Hindu priestly class*



## 02. EARLY INFLUENCES

"Two stories deeply influenced the life of Mohandas. One of them was the story of Raja Harishchandra which he had seen on the stage several times."

Hari- "What is the story, mother?"

Mother- "This is how that story runs.

Many thousand years ago, there lived in our country a king who, was very truthful and very generous. A great famine once befell his land, and the kind-hearted king sold all that he possessed in order to help his people, till he became very poor. As fate would have it, the gods decided to test his truthfulness and honesty at that time of crisis. One of the gods disguised himself as a holy beggar and came to the king to ask for alms. The king brought whatever there was in the house and laid it at the feet of the holy man. But the holy man asked for more and so the king sold his personal slaves and offered the money to him. But the beggar asked for still more. 'What you have given me,' he said, 'is not enough to meet my needs! It seems that I shall have to go to the low caste man living next door and ask him for a little charity. It is a great pity that I should have to turn from the house of a great king like you and beg of a mere untouchable. But I suppose it can't be helped.' At these words the king went with the holy man to the house of his neighbour, and offered himself as a servant to the untouchable in order to meet the demands of the holy man. The holy man then went his way, and the untouchable dom assigned to the king the task of collecting fees from those who came to burn their dead at the burning ghat.

He was still working for the dom when his only son, Rohithakshan, died. His queen carried the little corpse to the burning ghat, and set about arranging the funeral pyre. Just then Harishchandra came forward and demanded the prescribed fees. The poor queen had no money, and with tears choking her voice, she said to her husband, ", she said to her husband, 'All that I possess on earth, my lord, is this sari that I am wearing.' The king's heart sank within him,

but he would not fail to do his duty. He said. 'I am helpless, my dear queen. My master's orders are that I should collect the fee before I allow the pyre to be lighted. This is my duty and I must stick to it.' The queen offered to part with her sari in payment of the fee. But she had hardly set her hand on the sari when the heavens trembled and the gods admired the courage, the devotion to truth and the sense of duty of the king and the queen. Down they came to the earth and brought back the young Rohithakshan to life, and took the king, the queen and the dom with them to heaven.

Hari, my son. this story made a very deep impression on the mind of Mohandas. He wished with all his might that he, too, like Harishchandra, could have the strength to face every danger and difficulty in the pursuit of truth. And when he grew up, he staked his life itself for the cause of truth, and the whole world wondered at the honesty and courage which enabled him to come out victorious from the severest of trials."

The mother's heart was full of emotion now, and she paused for a moment to calm herself, and then went on with the other story.

### **On Service - Shrawankumar**

"The other story which taught him to serve his fellowmen was the story of Shrawankumar. Mohandas had read how both the parents of Shrawankumar were blind and how the son would look after them and carry them where ever he went in a sling thrown across his shoulder. He would labour all day to earn a living for them and would try in every way to make them comfortable. One day, while Shrawan had gone to the stream to fetch water for his parents, King Dashrath



was out hunting in those woods. Mistook Shrawan for a deer, and let fly an arrow. Poor Shrawan was mortally wounded and he cried in great pain. But even then his thoughts were with his parents. Before dying he asked King Dashrath to carry water to his parents, and to break the news of his death to them only after they had drunk the water and quenched their thirst. King Dashrath did as

he had been told. But the parents were old and infirm. The news of the death of their beloved son was too much for them, and they cried and wailed till their hearts broke with sorrow, and they died. And what happened to King Dashrath, mother?" Hari asked.

"As the law of divine justice would have it, King Dashrath also died sorrowing for his son." "But, mother, please explain to me how these stories influenced the life of Bapu."

"The child Mohan read these stories, and he made up his mind to be truthful like Harishchandra and to serve the poor and the needy like Shrivankumar. Harishchandra and Shrivankumar became his heroes. Shrivankumar had only served his parents, but when Mohandas grew up, he gave up all his comfort and his wealth in order to serve the four hundred millions of Indians- men, women and children, Muslims and Hindus, Brahmins as well as untouchables, princes as well as beggars. For him they were all one and he loved them all equally."

Hari was listening with rapt attention and his mother was happy to see that he was so deeply interested. She could see that Hari was already beginning to feel the influence of Bapu's noble example. She then continued.

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11. *This version of the 'Story of Harishchandra' is different from the familiar South Indian version.*

12. *Low caste singer.*

13. *Cremation ground by the side of a river*

### 03. GANDHI'S MARRIAGE

"Mohandas was not even fourteen when his parents married him to a girl from Porbandar, named Kasturbai. For the time being, Mohandas was very happy, for he knew that he would get nice new clothes to wear and a new companion to play with. But when he grew up, he always condemned child-marriage and fought against this evil practice.



#### The Dominating Husband

Soon after his marriage Mohandas started ill-treating his, gentle, little wife. He would check her movements and even choose her friends for her. Kasturbai was weary of these little tyrannies, and the more Mohandas tried to control her, the more she resisted them. Very often they quarreled and would not talk to each other."

"But why did Mohandas behave in this manner, mother?"

"Well, perhaps he thought that these quarrels and differences were necessary in love.

#### Meat-Eating

Although married, Mohandas did not stop going to school. In fact, he was considered to be one of the brightest boys in the class when he reached the upper standards. He always wished that everyone should think of him as an honest and truthful boy. And if ever, by mistake, someone thought that he was telling a lie, he felt hurt and cried for hours. He was also keen on bringing to the path of virtue those of his companions who were given to bad ways; and that was why he made friends with a boy who was very much older than he and very wicked. His wife as well as well as his parents tried their best to stop this friendship, but Mohandas paid no heed to their words. By the way, Hari, there was one thing about Mohandas which I forgot to tell you. He was a very very timid boy, and would not enter a dark room. His friend knew this and he also knew that Mohandas was anxious that he should become strong and brave. So

one day, he said to him, 'Look, Mohan, there is only one way of becoming strong and that is by eating meat. See how strong and well-built the English are. Just because they eat meat they are able to rule over us Indians, who are so weak and sickly.' Mohandas, in his innocence, believed this and he agreed to start taking meat.

You know, Hari, it is forbidden by religion to eat meat. So meat was never bought or cooked in Mohandas's house. How could he then eat meat ? His friend invited Mohandas to dinner at his place. Then, he said, he would be able to take meat without his parents knowing anything about it.

On the appointed day, Mohandas reached his friend's house and sat down to dinner along with others. He tried very hard to swallow the meat, but he just couldn't do it. The poor boy got sick and left his friend's house. He returned home, but all night long he had a most restless and miserable time. It seemed to him as though a goat was bleating inside his stomach. Afterwards he tried to take meat several times, but he never liked it. He would return home quite late after he began eating meat and each time he would have to make some excuse or other to his people. But one day it occurred to him that if he had to cover up his meat-eating with lies, it was not worthwhile trying to become strong at such a price. And so he decided never again to touch meat, even if he had to remain physically weak. It was no use deceiving one's parents in order to become strong."

"But then how did he come to be so brave and fearless?" asked Hari with some surprise.

### **Ramanama**

"Well, Mohandas had given up telling lies; but he longed to get strong and to cast off all fear. There was an old servant in the house, named Rambha. She knew how afraid Mohan was of the dark. One day she casually said to him that if he should ever feel afraid in the dark, or should find 'himself in trouble, he should start praying and repeating the sacred name of Rama.<sup>14</sup>She assured him that would drive all his fear."

And did he really get rid of his fear by praying to Rama, mother ?"

"Yes, my child, there is great virtue in prayer, and God always comes to the rescue of those who call on Him in their hour of need."

"Why, then, I think I should also take to reciting Ramanama<sup>15</sup>, for I too am afraid of going in the dark."

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14. *God.*

15. *God's name.*

#### 04. GANDHI'S FIRST LESSON IN NON-VIOLENCE

"Mohandas gave up the idea of ever eating meat again, but he was now most eager to get big and grown up. Every child passes through this stage, when he tries to imitate his elders. He tries to behave and act like them and thus thinks himself to be grown up. Whenever Mohandas saw his uncle smoking, he would feel a strong desire to smoke also. When Mohandas was about fourteen, one of his friends decided to start smoking cigarettes. But neither of them had any money and cigarettes could not be had without money. The problem, however, was solved by picking up the stubs of the cigarettes that his uncle had smoked. But after a time this failed to satisfy them, and then they began to steal money from the servant's pockets in order to buy cigarettes. Very soon they felt that they could not enjoy their cigarettes when they had to smoke them in this stealthy way. They thought life was hardly worth living when they could not smoke a cigarette freely and openly as their elders did. This thought greatly disappointed them, and they decided to commit suicide. They collected the poisoned seeds of the dhatura<sup>16</sup> and decided one evening to eat them. Just when they were about to eat those seeds, it struck them that the poison might not work. What then? How could they ever face their elders after the failure? And so they gave up their idea; and from that day the desire for smoking cigarettes was gone."

"But, mother, surely he must have smoked when he grew up?"

"No, my darling. He never touched a cigarette since that day."

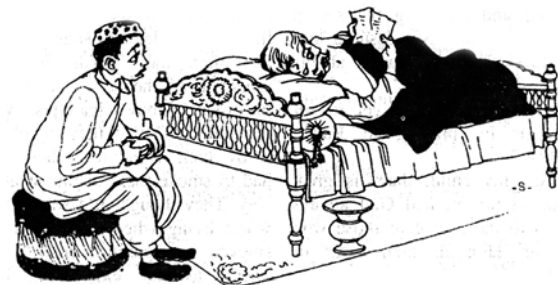
"One day, Mohandas was working at his lessons in his room when his brother came in. He was looking very worried and, coming close to Mohandas, he whispered something in his ear. The brother had gone into a debt of some twenty-five rupees, and he wanted Mohandas to help him out. After much careful thinking, Mohandas hit upon a plan. He quietly went to his brother when he was asleep, and stole a little gold from his armlet. Next morning the gold was sold and the debt was cleared."

"But, mother, you have always told me that stealing is wrong. How then can you explain Mohandas's action?"

"Hari dear, children often do wrong without knowing what they are doing. But good children are sorry for their mistakes when they come to know of them and never commit them again.

"In order to help one brother, Mohandas had stolen a hit of gold of the other brother. But by doing so he had lost all peace of mind and he could not decide what amends he should make for the wrong that he had done. At last he decided to tell his father the whole truth. He wrote a letter to him, telling him all about the incident. At the same time he promised his father that he would never steal again. He asked his father to punish him as severely as he wished and begged him not to feel pained about it in any way. The father was ill at the time and had to lie in bed all day. Mohandas went up to him, handed the letter and sat down quietly near the bed.

As the father read that letter, tears began to roll down his cheeks. And as he watched the tears, Mohandas's heart sank with shame and remorse. His father's tears affected him very deeply, and this time he took a silent vow never



As the father read the letter, tears began to roll down his cheeks.

to do an unrighteous deed again. This incident marked a turning-point in his life and he strove ever after to be ever good and truthful."

"But, mother, why did his father cry so bitterly? Why did he not beat Mohandas or punish him in some other way?"

"Because, my son, Mohandas's courage and truthfulness moved him deeply. If he had given the boy a beating, that would not have been so effective as his own gentle suffering. And that suffering and that love left its impression on Mohandas far more deeply than any beating could ever have done.

