

Mahatma Gandhi and His Involvement in the Indian Independence Movement

By Jihyeong (Jonas) Park

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Section II – Document Collection

Headnotes:

1. Gandhi's Ideas of Passive Resistance (1909)

In this excerpt taken from a book titled *Hind Swaraj* or *Indian Home Rule*, Gandhi explains what he meant by truth (swaraj) in his book *Hind Swaraj*. Mahatma Gandhi wrote in his native language, Gujarati. He wrote this book while he travelled from London, United Kingdom to Durban, South Africa on board *SS Kildonan Castle* between November 13 and November 22, 1909. He describes passive resistance or “satyagraha” as the key to fighting against violence of the British Empire.

The fact that there are so many men still alive in the world shows that it is based not on the force of arms but on the force of truth or love...

Passive resistance is a method of securing rights by personal suffering; it is the reverse of Resistance by arms. When I refuse to do a thing that is repugnant to my conscience, I use soul-force. For instance, the government of the day has passed a law which is applicable to me: I do not like it, if, by using violence, I force the government to repeal the law, I am employing what may be termed body-force. If I do not obey the law and accept the penalty for its breach, I use soul-force. It involves sacrifice of self.

Everybody admits that sacrifice of self is infinitely superior to sacrifice of others. Moreover, if this kind of force is used in a cause that is unjust only the person using it suffers. He does not make others suffer for his mistakes. Men have before now done many things which were subsequently found to have been wrong. No man can claim to be absolutely in the right, or that a particular thing is wrong, because he thinks so, but it is wrong for him so long as that is his deliberate judgment. It is, therefore, meet that he should not do that which he knows to be wrong, and suffer the consequence whatever it may be. This is the key to the use of soul-force.

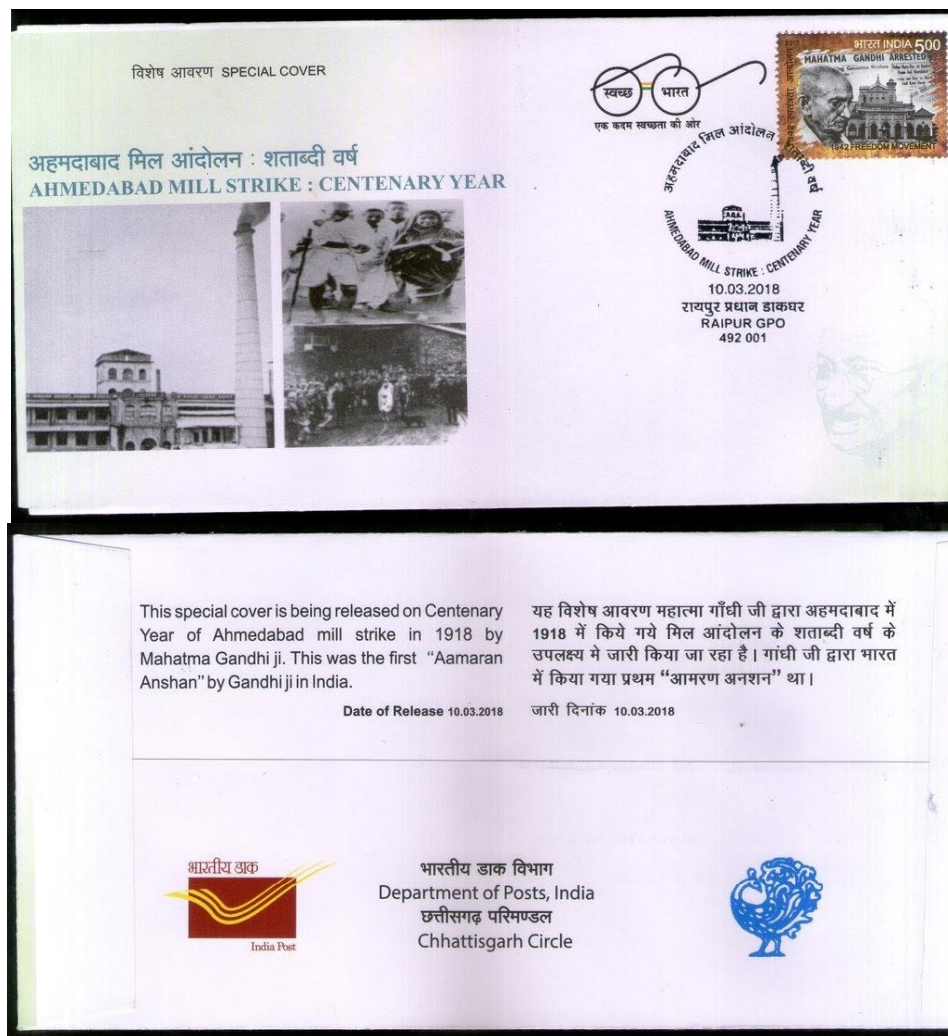
Source: *Hind Swaraj* Pages 129, 131, 132, Gandhi Heritage Portal Website Digital Archive (in Ebook):

https://www.gandhiheritageportal.org/ghp_booksection_detail/LTM4ODYtMTE=#page/1/mode/2up

Ahmedabad Mill Strike (1918) #Documents 2 - 4

Documents 2, 3, and 4, all have to do with the Ahmedabad Mill Strike. The Spanish Flu of 1918 devastated India and affected Indian mill workers of Ahmedabad, a city of British Colonial India. Mill workers began a strike in March 1918, so they could be allowed to obtain a wage increase of 35 per cent. The strike lasted for 22 days. However, mill owners refused. Gandhi worked with mill workers and started his fast. Mill owners agreed to reach a settlement, and they increased 35 per cent for mill workers on March 18, 1918.

2. The following letter cover “India 2018 Mahatma Gandhi Ahmedabad Mill Strike Raipur Special Cover # 18664” has pictures taken by anonymous photographers during the Ahmedabad Mill Strike in 1918. The Indian Department of Post distributed copies of this letter cover to Indian people in 2018 to celebrate the Centenary Year of Ahmedabad Mill Strike in 1918. Mahatma Gandhi met mill workers, who consisted of Hindus and Muslims in Ahmedabad Mill, British Colonial India between March 15th and March 17th, 1918. He stayed in Ahmedabad Mill to convince mill workers to peacefully strike against mill owners.



Source: Frontside and Backside of Special Letter Cover, which has pictures that show the Ahmedabad Mill, Gandhi and His followers, and Mill Workers during the Ahmedabad Mill Strike, India, March 1918:

<https://www.philindiastamps.com/products/india-2018-mahatma-gandhi-ahmedabad-mill-strike-raipur-special-cover-18664>

3. Mahatma Gandhi gave this speech to mill workers, commissioners, and prominent men of Ahmedabad under the babul tree, Ahmedabad, British Colonial India on March 18th, 1918. This speech is notable, because this speech mentions how Gandhi's decision to fast convinced mill owners [to pay attention to the workers' demands] and reached a satisfactory settlement for mill-hands.

The settlement which