This was Mohan's first lesson in non-violence. And later on it was this very weapon with which he fought the British, and won freedom for his country.



The incident of the stealing was soon forgotten, but the father began to love Mohan and trust him more and more. This was only natural, for had not Mohan shown how good and truthful he was?"

"I promise, mother, I, too, will always tell the truth, and then I am sure father will love me more and more."

"Yes, my son. Not your father alone, but everyone who loves and honours the truthful."

"But let us proceed with the story, mother. What happened to Mohan after that?"

"His father's health now began to decline. Everyone in the house did what he could for him. But Mohandas took special pains to nurse him and look after him. He would rush home from school as soon as possible, and then attend on his father. He would give him his medicines, change his clothes, and massage his aching legs and feet for hours. One night, he had just left his father and gone to his room for something, when a servant knocked at his door and told him that his father had passed away. Mohandas could never forgive himself for not having been near his father during his last moments and this thought hurt him and pained him throughout his life. He was about seventeen when he lost his father.

"Alas ! Poor boy ! How bitterly he must have cried at his father's death!"

"Yes, my son. But today he himself is dead and the whole of India, nay, the whole world, weeps for him and mourns his death!"

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16. *Poisonous plant.*

## 05. IN ENGLAND

"Mohandas passed his Matriculation in 1887 at the age of eighteen and on the advice of an old family friend, his elder brother sent him to England to study law. People in our country then used to think that there in England, one could not be as religious or as pious as one could in India. And it was with great difficulty that Mohandas's people agreed to send him abroad. But before allowing him finally to go to England, his mother made him promise three things—firstly, that he would not eat meat, secondly, that he would not drink, and thirdly, that he would not make friends with girls. Mohandas gave his solemn word that he would do as his mother wished, and then, with the blessings of his people, he left for England, alone.

Before he left India, Mohandas had plenty of English clothes made for himself. He bought shining shoes and bright ties. At first he found it difficult to knot his tie, but once he had learnt how to do it, he liked ties more than anything else in the English dress.

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### Western Attire



When the ship touched the shores of England, Mohandas thought that he should set foot on English soil, dressed in his best suit. He took out a white flannel suit and wore it and walked down the ship's gangway<sup>17</sup> in great style. But when he looked around he noticed that the others were wearing dark-coloured suits, and were staring at his white suit in amazement. He felt so uneasy that he did not know where to turn. With the greatest difficulty he managed to reach his hotel. The next day happened to be a Sunday, and his luggage could not be brought from the docks. So for three days poor Mohandas had to wear his white suit, but he kept to his room most of the time and hardly stirred out.

He saw that fashionable people in England wore top hats, and he too wanted to buy one. So one day he walked into a hat shop, but being very shy, he bought the first top hat that caught his eye, without even trying it on. When he came home and tried it, he found that the hat was too big for him. Luckily, his large ears prevented the hat from slipping down and covering his eyes."

"How funny he must have looked with his huge hat covering his small face! I wish I was there, mother. I would have taken a snap of him."

"I am quite sure, too, he must have looked very funny. Most Indian boys, when they get to England spend money quite freely. Mohandas was no exception. He learned to dance and play on the violin; he went to the finest tailoring shops and had some very expensive suits made; he even bought a gold watch for himself. In short, he spent money as he had never done before. He had, however, one very good habit; he would keep an account of every penny that he spent. And one day it occurred to him that if he continued to waste his time and money in idle pleasures, he would never be able to study, and surely he could not expect his brother to be sending him money indefinitely. He at once took out his account-book and carefully examined it. He marked those items which appeared to him useless and unnecessary, and made up his mind not to spend money on them again. He gave up his two-roomed flat and moved into a small room. He learnt to cook cheap and wholesome meals for himself and even avoided traveling by bus whenever he could.

Along with his legal studies, he read books about the world's great religions. As a child he had seen Jains, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Parsis and Christians coming to his father and having long discussions about religion. He would sit quietly and listen to these talks with attention, and he had thus learnt to respect all religions. Quite early in his life he had come to the conclusion that being good was the basis of all religions, and that no man could be good unless he was truthful.

It was in England too that he began to take a keen interest in nursing the sick. With the help of a doctor friend he even learnt to nurse those suffering from leprosy, and within a short while he acquired very great skill in this work."

"But, mother, how could he pick up this work so quickly ?"

"You see, Hari, once you put your heart into a work, it comes to you very easily. Mohandas found great happiness in serving the sick and needy.

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### **Visit to Paris**

He had heard several of his friends speak very highly of the city of Paris. They had told him that Paris was a very beautiful and well laid-out city. Shortly before he was due to return to India a great exhibition was to be held in Paris. He thought this was a great opportunity for seeing the exhibition as well as the city of Paris at the same time. A very tall tower of steel had been built in the middle of the exhibition grounds. This tower was nearly three times as high as the Qutub Minar in Delhi. Every visitor to the exhibition made a point of climbing to the top of this tower. They would sit down and have refreshments in a restaurant specially built on the top of the tower, and would survey the exhibition from that height. Mohandas too bought a ticket to go to the top of the tower and he went to the restaurant and had a meal there.

After he had gone round the exhibition, he went out sight-seeing and visited all the important places in Paris. What impressed him most were the old churches of the city, particularly the church of Notre Dame."

"And wasn't he quite thrilled with the tower too? "

"Strange to say, he did not much care for that tower, but he liked very much the old buildings of Paris.

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### **Mother dies**

Mohandas was soon called to the bar and in June 1891 he got ready to return to India. June and July are usually rough months on the ocean, and so it was after a rather uncomfortable voyage that he at last reached Bombay. His elder brother came to the port to meet him. He had all along been very anxious to meet his mother, but when he learnt from his brother that his mother had died,

his heart sank within him and tears rose to his eyes at the thought that when he got home, he would not find his beloved mother waiting at the doorstep to greet him. But he checked his tears, and not even a sigh escaped his lips."

"How could he possibly keep back his tears, mother ? Anyone else would have cried his heart out at such a blow."

"But he was not like any other ordinary person. Mohandas Gandhi was different from the rest."

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*17. Passage on ship.*

## 06. IN SOUTH AFRICA

His brother had already rented an office for him in Bombay. He put up his name-plate MOHANDAS KARAMCHAND GANDHI, BARRISTER-AT-LAW, and started practice as a lawyer. But he was not able to get much work in Bombay, and so after six months he shifted to Rajkot, He had better lucks there, and within a short time, he was doing very good work. But he felt unhappy and out of place there. The people of Rajkot were dishonest and untruthful, and he wanted to leave the place.

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### Racism in South Africa

Fortunately for him, the proprietors of the firm of Messrs. Dada Abdullah & Co. were great friends of his family and were at the time fighting an important lawsuit in South Africa. They engaged him for their case and sent him to Durban.

In South Africa, Gandhiji found himself in an entirely new and different world. The white people there treated the coloured races with contempt. Every Indian, whether he was a lawyer or an office worker, was called a coolie.<sup>18</sup> And those who actually worked as coolies, were treated even worse than animals. No dark man was allowed even to enter a hotel, much less stay there. He could not walk on a pavement when a white man was walking along that pavement. It was quite common for Europeans to push the Indians off the pavement. Nor could an Indian go before an European with his turban on. He was not allowed to travel in the same coach or railway compartment in which a white man was traveling."

"It must have been terrible for Gandhiji to stay there," said Hari.

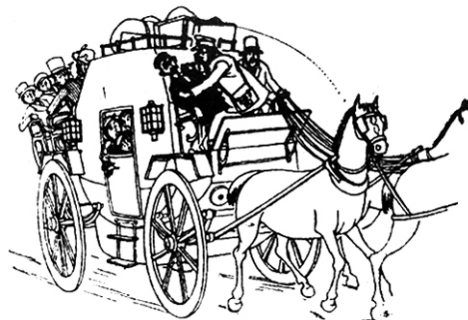
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### Pushed out of the train

"I shall tell you a story about his life there, and from that you will understand the difficulties he had to face when he was in South Africa. One day Gandhiji

wanted to travel by coach from Durban to Pretoria. The conductor would not allow him to sit inside the coach with the European passengers. As his business was urgent, he decided to sit outside with the driver. The conductor himself was inside, and the coach started on its journey. But he soon found out where Gandhiji was. He would not allow Gandhiji to sit next to the driver who was a white man. He ordered him to leave his seat and sit at the feet of the driver.

Gandhiji refused to obey this order. The conductor began to shout and swear at Gandhiji and he hit him and tried to push him off the coach. Firmly and courageously Gandhiji held on to the handle and refused to be thrown out. For a while the other passengers looked on and seemed to enjoy the



fun, but they soon began to feel that the conductor was going too far and they scolded him. So when the conductor saw that even the white men were siding with Gandhiji, he let him go and allowed him to sit with the driver."

Hari was greatly upset when he heard of this incident, and he began to cry. The mother tried to console him and said, "Why! My child, you are crying! Surely you are not so timid. This was a very small incident in Gandhiji's life. Later in his life he suffered much more for the sake of others. And he never uttered a word of complaint. When people acted unjustly towards him, he never got angry with them. He would feel hurt and sad, but he never cried like you." Hari quickly wiped away his tears with his hand, and the mother continued her story.

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### **Call for unity among Indians**

"When Gandhiji saw that the Indians in Africa had to put up with insults and suffer at the hands of the whites, he decided that all the Indians there-Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Christians and Parsis should unite together and appeal to the government. He brought all his countrymen together, and in 1894 the Indian National Congress of South Africa was founded. Every Indian, rich or poor, gave

his whole-hearted support to the Congress. In course of time the authorities began to give a sympathetic hearing to the complaints of the Indian community."

"But surely, mother, there were Indians in South Africa before Gandhiji went there? And, as you said, the white people had always treated them badly. Why, then, didn't someone think of improving their lot?"

"That was because no one felt for the sufferings of others as Gandhiji did. Gandhiji's heart melted with pity for the poor and for those in pain. And whenever he found the strong treating the weak cruelly he would risk his very life to fight such injustice. It was, therefore, natural for him to take up the cause of the suffering Indians in South Africa.

For two years he served the people selflessly, his name became well known with the young and the old alike. They called him Gandhi Bhai<sup>19</sup> or Gandhiji, out of their great respect and affection for him. And his legal practice also rose and he became one of the leading Indian lawyers in South Africa.

The Indians in South Africa soon found that they could not do without Gandhiji. They wanted his help to put an end to their hard-ships. So they asked him to settle down in that country, to practise there as a lawyer and at the same time serve the cause of his countrymen. Gandhiji agreed to their request and decided to settle there, but he asked their permission to go home to India and bring his wife and children.

In those days, it used to take nearly twenty-five days to reach India from South Africa, and during the voyage, Gandhiji felt bored and found time hanging heavily on his hands. He was looking round for something to occupy him, when he discovered a rnunshi<sup>20</sup> among his fellow passengers, and he started taking lessons in the Urdu language.

On reaching India, Gandhiji told his countrymen the real condition of the Indians in South Africa. He spoke to many people and wrote to the newspapers. to the newspapers. He thus succeeded in winning the support of important public men like Sir Phiroze Shah Mehta and Gokhale, and they promised to do



their best to help him in his work. Meanwhile he was asked to return to South Africa at once. At once he left with his wife and children. The sea was very rough and Gandhiji was busy, looking after those who were sea-sick. Soon he was back in Durban in the midst of his old friends and associates".

Hari's mother now remembered that he had not eaten and that he might be hungry. She stopped in the middle of her story, and said to her son, "There is some food left over from the morning. I shall warm it up for you. You had better eat something before we go on with the story."

"No, mother," said Hari, "if no one else in the house is eating, I shall not either. Please, mother dear, go on with your story,."

In vain did the mother try to persuade her little son to eat something. Hari was most eager to hear all about Gandhiji's life. And so she continued the story.

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18. *Porter.*

19. *Brother*

20. *A scholar or man of letters*

## 07. BRAVING INJUSTICE IN SOUTH AFRICA

### Assault on Gandhi

"During his stay in India, Gandhiji had been trying to tell people of the hardships which the Indians in South Africa suffer at the hands of the white people. The white men therefore strongly disliked Gandhiji's activities. And the South African newspapers gave a very wrong and misleading account of what he was trying to do. So the whites became indignant with him. If they could have had their way, they would have done away with him. But the hand of God was with Gandhiji, and he was not afraid. He had hardly come down from the ship, when he was surrounded by a group of European boys and ruffians. They threw stones and rotten eggs at him and kicked him and handled him roughly. Poor Gandhiji could hardly do anything to defend himself. Luckily the wife of one of his European friends was passing that way. She ran through the crowd and came and stood in front of him. Seeing a white woman protect him, the crowd of hooligans gradually melted away, and she took him to the house of his friend Rustomji. In the evening, however, Rustomji's house was surrounded by a white mob, who shouted and yelled and threatened to hang Gandhiji on the sour apple tree. The crowd looked mad and murderous and Gandhiji's life was in real danger. It was with the greatest difficulty that his friends managed to rescue him and take him to a place of safety.



Gandhiji was surrounded by European ruffians.....

Gandhiji could have easily got those hooligans punished. But he had not forgotten the lesson of love and forgiveness which his father had taught him. He showed no desire to avenge himself on the white people. This had a great effect on the whites. Their hatred for the Indians became less

fierce.

When the Boer War broke out in South Africa, Gandhiji helped the English against the Boers. Anyone else would have used this excellent opportunity to have his revenge upon the English people. But Gandhiji always believed in returning good for evil, and in winning over the enemy with love and kindness. He stuck to his noble ideal. He made Englishmen believe in his own goodness and sincerity as well as in the goodness and sincerity of the other Indians living in South Africa.

God had blessed Gandhiji with everything that man could desire-wife and children and money. But he was not happy and his mind was not at peace. As with Gautama the Buddha, comfort and luxury made him uneasy, and he felt that the way to find peace lay in giving up worldly comfort and luxury, and living a life of simplicity. And so he decided to do everything himself: he washed his own clothes, swept his rooms himself, cooked his food and even cleaned his lavatory himself.

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### Barber denies service

One day Gandhiji needed a hair-cut, and he went to a white barber's shop. I have told you already how the white people hated the Indians. The white barber refused to serve Gandhiji. And what do you think Gandhiji did? He quietly returned home and sat down to cut his own hair. He had never practiced hair-cutting before and you can imagine, the hair was cropped very unevenly and clumsily, as though a mouse had been nibbling at it while he was asleep. His friends laughed at him when he went to the court the next day. But when he told them how he had been driven to do the job himself, they were all stunned. And since that day, he never kept the hair-style of the west and always cut his hair himself."



"I am sure, mother, that day when Gandhiji saw himself in the mirror, he must have had a good laugh at himself."

"Yes, of course. He always enjoyed a joke, even at his own expense. But, to go on with our story, when the Boer war ended in 1902, Gandhiji longed to return home and serve his people there. At last he decided to pack up and sail for India. The Indians in South Africa showed their gratitude by giving him a number of valuable presents. To his wife Kasturbai they presented a lovely diamond necklace. But Gandhiji handed over everything to the local Congress office, so that these could be used in the service of the people. He believed that a servant of the people had no right to accept presents and keep them for his personal use.

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### Returns to India

Gandhiji returned to India in 1906. Preparations for the Calcutta session of the Indian National Congress were then in full swing. Every Indian's heart was set on winning freedom. But they lacked unity and organization. They had little discipline or sense of duty. They had not learnt that the smaller things of life were as important as the bigger ones, and they did not understand that there was dignity in all labour. At this time, Gandhiji offered his services to the Congress. He took upon himself the job of cleaning up the visitors' rooms every day. It was at this session of the Congress that he told the Indian leaders all about the conditions of the Indians in South Africa, and made them keenly interested in their cause.

After the Congress session he returned to his home in Rajkot, visiting Banaras, Agra, Jaipur and Palanpur on the way. He travelled third class all along, and his total expenses throughout the journey came to only thirty-one rupees! And he travelled very light. His entire luggage consisted of a small tin box for carrying food, and a bag in which he kept a warm coat, a dhoti, a shirt and a towel. And these simple habits remained with him ever after. Till the last day of his life, he travelled third class."

"But, mother, didn't Gandhiji carry a soap and a tooth-brush in his bag?"

"No, my child. He used a natural tooth-brush, what we call a dantan in Hindustani."

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21. A thin green branch of tree used for scrubbing teeth

## 08. THE BIRTH OF SATYAGRAHA

"I mentioned the name of Gokhale a little while ago. He was one of the most important Indian leaders of those times. He had a great affection for Gandhiji and looked upon him as a younger brother. On his advice Gandhiji decided to set up practice again in Bombay. He had hardly settled down to work, when cable after cable came asking him to return to South Africa. The Indians there wanted him to come and place their grievances before Mr. Joseph Chamberlain, the British Minister for Colonies, then visiting Africa, and try to have them redressed. Gandhiji saw how important this task was and felt that he must go.

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### Struggle for Justice in South Africa

He immediately left for South Africa. On reaching there, he gave up practicing as a lawyer, though it meant giving up a good income, and started a newspaper in which he could make known the needs and difficulties of the Indian community. There was an outbreak of plague in the country, and Gandhiji set out nursing the sick and the helpless. And with renewed vigour he worked to win for Indians equal rights with Britishers. He also went on fasts and penances

in order to purify his inner self; he carefully studied the Gita<sup>22</sup> and even learnt by heart thirteen chapters of this great book. He now fully believed that one could realize God only by giving up pomp and luxury.



Gandhiji had come to believe that all men were equal, and that there could be no distinction between the rich and the poor. He decided to spend his time with the poor and the common people. So he settled in a small village, from where he brought out his paper, and lived humbly and simply with the villagers. His way of life impressed his English friends very deeply and three of them

even came to live with him in this small colony.

Those were days in Africa when a number of laws were being passed against the Asians. Under Gandhiji's advice and leadership, the Indians decided to resist those laws by offering satyagraha.<sup>23</sup> This was his main weapon in the non-violent struggle against injustice and foreign rule. With rare courage and capacity for suffering, peacefully and non-violently, the Indians in South Africa faced the batons and the bullets of their white rulers. They went to jail willingly and cheerfully: Gandhiji was himself arrested for disobeying the law and sent to jail in 1908. This was his first imprisonment, for as you know, Hari, later on in his life he was arrested and sentenced to imprisonment many times. He had hardly served his sentence for twenty days, when the Prime Minister, General Smuts, called him to Pretoria, to discuss terms for an agreement. But Gandhiji replied that he would discuss the terms of settlement only after the Government had released all those who had been sent to jail along with him. All his companions were at once set free; a huge meeting of the Indians was held at the mosque in Johannesburg and it was unanimously decided to open negotiations for a settlement with the Government. A few fiery Pathans, 24 however, did not like the idea of coming to terms with the Government. One of them even assaulted Gandhiji and injured him seriously on the head."

"But, mother, didn't Gandhiji get that Pathan arrested and punished?"

"Not at all, my child. Gandhiji refused to take any action against him. He believed that his suffering would ultimately move even his enemies. And he was not wrong. For, when the Pathan came to know of Gandhiji's large-heartedness, he was filled with sorrow. He came to ask for his forgiveness and became one of his most loyal friends and supporters ever after.

Then came 1914. On the 4th of August, England declared war against Germany. It dragged in almost all the countries of the world. It became a world war. Gandhiji felt that at such a time his country would need his services. He first went to London, and after staying there for a short while, he returned to India. He arrived in Bombay on the 9th of January, 1915, dressed in a Kathiawari coat, a puggaree (headgear) and a dhoti of Indian mill-made cloth."

"I am sure he must have looked very smart in those clothes. I wonder why and when he gave up that dress."

"Quite so, my child. He did look very smart in those clothes. But in 1919 he realized that millions of his countrymen could not afford even a shirt, much less a coat. And so he himself took to wearing only what the poorest of his countrymen used to wear-namely, a short dhoti, and a chadar. And that is why you could never see him dressed in a shirt or a jacket."

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22. One of the most important Hindu holy books

23. Non-violent protest

24. Persons from the north western frontier (now in Pakistan)

## 09. THE BEGINNING OF INDIA'S FREEDOM STRUGGLE

### The Kochrab Ashram

"In 1915, under Gokhale's advice, Gandhiji started a small Ashram in a Gujarat village named Kochrab. This was meant to be a school for training national workers; everyone in the Ashram had to take a vow never to tell a lie, to give up violence, to eat the plainest of food, and never to steal or to get money for his personal use. He had also to practice fearlessness, to use articles that were made in India, to wear only hand-spun and hand-woven clothes, to help to educate the people through the medium of the national language and to try to remove untouchability to the best of his ability.

In the Kochrab Ashram, members of the untouchable caste lived and moved freely with the rest. All were considered equal: no one was looked upon as being higher or lower than the rest. In the beginning the inmates of the Ashram thought this rather strange, but they soon became used to it. Some even resented it, for such thing had never been known in India before; and the richer patrons withheld the money which they had offered to give to the Ashram. One evening Gandhiji found that there was not even pie with which to run the Ashram and he felt greatly worried. He was sitting helpless and anxious not knowing what to do, when, lo! a stranger walked up to him and handed him a purse containing thirteen thousand rupees. God never forsakes those who serve Him truly!

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### Given the title 'Mahatma'

Gandhiji's earnestness, goodness and self-sacrifice quickly became well known in the country. The poet Rabindranath Tagore called him a Mahatma (i.e., the great soul). Very soon he came to be known by that title all over India, and wherever he went people would come flocking in thousands, to get a glimpse of him, and to touch his feet or kiss his hands.



There was then in India, a wave of discontent, even hatred against the British. The patience of the Indians had been tried to the breaking point. They were restless and desperate. Gandhiji was anxious to keep alive the passion for freedom, but he also wanted to drive out hatred from the hearts of his countrymen. He knew full well that it would be no joke to fight against the British Government. It was necessary to train the men and collect the resources of the entire country. And so he devoted himself to the service of the common people and worked hard to improve their condition and to spread the message of freedom far and wide.

The war between England and Germany was then at its height, and England needed all the help that India could give her. The English asked Gandhiji to give them his support. Knowing how the British Government had been treating the Indians, no one would have agreed to give them any help. But Gandhiji believed that one should never try to take advantage of the enemy's difficulties. He wanted to help the British in their hour of need and, by placing them under a deep debt of gratitude, compel them to do the right thing by India by giving her freedom. Moreover, Mahatmaji felt that the English as a nation were not bad: the unjust treatment of the Indians was the result of the foolish and wrong policy of a few ignorant English officials who came out to India. He believed that the English people could be won over with love, and so he put forth all his effort to get his country's support for the war. He travelled from village to village, persuading people to join the army. He spared himself no pains and worked so hard that he fell ill. Hardly had he recovered, when news came that the war had ended and that no further recruitment was necessary. During this illness he took to drinking goat's milk and since then right until the day of his death, he lived only on boiled vegetables and goat's milk."

"How happy Gandhiji and all his countrymen must have been when the war ended !"

"Of course, yes. Everyone rejoiced when the fighting ceased. But our country's problems had yet to be solved. Everyone was expecting that when the war had

ended, and peace and prosperity was once again established, India would get some measure of freedom in return for her services and sacrifices in the war. But freedom and peace seemed still a long way off; in fact, the British tightened their hold over India still further. They passed new laws by which they could put our greatest leaders in jail on the slightest grounds. A wave of resentment swept over the whole country. From Calcutta to Karachi, and from Kashmir to Cape Comorin, men and women burned with rage and indignation at these new laws with which the British Government sought to crush the liberties of the Indian people. Mass meetings were held all over the country to protest against the high-handedness of the Government. Young and old, men and women, Hindus and Muslims, all were ready to defy the laws, and lay down their very lives for the country.

Mahatmaji rose to the occasion with his message of love and non-violence and a new hope emerged from the gloom that had fallen over the country. With one voice, all classes of Indians demanded freedom for their country. Mahatmaji became the natural leader of India. The very first condition that he laid was that the fight against British Imperialism must be carried on peacefully and non-violently. He gave the call for a one-day strike throughout the country. All business was stopped. Men and women fasted, and prayers for the independence of India were offered in temples and mosques.

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### **The massacre at Jalianwala**

The response of the country to Mahatmaji's call was amazing, and the Government was now rather afraid. They tried to terrorize the people with stricter and newer measures. Have you heard of the Jallianwala Bagh massacre in Amritsar? That happened on the 13th of April, 1919. A large number of people had gathered in that Bagh to conduct a peaceful meeting. General Dyer opened fire on that crowd and mercilessly killed innocent men, women and children. Elsewhere in the Punjab, too, thousands were put into prison. Even the barest civil liberties were taken away from the people.

The Government declared martial law or military rule in the Punjab. Hundreds were killed and thousands arrested. Communication with the outside world was entirely cut off, and we were quite in the dark about what was happening in the Punjab. But news about the happenings in the Punjab could not be suppressed for long, and after a few days the story of Punjab's woes reached Mahatmaji's ears. His heart melted with pity for the suffering men and women of the Punjab. He could not find any peace of mind and he decided to visit the Punjab. But before he could reach Amritsar, he was arrested and sent back to Bombay.

The British Government now turned all its might against Mahatma Gandhi, and strove hard to crush him. But Mahatmaji faced the Government with greater courage and fearlessness. He worked restlessly to bring together all classes and sections of people, and within a short time, he succeeded in his task. Hindus as well as Muslims rallied under the same banner and fought the battle of independence, standing shoulder to shoulder. But this unity alone was not enough: there were many more things that had to be done before freedom could be won. The most important task perhaps was that of removing fear and suspicion as between the rich and the poor, the tenant and the landlord, the untouchable and the Brahmin, the British and the Indian. And he was never tired of telling the people that the only way to drive out fear and win freedom was by pursuing truth and non-violence.

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### The message of Non-violence



This message of non-violence and love of Mahatma Gandhi was first given to the people of India by Gautama Buddha. But through the lapse of centuries we had forgotten that lesson.

Mahatmaji reminded us anew that taking life was the greatest of sins. He asked the people to fight for the freedom of the country not with weapons of war but

peacefully and non-violently. He sent his disciples all over the country. They went from village to village, bringing to the people the message of freedom and preparing them for the battle of independence.

He also told people that they should learn to read and write, and spin and weave, and give up drinking and abolish untouchability. It was Gandhiji's rule that he should first practise himself what he wished to ask others to do. And so he began to learn to spin and within a short time, he could spin like an expert with both his hands.

While Mahatmaji was trying to rouse the people and prepare them for the fight for freedom, the visit of the Prince of Wales to India was announced. The people of India were in no mood to welcome him. They believed that the British Government was sending out the Prince of Wales to India only to remind her people of the glory and the might of the British Empire. The people under Gandhiji's lead, therefore, decided to boycott all processions and celebrations in honour of the Prince's visit. And so it came about that while, on the one hand, the Royal procession was passing through the decorated but deserted streets of Bombay, on the other hand, people were collecting foreign cloth and making a bonfire of it. For the cry had gone round that swadeshi<sup>25</sup> or the building up of Indian industries was essential for winning political freedom.

All this, however, was happening in a most peaceful and orderly manner. But a few rash men lost their balance and scenes of violence were witnessed in Ahmedabad and Bombay. Stones were thrown at a few Englishmen, people who had organized the reception for the Prince of Wales were beaten, tramcars were burnt down and liquor shops were looted. As soon as Mahatmaji heard of these happenings, he visited the scenes of these outbursts in person. At one place he saw two injured constables lying unconscious.

He was surrounded by the crowd, and the air rang with shouts of "Glory to Mahatmaji ! Victory to Mahatmaji !" Great was his grief when he looked round at the damage and devastation that had been done in his name. He scolded the people severely and told the crowd, that to fight the Government in that manner was his defeat as well as the defeat of non-violence. He would have

nothing to do with a freedom which was won through violence. The crowd grieved very much when they heard him speak thus. Gandhiji was still trying to pacify the people and arranging to remove the wounded police constables to the hospital, when news came that the police had opened fire on a crowd in another part of the city. This was more than the people could bear. They were wild with rage and once again there was looting of shops and burning of tramcars. Disorder and violence reigned again.

Gandhiji saw that the people were getting out of control. He decided to undertake a fast. He said, 'I want to make penance for the wrongs done by the people, and I shall break my fast only when those Hindus and Muslims who have resorted to violence fully repent and ask for forgiveness of the Parsis and the Christians whom they have wronged.'

Gandhiji's wishes were immediately carried out. The leaders of all the groups came to him and assured him that those who had acted violently had already apologized individually to those whom they had assaulted, and that the latter had freely forgiven them. Only after this assurance was given, did Gandhiji break his fast. And since that day he took a vow that he would observe complete silence every Monday until India was free."

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25. *Indian made articles*

## 10. THE FREEDOM STRUGGLE REACHES ITS HEIGHT

"After the Bombay incidents, Gandhiji was filled with doubts about his methods, and he was not quite sure if he should continue his non-violent civil disobedience movement. He was afraid lest there should be fresh outbursts of violence. But he received news that, in the other parts of the country, strikes and satyagraha had been perfectly peaceful and non-violent. This gave him hope: and he decided to continue the struggle.

As a result of the strikes and the boycott campaign, many people in the country had given up the use of foreign goods, and this was a great blow to the manufacturing firms in England. The Government tried hard to kill this movement for the boycott of foreign goods. They arrested and imprisoned hundreds of our national workers, great leaders like Pandit Motilal Nehru, Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das, Lala Lajpat Rai and Maulana Azad.

Another person in Gandhiji's place would have lost heart and given up the struggle in the face of such opposition. But Gandhiji bravely continued to fight the government. He again and again asked the Viceroy to release our national leaders but the Viceroy paid no heed to his requests.

The fight for freedom was at its height, and it seemed as if victory was within our reach, when suddenly news came that Mahatmaji did not know how to explain Gandhiji's action. Some thought that he had become frightened of the British Government. Others thought that he had made some sort of compromise with them. Each one had his own story to tell, but there were a few sensible persons who could guess what the truth was."

"And what was that truth, mother? Why did Mahatmaji call off the movement?"

"You see, Hari, when Mahatmaji started the country's fight for independence, he wanted the people to master the details of non-violence to perfection. He knew that it was not easy to resist the organized might of such a great Empire. He also knew that as soon as the people started opposing the government, the government was bound to punish them. The police would make lathi<sup>26</sup> charges or even open fire on them. To remain calm under such provocation would be

the supreme test of non-violence. And it turned out that people did defy the laws all over the country and calmly faced the lathi charges. At one place in the Uttar Pradesh, however, in the village of Chauri Chaura in the Gorakhpur district, the mob forgot the lesson of non-violence and returned blow for blow and set fire to a police outpost. Twenty-one policemen died as a result of the fire. This incident completely upset Gandhiji, and he immediately called off the movement. A freedom won through bloodshed or pain,' he said, 'was not worth having at all. It was better to remain a slave than take to such violent means. And yet I know that the mistake is mine. The country has not yet learnt the lesson of non-violence properly. Unless people learn the true meaning of the creed of nonviolence, they will not be ready to offer satyagraha. Truth, patience, meekness, understanding and love for the enemy are most necessary for satyagraha.'

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### **Gandhiji is arrested**

To admit his mistake and the mistake of his countrymen was not enough for Gandhiji. He sought to do further penance by observing a five-day fast. He returned to the Sabarmati Ashram from where he meant to preach his gospel of non-violence throughout India. But he had hardly been in Sabarmati four days when the Government arrested him. He was sentenced to imprisonment for six years. In his absence, Kasturba sent his message to the country, asking everyone to give up foreign clothes and wear Swadeshi instead, to spin, to abolish untouchability and to work for the uplift of the country.

Life in jail had many hardships, but Gandhiji bore them all cheerfully. He would read the Gita in the morning and the Koran<sup>27</sup> in the afternoon, and in the evening he would read the Bible with a Chinese Christian. He also spun regularly, and in his spare time he would learn to read and write Urdu and Tamil.

Though Gandhiji was in prison, he continued to live in our hearts and to lead us. He had not been in jail quite two years when he fell seriously ill. The news of his illness caused great anxiety, all over the country. For six months he remained ill inside the jail, and when the Government saw that there was no

improvement in his condition, they transferred him to the Government hospital in Poona. There he was operated upon for appendicitis by a well-known surgeon. And when after a few days, he was known to be out of danger, there was great rejoicing all over the country.

In the beginning of February that year, Gandhiji was released from jail before he had completed his term of imprisonment. The first thing he did on his release was to write a letter to Maulana Mohammed Ali, the then President of the Congress, saying that he was not at all happy at the way in which he had been released. Even though outside the jail, he considered himself a prisoner for the remaining period of his six years' term of imprisonment. He would not take part in the fight for freedom or oppose the Government during that period.

From the Poona hospital, Gandhiji went to Juhu near Bombay, and here he gradually improved in health. Pandit Motilal Nehru, Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das and the young Jawaharlal Nehru visited him there frequently. With them he would discuss the problem of our independence ceaselessly. Every day he was becoming more and more certain that our country could neither make progress nor win freedom unless poverty, ignorance, untouchability were removed. As soon as he was well enough, Gandhiji started again on his campaign for the uplift of India. Spinning and weaving classes were opened all over the country, so that foreign cloth could be easily replaced. He also worked for removing the evils of drink and untouchability and differences of caste and creed. He wanted the people of India to become strong and united.

Gandhiji kept his word and for almost four years he did not take any part in the fight against the Government. Still the Government felt that if the people of all sects and creeds of India became one and fought unitedly for independence, the strongest of Government would not find it possible to resist them. And so the officers and agents of the British Government tried to create a split among the Hindus and Muslims."

"But, mother, why did the Hindus and Muslims listen to them?"

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26. *Wooden stick.*      27. *The Muslim holy book*



## 11. DANDI MARCH

### Communal Violence Erupts

"You know, Hari, hatred and ill-will come easier to men than love and good fellowship. And so the foolish, unthinking Hindus and Muslims fell into the trap set by our rulers and forgot Gandhiji's message of love and brotherhood. They started fighting each other, and for the time being, our dream of freedom vanished.

Gandhiji's sorrow knew no bounds when he saw the Hindus and Muslims fighting and shedding each other's blood. A riot had broken out in Delhi. Mahatmaji went there and decided to go on a fast for twenty-one days. He hoped, with prayer and fasting, to drive away hatred and purify people's hearts.

The first eleven days of the fast passed off well, but on the twelfth day the doctors declared that Gandhiji's life would be in danger unless he broke his fast at once. This news cast a gloom over the entire country. Friends and doctors tried their best to persuade him to give up the fast. That day happened to be his day of silence, and so he just wrote on a piece of paper, 'Trust in God: there is great virtue in prayer.' It was a night of terrible suspense and anxiety. People kept awake and prayed fervently for Gandhiji's life. And Hari, my child, God heard the prayers of the People, and the next morning Gandhiji's condition improved. After twenty-one days he broke his fast, and he looked very cheerful and happy.

It was a memorable day. His friends and companions woke up at four o'clock in the morning for special prayers. The fast was due to be broken at noon. Passages from the Holy Koran were first recited, and then a Christian friend sang a hymn. This was followed by readings from the Gita, and finally, Gandhiji broke his fast with a glass of orange juice. All the important leaders, Hindu as well as Muslim, Motilal Nehru, Chittaranjan Das, Maulana Azad, Maulana Shaukat Ali, Doctor Ansari, Maulana Mohammed Ali, Hakim Ajmal Khan, and Swami Shraddhanand, were present on the occasion and they took a pledge

that they would work wholeheartedly for Hindu-Muslim unity. And for a long time, the effect of Gandhiji's fast continued to be felt and differences between the Hindus and the Muslims disappeared.

Gandhiji now found time to turn to the problem of untouchability. The situation in Travancore was very serious. The Brahmins there had denied even the use of certain roads to the untouchables. Gandhiji went there and decided once again to make use of the old weapon of satyagraha. Success was immediate and all the roads were thrown open to the untouchables.

In 1922 there was tension between the peasants of Kheda in Gujarat and the Government. Gandhiji saw that the Government were trying to oppress the peasants, and he sent Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel to help them. The Sardar worked with tact and firmness. The Government found themselves in a difficult situation and the peasants won the day.

Unrest was growing apace in India, and the country rang with cries of 'Gandhiji ki jai'.<sup>28</sup> People waited eagerly to court imprisonment or lay down their very lives for the sake of their country's freedom.

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### **Tricolour Flag - The Official Flag of Congress**

As early as 1921, Gandhiji had adopted the tricolour as the national flag of India; in 1930 the Congress accepted it officially. The saffron on the top stood for bravery, the white in the middle for purity, and the green at the bottom for peace, prosperity and happiness. The spinning wheel in the middle stood for the dignity of labour. Thus the tricolour became a sacred symbol for all classes of Indians, without distinction of caste or creed. And it has since been the duty of every Indian to honour and respect that flag.

I told you, Hari, that the country was restless with the desire to win freedom, but the British were again and again treating our demands with contempt. Gandhiji wanted once more to defy the law and start non-violent civil disobedience. But he was anxious that the law which he should decide to break

should be one which meant particular hardship to the common people. And so, after long and careful thinking he chose the Salt Law.

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### **Salt Law Is Broken**

For you know, Hari, salt is something which the rich and the poor both need; and anyone can make salt from the seawater or from certain kinds of earth. But the Government had framed laws by which they alone could manufacture salt, and they had also fixed a fairly high rate of tax on its sale. Gandhiji felt that this tax was most unfair, and as it tended to raise the price of salt, it hit the poor people very hard. And so he decided to break the Salt Law. He announced his plan of marching to Dandi, and of breaking the unjust Salt Law there by manufacturing salt himself. Before starting on his famous march, he fasted and prayed, and then, accompanied by seventy-nine chosen companions, he set out on foot from the Sabarmati Ashram. Gandhiji led the procession, and his companions followed him in rows of three. Each one of these satyagrahis<sup>29</sup> carried a small bundle thrown across the shoulder by a stick. All along the route, men and women flocked to get a darshan<sup>30</sup> of Mahatmaji. The streets were sprinkled with water, and flowers and coconuts were laid before him as a mark of the people's faith and esteem. And Gandhiji would stop on the way and make speeches or preach sermons to the people. And thus the march from Ahmedabad to the port of Dandi in Gujarat a distance of two hundred miles, which was begun on March 12, ended on April 5.

On the 6th of April at Dandi, Mahatmaji prepared the first illegal salt. This was a signal to the whole country, which seemed suddenly to be stirred up into new life. At very many places all over India, the Salt Law was peacefully and quietly broken, and salt was manufactured in defiance of the Government. The Government arrested the law-breakers and punished them at once and severely.

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## Arrested At Midnight

On the fourth of May, at dead of night, armed police surrounded Gandhiji's hut. Gandhiji and his satyagrahis were all fast asleep, when a British Police Officer flashed his torch on Gandhiji's face and asked, 'Are you



A British Police Officer flashed his torch on Gandhiji's face.

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi?' Gandhiji, calm and undisturbed, simply said, 'Have you come to take me away? Will you be so good as to wait for a little while? I shall just have a wash and then go with you.' Gandhiji rinsed his mouth and washed, while the Police Officer stood by holding Gandhiji's small bundle in his hands. When Gandhiji had finished washing, he asked for a little more time so that he could say his prayers. And then Gandhiji and all his companions sang hymns and recited prayers. Each one came with folded hands and bowed before Gandhiji. One of the policemen picked up the two small khaddar bags in which Gandhiji's things were packed, and then Gandhiji walked to the police truck, followed by the constables and the police officers. Thus, the police came stealthily and quietly, like guilty criminals, in the dark, and took away our beloved Gandhiji."

"But, mother, why didn't he raise an alarm, so that people could have rushed in and rescued him from the police."

"My son, haven't I told you that Gandhiji never believed in resisting the police or the government by the violent means? That is why he could never think of raising an alarm or calling for help."

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28. *Victory to Gandhiji.*

29. *Nonviolent fighters*

30. *Glimpse of a great personage*

## 12. GANDHIJI ATTENDS THE ROUND TABLE CONFERENCE

"For eight months Gandhiji was in jail, and when he came out, the entire face of the country had changed. Gandhiji had such a hold over the people that the proud and arrogant British were compelled to come to terms with him.

The terms of the agreement required that a Round Table Conference should be held in England in order to discuss the future of India. The Congress nominated Gandhiji as their representative at the Conference. Gandhiji was conscious of the trust which his countrymen had placed in him, and his last words to them before he set sail for England were, 'I give you my solemn word that I shall not betray the trust which you have reposed in me.'

Gandhiji arrived in London on the twelfth of September 1932. The newspapers were full of news about him. Scores of pictures showing various sides of his life appeared in them. One of the papers, however, published a false picture showing him touching the feet of the Prince of Wales. Gandhiji smiled when he saw that picture, and said, "I would most gladly bow my head before the lowliest of my countrymen. I, would even pick up the dust from under the feet of the untouchables whom we have despised and oppressed for centuries past. But I will never touch the feet of the King of England, much less the Prince of Wales.'

The Conference lasted for some time and Gandhiji presented our case with great ability. In one of his speeches he told the Conference, 'I do not in any way wish to belittle the British in India. But I certainly want that England should look upon India as an equal and treat the people of India accordingly.'

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### Gandhiji Meets King

When the Conference ended, Their Majesties held a reception in honour of the delegates to the Conference. Everyone that went to the reception was dressed in his best suit of clothes, but Gandhiji appeared before the King of England, wearing a Khaddar dhoti, a pair of the plainest sandals, and an ordinary

blanket. The simplicity and humility of his dress presented a striking contrast to the glory and pomp of the royal palace."

"Isn't it strange, mother, that even when he went to the royal palace, he should not have put on a proper suit of clothes?"

"You see, Hari, Gandhiji went to England as the spokesman of the poorest men and women of India, and it was right that he should appear like one of them. But the respect that he got did not depend upon his clothes, for the King was very attentive to him and talked to him for a long time.

In England he was the guest of an old friend of his, Miss Muriel Lister, and he continued to follow his daily routine exactly as he used to do in India. He would hold his prayer meetings, morning and evening, and would take long walks everyday. His simplicity and sincerity and warmth left a deep impression on the poorer people of England. In fact, that impression still remains in a very large measure.

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### **Churchill Refuses To Meet Gandhiji**

It is customary that when a person visits a new country or town, he calls on the important people of that place. And in accordance with this practice, Gandhiji wanted to call on Mr. Churchill. But Mr. Churchill refused to see him, saying, 'I am not prepared to meet that half-naked fakir of India as long as he does not learn how to dress properly.' Bapu was not upset by Mr. Churchill's rudeness but every Indian felt deeply grieved and angry at this insult to their beloved leader.

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### **Calls Off the Civil Disobedience Movement**

Gandhiji returned to India without having been able to bring about any understanding between England and India. On his way back, he stopped in Italy and saw the Italian dictator, Mussolini. He also visited the Pope's palace, the Vatican, and towards the end of December he reached Bombay. The Government had meanwhile resumed its repressive policy. Our leaders - Pandit

Jawaharlal Nehru, Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, and Sardar Patel - had been sent to prison, and no less than ninety thousand men and women were in jail. The British Government were trying every means of crushing the Congress. But their repressive policy had the very opposite effect on the people. They became all the more determined to win freedom for their country. Finally, Gandhiji was arrested and put in jail again. The Government had hoped that with Bapu in jail, the people would lose courage and become disunited. They did not know that the flame of patriotism Gandhiji had lighted burned steadily in every Indian heart, and that it was not possible to put it out by violence. No doubt, people had to face more severe hardships everyday, and Bapu could only show his anger and distress over the sufferings of his countrymen. When he saw no other way of stopping the highhandedness of the Government, he decided to fast unto death. The Government thereupon released him. As soon as Gandhiji came out of the jail, he called off the civil disobedience movement and devoted all his energies to the uplift of the Harijans."

"Why are the untouchables called Harijans, mother?"

"This name was given to them by Bapu. The word, 'Harijan' means the servant of God, and since the so-called untouchables work very hard and are therefore the best servants of God, Bapu preferred to call them Harijans rather than untouchables. Hari, my dear, you can see by this what a kind heart Bapu had!"

### 13. AT SEVAGRAM ASHRAM

"I told you how, right from the days of his childhood, Bapu looked upon untouchability as a shameful evil. It hurt him and filled his heart with sorrow. He believed that all men were equal, and that no one had the right to think he was superior to others. A man was high or low in the eyes of God by his actions and not by his birth. Distinctions of class and caste were set up by interested people.

Gandhiji had always believed in practicing himself whatever he preached to others. He started another Ashram at Wardha in the year 1936. This came to be known as the Sevagram Ashram, and was open to people of all castes and creeds. There were, of course, certain conditions which everyone in the Ashram had to fulfill. Each one had to do everything for himself-like grinding the flour, cooking the food, sweeping the rooms, and cleaning the lavatories. Even Gandhiji and Kasturbai would do everything with their own hands: they were no exception to the discipline of the Ashram. The food would be cooked in a common kitchen and all would sit down to their meals together. They would first pray for God's blessings and for peace and then eat the food.

Bapu was in the habit of inspecting every nook and comer of the Ashram every day, and if he saw any dirt or rubbish anywhere, he would sweep it away himself. If any of the inmates fell ill, he would sit with him up and cheer him with his inimitable humour and wit. He was himself quite an expert in nursing and treating the sick.

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#### The lad's wish is fulfilled

A Madrasi lad once had an attack of dysentery in the Ashram. He had just recovered when he longed to drink South Indian coffee. He had become used to the plain and boiled food which everyone in the Ashram ate, but he had always missed his coffee. The rules of the Ashram, however, forbade coffee, tea, cigarettes, and even pan<sup>31</sup> How, then, could the Madrasi boy get any coffee? He



was lying in his bed, dreaming about his coffee, when he heard Bapu's footsteps. Bapu came and stood near his bed and looked at him in his usual kind and smiling manner. ' You are looking much better today', he said, ' I hope you have got back your appetite. What would you like to eat? How about a few dhoshas?" Gandhiji knew how very fond the South Indians were of dhoshas."

"What are dhoshas, mother?" asked Hari.



Gandhiji walked in with a tray....

"They are a kind of savoury pancakes," continued the mother, "which are made only in the South of India. The eyes of the young boy began to sparkle, as he heard Bapu talk of food. He faltered for a while, and then took courage to ask, 'Could I have a cup of coffee, Bapu ?' 'You old sinner !' said Bapu, and laughed affectionately. 'Since you are so keen,

you will certainly have coffee. In fact, a light cup of coffee may be good for you. But you must have something to eat with your coffee. It may not be possible to get dhoshas made here, but perhaps a hot toast will go very well with your coffee. I shall go and see to it at once.'

And then Bapu went away. The young boy knew that tea and coffee were forbidden inside the Ashram, and he was wondering whether Gandhiji had promised him the coffee in a moment of absent-mindedness. He could hardly believe that he could be so lucky as to get coffee inside the Ashram, and that too from Gandhiji's own hands. A little later, Bapu's footsteps were heard again coming nearer and nearer his room. He now feared that Bapu was coming to tell him that he had made a mistake in promising him coffee, and that coffee was really impossible inside the Ashram. But to his great surprise he saw Gandhiji walking in with a tray covered with a khadi napkin. He could hardly believe his ears, when Gandhiji placed the tray near his bed and said, 'Here is your coffee and toast. I have made it myself, and even a South Indian like you will agree that it is well made. '

'Bapu, Bapu,' faltered the boy, 'why didn't you tell someone else to make the coffee ? I am so sorry that you had to take all this trouble for my sake.' 'Let it be,' replied Gandhiji, most affectionately. Don't let the coffee get cold. Ba was asleep and I did not like to wake her up. You had better drink it now. I should be going now. I'll send someone to take away the tray.' And with these words, Gandhiji walked away. The coffee was really very good, and the boy enjoyed it thoroughly. Coming from Bapu's hands, that coffee was like divine nectar itself."

"But, mother, when no one was allowed to drink coffee or tea inside the Ashram, how did the coffee get there so quickly? "

"You see, son, Rajaji and Mr. Andrews often used to come to see Gandhiji, and Kasturbai always kept some coffee and tea for them, though for no one else. That was how Gandhiji was able to prepare the coffee for the boy.

All kinds of people would come to the Sevagram Ashram to meet Bapu. Someone would bring a sick child to be healed, another would come to have a dispute about property settled. Sometimes a husband and wife would come and tell Bapu of their quarrels and seek his help in settling them. One day there walked in a man who seemed to be slightly mad. It was later found that he was a very well-read man and had been a professor in some college. He had also been to jail a number of times, and had now become a sadhu.<sup>32</sup> He had roamed the jungles for many years without any clothes at all. He had fasted for weeks at a time; he had at one time taken a vow of silence and had gone so far as to stitch his lips with a copper wire. For a long time he lived only on neem<sup>33</sup>leaves and unbaked flour. In the course of his wanderings, he came to the Sevagram Ashram and he wanted to meet Bapu. Bapu looked after him with great affection and care and succeeded in bringing him back to the world of normal human beings.

In the beginning he disliked work, but, in course of time, he began to work for seventeen hours at a stretch. He would spin for eight to ten hours, and teach the inmates of the Ashram for another seven or eight hours. He became a fully normal and active human being, and, whereas he had formerly gone about with

sealed lips and avoided human society, he would now make the whole Ashram ring with his hearty laughter. He even agreed to wear a short dhoti, but more than this he would not keep anything else with him. He would walk fearlessly to a place full of snakes and scorpions. Sometimes, however, he would get into one of his old moods, and then he would go to Mahatmaji, troubled and upset, and ask for permission to hang himself upside down in a well. Of course he was never allowed to do anything so foolish; for Bapu's word was law to him and he would obey it unquestioningly like a child.

In those days Bapu was working from his Ashram to remove untouchability, ignorance and superstition from the country. He started the Charkha<sup>34</sup> Institute, the Education Institute, and the Institute for the Protection of Cows. It was his wish to provide occupation for the villagers, when they were idle and had no work to do in the fields and thus add to their income. Such occupation, he thought, could be found in spinning, weaving newar<sup>35</sup> or some other similar handicraft. At the same time he also wanted the villagers to learn to read and write, and thus prepare themselves for the final battle for freedom. He wanted to get them freedom not only from the British, but also from poverty, diseases and ignorance."

Hari had begun to yawn and so, the mother asked, "You seem to be tired and sleepy. I have come nearly to the end of my story, but I shall continue it tomorrow."

"No," said Hari, "I am not at all sleepy. In fact, I am all attention and I don't think I can go to sleep before I have heard the entire story. Do please go on, mother dear."

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31. *Betel leaf*

32. *A holy man or a hermit*

33. *A tree common in India.*

34. *Spinning wheel.*

35. *A broad rough tape.*

## 14. THE QUIT INDIA MOVEMENT

"By now the prestige of the British Government had fallen very low and Gandhiji ruled over the hearts of the millions of the millions of Indian men and women. In fact, he was the uncrowned king of the country. In some provinces, the Congress had even formed the government. The British did not approve of such things, but they were helpless before the growing enthusiasm of the masses.

The Congress Ministers had been in power only for a short time, when the Second World War broke out. The British began to use our men and materials in the war against Germany without even consulting our leaders. The people of India felt deeply hurt and resented this fresh insult to our national dignity. On Gandhiji's advice, the Congress governments in the provinces resigned, for Gandhiji felt that there was not much sense in the Congress party continuing to hold office when they were not consulted in a matter of the greatest importance.

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### Bapu's letter to Hitler

Bapu remained at Sevagram, but he was in touch with all the events that were happening in the world outside. He was aware of the misery and destruction that wars caused, and so he wrote a letter to the German Dictator, Hitler, saying, 'I do not generally regard anyone as my enemy; but today you and I happen to be fighting a common foe, namely, the British. How wonderful it would be if, like me, you too fought the enemy with the weapon of non-violence. Violence could only bring immense ruin and misery to the whole world. Should you like to know more about the principles of non-violence, there is a soldier in your army who was with me in my Ashram for some time. He will be able to tell you everything about the methods of non-violence. You alone are now in a position to stop this ruinous and bloody war.' Gandhiji wanted to send this letter to Hitler through the Viceroy of India, but the latter did not

allow it. Had the Viceroy consented, and had Hitler listened to Mahatmaji's advice, the world would have been saved all the havoc and destruction that followed. But England and Germany were both drunk with power and they could only go headlong towards disaster.

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### **Appeal for freedom**

At the same time, Gandhiji made repeated attempts to persuade the British to transfer power to Indians in a peaceful way. But all his efforts were in vain. Had he wished, he could have asked the whole nation to fight the Government. But the apostle of nonviolence could never do so; he was not prepared to win freedom by bloodshed and violence. And yet the fight against the British had to be kept up somehow. He felt that satyagraha on a mass scale was not proper. And so he thought of a new method, that of Individual Satyagraha. He decided to select a few well-trying companions, who had thoroughly understood and practiced the principles of non-violence, and these were to offer satyagraha, one by one. The first person chosen for the offer was Shri Vinoba Bhave. He was immediately arrested, and after him hundreds of patriots, who were only waiting patiently for their turn. Overnight all the leaders were arrested. Jawaharlal Nehru was sentenced to imprisonment. But the country was seething with unrest and the government found it impossible to crush the rising urge for freedom. Very soon they had to release all those whom they had put in jail.

The fighting in Europe was at its height, when news came that Japan had joined the war against the Allies and led an attack against America. Japan had also advanced towards India and occupied Rangoon. The enemy was at our door. There was widespread anxiety all over the country, and people were wondering what would come next.

Some thought that India would be attacked in the war between Japan and America. Some even wished that the Japanese would cross over to India and drive away British. People were impatient break their chains of bondage. Seeing such widespread unrest in India, the British government in England decided to send out Sir Stafford Cripps to India, so that could bring about some

kind of settlement between the two countries. A ray of hope seemed to come out of the darkness, and people in India began to think that freedom was at hand. But once again our hopes were dashed to the ground. The proposals which Cripps brought with him were not acceptable to our leaders :the British were not prepared to give what we really wanted. And so Cripps went back to England, having achieved nothing, and Gandhiji and the other leaders decided that India could not give the British help in the war, unless she is first given freedom.

Bapu saw that the European war as well as the war with Japan was ruining our country. The youth and the wealth of the country were being sacrificed, against our wishes, for the sake of a foreign nation. His heart was sick and he wanted to do something. He called all the leaders together and explained to them that, as long as the British remained in India, they would continue to suck her blood and to exploit her. It was necessary to make a desperate and united effort to drive them out of India.

But the fight must remain peaceful and non-violent. If freedom was achieved through violence and bloodshed, it was not worth having at all. Let us ask the British with one voice, 'Quit India! Quit India!' The moment Gandhiji gave the call, the four hundred millions of India took up the slogan 'Britishers, quit India! Britishers, quit India !' This slogan stared the British in the face wherever they went. It was written on the walls, the door-posts, the streets, and even on the office tables where they worked. For the first time they began to realize that the time had come when they must really quit India.

At the same time Gandhiji wrote a letter to the Viceroy saying that if India was given freedom, she would willingly help in the war-effort. But if the British even now refused to give India her freedom, she would be driven to fight for that freedom to the very last man. It would be a desperate and a bitter struggle, but it would be fought on the principles of non-violence."

"What reply did the Viceroy give to Gandhiji's letter?" asked Hari.

"Instead of replying to that letter," continued the mother, "he only arrested our leaders and shut them up in jails. Bapu and Kasturbai were taken to the Aga

Khan's Palace in Poona and confined there. Some of his close associates such as Sarojini Naidu, Dr. Sushila Nayyar and Mahadev Desai were also kept in confinement there along with him."

## 15. Death of Kasturba and Mahadevbhai

### Days at Agakhan Palace

"Bapu must have been very comfortable in that palace?" asked Hari.

"No, my son, how could Bapu, the friend of the poor, the father of Our Nation, how could he be comfortable, living away from his suffering and sorrowing children? He could find no peace inside that large and luxurious palace. Bapu could never find happiness, if he could live and spend all his time with the poor and the lowly.

Even in that palace he lived like a poor man. He would get up early in the morning, say his prayers, take a little fruit juice and then get busy with his work. All his associates would have their meals with him, and the poetess Sarojini Naidu, the Nightingale of India, would entertain him with his jokes and anecdotes. There would be prayers again in the evening, and then they would all settle down to some more work. And then they would retire early, after having worked the whole day.

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### Loses his dear colleague

Mahatmaji had been in detention only for a few days, when his old and trusted colleague, Mahadev Desai, died suddenly of heart failure. Gandhiji and Mahadev Bhai had been very closely associated with each other for over thirty years, and Bapu loved him as his own son. Mahadev Bhai too had dedicated his life to Bapu and to the country. They had shared each other's joys and sorrows: Bapu would open out his heart to him, and he would always give Bapu his frank and well-considered opinion on all matters.

Bapu bathed Mahadev's body with his own hands and then decked the bier and performed all the funeral rites himself, even as a father would have done. The funeral pyre was lighted in a corner of the palace garden, and a memorial was



erected on that spot, and as long as Bapu stayed in that palace, he went to that samadhi<sup>36</sup> and laid flowers there everyday.

After Gandhi's arrest, there was no one to guide the people in their non-violent struggle against the British Government. People were burning with the desire to win independence, and they carried on the fight in various ways according to their lights. Some, in their enthusiasm, even forgot the teachings of Gandhiji, and secretly incited people to violence. And the government answered back with all the violence that it was capable of. Bullets were rained on innocent gatherings, and whole villages were burnt down. A reign of terror prevailed in the country. Men, women, and children were killed by the thousand, and the jails were full. The leader of the nation was in prison, and without his guidance the people had gone astray and run mad. Bapu had never thought that if he was removed from the scene, the fight for freedom would take such a bloody and violent turn. He did not know that people would so misunderstand his slogan of 'Quit India', that they would throw all restraint to the winds.

While in jail, Gandhiji was in touch with the day-to-day happenings in the country. He was cut off from us physically, but all his thoughts were with us. The Father of the Nation could not rest in peace while the people, misguided by their enthusiasm, risked every hardship and suffering.

The government threw the entire blame for the prevailing confusion and chaos on Bapu. Gandhiji made earnest efforts to secure the release of some of the leaders, so that they could lead the people back to nonviolence and discipline. But the government turned a deaf ear to all his requests. In utter helplessness, on the 10th of February 1943, Bapu decided to go on fast for twenty-one days as the only way of convincing the world of his sincerity.

The government offered to release him for the duration of the fast, but Bapu would not agree to such a proposal. Gandhiji grew weaker and weaker every day. Kasturba was all the time by his side and looked after him. The whole of India was in great suspense and anxiety. Men and women prayed for his life, and all eyes and ears were turned anxiously to the Aga Khan's Palace. There were protests and strikes all over the country, and in Delhi three Indian

members of the Viceroy's Council tendered their resignations. But the government did not yield an inch.

At long last the ordeal was over; Gandhiji, on the 3rd of March, broke his fast with a glass of orange-juice given to him by Kasturbai. Miraben sang some Christian hymns, friends recited the Holy Koran, and Parsees, Hindus and Buddhists all read to him passages from their Holy Scriptures.

The country heaved a sigh of relief when the fast ended.

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### **Kasturba Passes away**

But Bapu's trials were not yet over. He had hardly recovered from the blow of his dear friend Mahadev Desai's death, when Kasturbai fell ill. Efforts were made to persuade her to return home, but she would not leave Gandhiji. It seemed as though she knew she would die, and so did not want to leave her husband. Her health continued to decline, and at last she died."

"How bitterly Bapu must have cried over Kasturbai's death !" said Hari.

"My child," answered the mother, "anyone else would have completely broken down in the face of such a calamity. But even in such a crisis, Gandhiji did not lose faith in God, nor did he forget to pray for his suffering countrymen.

A memorial was raised for Kasturbai alongside that of Mahadev Desai, and as long as Bapu was detained in the Aga Khan's Palace, he would lay flowers on both the samadhis and offer prayers everyday. And even today hundreds of people visit the palace on Sundays and pay their homage to the memory of the departed souls.

There was sorrow and calamity on all sides, and Bapu was trying to brave all this alone. But there are limits even to the endurance of a man like Gandhiji. His strength began to decline and he fell ill. When his condition became serious, the government felt that it would be both safe and wise to set him free. They knew that his death in jail would throw the whole country into chaos. And, so, on the 6th of May, Gandhiji and his companions were

unconditionally released. Before leaving the palace, Gandhiji paid his last homage at the two samadhis, and as he laid the flowers, everyone's heart was touched, and all eyes were moist with tears."

"Yes, mother, I remember very well how happy we were when we heard of Bapu's release, and how we celebrated it in our house."

"My son, we were not the only ones who were happy at his release. There was rejoicing and happiness all over the country."

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36. *Memorial.*

## 16. FREEDOM IS WON BUT.....

"With Bapu out of the jail, a new hope came into all hearts, and people found fresh courage, for once again they had someone who could feel for them and share their sorrow.

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### India Is Divided

For some time, Gandhiji lived in Juhu and Poona and tried to regain his health. As soon as he was better, he threw himself into the National Movement and once again assumed its leadership. He opened the people's eyes to their mistakes, and also pointed to the government where they had been in the wrong. Once again, he threw in all his weight to persuade the British to transfer power to the Indians, but the British were in no mood to do so. They said that they would be willing to quit India only if the Hindus and the Muslims could settle their differences and ask for independence with one voice. Mahatmaji argued that Hindus and Muslims were both children of the same country, and that their differences were a mere domestic quarrel which they could settle as they liked. The British should not interfere in this domestic quarrel, or make this the excuse for refusing to give India her freedom. But there was bitterness and division in our ranks, and we were like the two cats who quarrelled over a loaf of bread and called in a monkey to divide it equally between them. The monkey would put the two pieces in the scales and eat up a larger slice now from one piece, now from the other, pretending to equalize them, until he had eaten away the entire loaf and the two cats looked helplessly at each other, growing wiser only after the event. In the same way the Hindus and Muslims quarrelled with each other and the agents of the British offered to divide the country into two parts --India and Pakistan.

Our leaders at length agreed to this proposal, for they felt that it brought them freedom even though it meant dividing the country. Little did they realize that this division would sow the seeds of hatred and ill-will all over.

## Riots Break Out

From all parts of the country there came news that was heartrending and alarming. There were already disturbances going on in the Punjab, when fighting between the Hindus and the Muslims broke out in Calcutta. There was bitter hatred between the two communities, and men and women who had so far lived as peaceful neighbours now became sworn enemies. Gandhiji was greatly worried over the turn of events and he proceeded to Calcutta to see things with his own eyes. He found that the reports that had reached his ears were only too true. Hindus and Muslims who had lived together in friendship for generations past, were now after each other's blood. The first thing that Bapu did was to call a mass meeting in the Calcutta Maidan. The response was amazing. Hindus and Muslims, who had hitherto hated the very sight of each other, poured in by the thousands to listen to Bapu's words. Gandhiji talked to them about the power of love and the value of goodwill, and in the twinkling of an eye, all hatred and ill-will seemed to have vanished into thin air. He then called upon both Hindus and Muslims to bring their weapons and lay them before him. People were not yet ready for this. Gandhiji at once saw that his message had not gone home, doubt and suspicion still remained in the hearts of people. And so he decided to go on a fast, so that the hearts of people might be cleansed.

As soon as the news of his fast went round, the people of Bengal were struck with fear and sorrow. They came in hundreds and surrendered their weapons to him and pledged themselves to live in friendship and peace. And they kept their word and never fought with each other again.



Bapu was working hard to bring back goodwill among the Hindus and Muslims. If Gandhiji brought about peace and friendliness at one place, quarrels would break out at another. Just then news came that Muslims of Noakhali were

killing and plundering the Hindus there. The frail old man immediately started for that place.

He scorned all danger, and went about preaching his gospel of love from village to village. Often he had to journey on foot and sometimes he even walked barefoot. He lived and moved with the villagers of Noakhali. He ate with them and slept with them. He talked to people, and asked them to stop fighting each other and to return the plundered goods to their rightful owners. He called back those who had become homeless and put them again in their homes. He restored the displaced and the desolate to their friends, and strove in every way to bring order out of confusion.

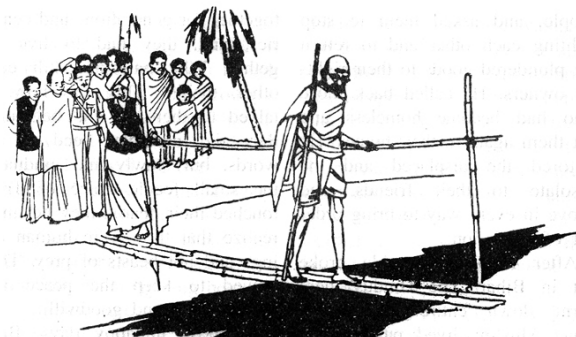
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### **In Bihar-Preaching Love**

After Noakhali, trouble broke out in Bihar. The Hindus there burnt down entire villages in which Muslims lived; passions ran high and hatred was let loose once again. When Bapu heard all these he was full of grief and set out for Bihar at once. Again he preached his gospel of love and told the people that it was a sin to take anyone's life. Hindus and Muslims alike were the natives of the same country. They had lived together for generations and centuries, and , they had to live together. Why hate and kill each other, then? This was how he talked to them. In the beginning they did not pay heed to his words, but slowly and gradually, the small feeble voice of Truth touched their hearts; they began to realize that they were human beings and not beasts of prey. They vowed to keep the peace and cherish love and goodwill.

In those unhappy days, Bapu worked continuously and feverishly. He forgot his food and his sleep; he was unmindful alike of freezing cold and scorching heat. He would wander barefoot in the villages of Noakhali or go from place to place in Bihar, bringing help to the distressed and peace to broken hearts. Not for a moment did he lose hope; not for a moment was his faith shaken. Trials and difficulties gave him more courage; suffering and hardship made him more gentle.

## India Wins Freedom



Gandhiji in Noakhali

At last in 1947 came the day when India was free; there was joy and enthusiasm in every heart. But the dawn of freedom was marred by clouds of hatred and ill-will. Murder and bloodshed were going on unchecked in the country. Communal passion had blinded us and we had strayed into

darkness. The bonds of love had snapped; people were after each other's blood. Men had become murderous like wild beasts, and Hindus and Muslims thirsted for each other's blood. A gloom had settled upon the country, but even in that terrible time, one or two beacon lights shone faintly and fought to drive away the darkness."

"What were those beacon lights, mother?"

"These lights, my child, were none other than Bapu and his colleagues. But somehow we had turned our eyes from them. Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs were killing each other. The goondas<sup>37</sup> thought it a golden opportunity: They pillaged and plundered and robbed and murdered. Innocent men and women had to suffer and the world was shocked at the savagery which had seized our country."

Hari was deeply affected by this narration; he was sad and lost in thought for some time. At last he spoke out, "Alas! mother, how it must have grieved Bapu to see Hindus and Muslims and Sikhs doing such acts. It must have broken his heart."

"Yes, my child. His heart was sore and



Gandhiji in Noakhali

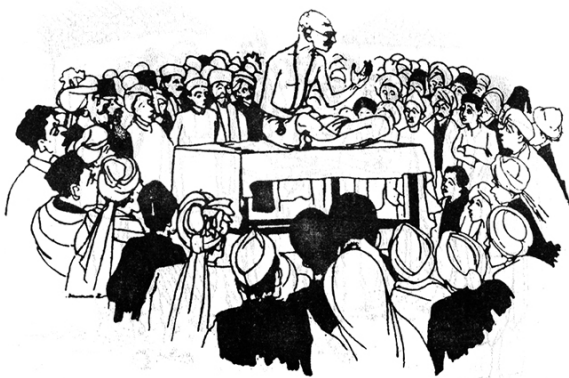


he would often say, 'Oh God, I cannot bear this killing and looting any more. Take me from world'.

When peace had been restored in Noakhali and Bihar, Bapu started for the Punjab. But just then rioting broke out in Delhi. What happened then is such a recent matter and I suppose you remember it all very vividly. They were terrible days. Bapu stopped in Delhi; he could not go Punjab when people were fighting against each other in the very capital of India. He found that displaced Punjab had poured into Delhi by the thousand. They were bitter and angry, and they seemed to have been the cause of the outburst in Delhi. Bapu was in full sympathy with them, but he also realised that, if once things went out of control in Delhi, confusion and disorder would spread to the whole country and destroy it."

"What did he do, then, mother?"

He thought over the matter calmly and carefully. He called the important officials of Delhi and urged upon them to treat the Hindus and the Muslims alike with complete impartiality. He asked them to be watchful and careful. He then went to the refugees. He assured them of sympathy and help, and explained to them that whatever the Muslims of the Punjab might have done to them, the Muslims of Delhi had not harmed them in any way. It would be madness to try to avenge their wrongs upon people who were innocent. He also appealed to the Muslims of Delhi to help the refugees as best they could.



Gandhiji addressing people of all communities .....

But people had lost their heads. Frenzy and passion had clouded their vision. Gandhiji then decided to undertake another fast: he might succeed in bringing the Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs together by laying down his own life. There was a Commotion in Delhi: no one knew what should be done. At

length the leaders of various communities went to Bapu and assured him that they would risk their own lives in order to restore peace and goodwill in Delhi.



As soon as Gandhiji was convinced of the sincerity of these leaders, he broke his fast, and from that moment conditions in Delhi began to improve steadily."

"I remember the day when Bapu broke his fast, mother. There was rejoicing all over the country."

"You are right, my son, Gandhi's fast had a great effect on all good people, but there were some who did not approve of his efforts in the case of Hindu-Muslim unity. They thought that such attempts would weaken India, and that the only way of becoming strong was to return bullet for bullet. To try to overcome evil, with good was, according to them, a sign of weakness and cowardice. They also knew that as long as Bapu was alive, he would continue to strive for harmony between all communities, and that he would not heed to their evil counsel. And so there was only one way for them, and that was to kill Bapu.

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### The Light Goes Out

Bapu was in the habit of having his evening meals early, and exactly at 5 o'clock he used to hold his prayer meetings. Men and women would gather for these meetings long before appointed hour, and as Bapu passed through the crowd, people



Gandhiji at prayer meeting

would bow and greet and touch his feet, Bapu would sit on a low dais surrounded by his associates and read the Koran and Gita or sing hymns. The prayer would begin with some recitations from the Koran and then there would be readings from the Gita and the singing of hymns. And then Bapu would preach a short sermon, and talk to the people about the situation in the country and in the world. A favourite hymn of Bapu's which would be sung everyday in the prayer meetings began thus:

*'Ishwar Allah tere nam*

*Sabko sanmati de Bhagwan.*<sup>38</sup>

There were also other similar hymns which were sung at those meetings.

People flocked to his prayer meetings from far and near, and Hindus and Muslims, all sat together and prayed."

"I know, mother, I have been to these prayer meetings many times. But I could not understand why Bapu would have readings from the Koran and the Holy Bible alongside those from the Gita."

"Because, my dear son, Gandhiji believed that all religions were based on truth. In fact, he used to say that he was a Hindu as well as a Muslim, a Sikh and as well as a Christian. He took all religions as his own, for is not every religion based on the principles of truth and righteousness? But let me tell you of what happened today. Bapu was walking fast to the prayer meeting, as he was a little late. He was passing through the crowd when a man came towards him as if to touch his feet, and shot at him. He must have been a very cruel and a heartless man, for none other could have lifted his hand at Bapu."

The mother saw that Hari was crying. She took him in her arms and tried to console him. "Do not cry, my child. Gandhiji gave his life in the service of God. Such people never die, they live forever. And in the end victory shall come to them. Victory for Bapu will mean victory for Truth, and victory for Truth will be victory for India. But men and women, young and old, will have to work unceasingly for this. We should not only follow the teachings of Gandhiji ourselves, but help others to do the same. For thirty years. Gandhiji has been teaching us the gospel of Truth, Love and Nonviolence. Whenever we see our brethren going astray and yielding to hate, unrighteousness or violence, we should stretch our loving hands to them and bring them back to the right path. We should never think in terms of Hindus or Muslims, Sikhs or Christians; we should remember that we are Indians first and Indians last. We should all work for Hindu-Muslim unity. India as well as Pakistan should both learn that all

communities are alike. God has created the Hindus, the Muslims as well as the Christians, and all must live together in love and harmony."

Hari suddenly sat up and asked, "Mother, what must I do in order to become a true Indian?"

"There is only one way," answered the mother, "and that is to follow the path that Bapu showed us. We must try and make India a country where there shall be no poverty or suffering, where the strong shall not oppress the weak, where there shall be no distinction of rich and poor, Hindu and Muslim, but all shall be equal, happy and prosperous. We can achieve this end only through Truth, Sacrifice and Perseverance. And Bapu's soul will rest in peace if we can all work sincerely towards this end. It is not necessary that our efforts should bear immediate fruit. There will be many failures and disappointments, but we should not waver or despair. That would be unworthy of Bapu's followers. We should work earnestly and righteously, without worrying about the results. That would be true service of humanity, and thus alone could we become worthy disciples of Bapu."

The mother was narrating the story of Gandhiji's life, when Hari's father returned. He had listened to the statements of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and Sardar Patel on the radio. He told them that Panditji overwhelmed by the tragedy, and in a voice trembling with emotion, had said, 'Friends and comrades, the Light has gone out of our lives and there is darkness everywhere. I do not know what to tell you and how to say it. Our beloved leader Bapu, as we called him. the Father of the Nation is no more. Perhaps I am wrong to say that. Nevertheless. we will not see him again as we have seen him for these many years, The Light has gone out, I said, and yet I was wrong. For the light that shone in this country was no ordinary light. The light that has illumined this country for these many years will illumine this country for many more years, and a thousand years later, that light will still be seen in this country and the world will see it and it will give solace to innumerable hearts.

'A mad man has put an end to his life, for I can only call him mad who did it and yet there has been enough of poison in this country during the past years and

months and this poison has had its effect on people's minds. We must face this poison. We must root out this poison in the way that our beloved teacher taught us.' Thus spoke Panditji and then followed Sardar Patel. He too was deeply affected by Gandhiji's death. He said. 'My heart is full of grief and agony, I do not know what to say to you. What has happened is a matter of sorrow and shame. Of late, Gandhiji had been dissatisfied with the state of affairs in our country. His recent fast was the result of that. The occasion today is for grief and not anger. Anger will make us forget the great things which Gandhiji had been teaching us all his life. We did not take his advice during his life-time and let it not be said that we did not follow him even after his death. That will be a great blot on our names.

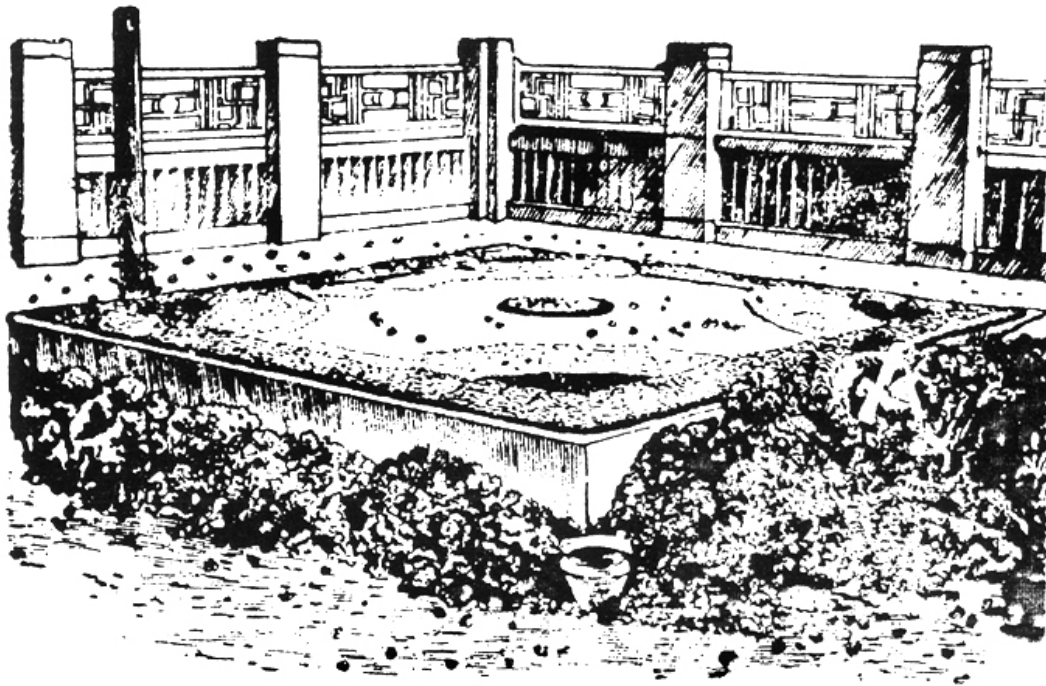
'Whatever we may feel, we must not forget that now is the time for us. We must stand firmly and solidly without any division in our ranks. Gandhiji will still be with us always, because his teachings and noble ideals will always be before us. Tomorrow at 4 p.m. his body will turn into ashes but, his soul will be with us for all times to come, because it is eternal.'

Hari's mother could restraint herself no longer and broke into tears. The father tried to console her by saying, "Do not cry, my dear, for tears will not help us. This is no time for crying and lamentation. This is the time for every Indian to take up the challenge and declare to Bapu's enemies, 'We are the soldiers of Bapu; we are the inheritors of his mission.' We shall march into the field carrying the banner of Truth, the shield of Nonviolence and the sword of Spiritual Force. Thus shall we fight evil and conquer without killing, and victory shall be ours! Let the sons and daughters of India wipe their tears and march onward with fresh hope and vigour. Let us work with the strength and the light that he has handed down to us. Let us win for him the battle of Truth and show to the world what he and his mission were."

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37. *Gangsters.*

38. *Ishwar, Allah are thy names; Give good sense to all, O Lord.*



Gandhi Bapu's Samadhi, Rajghat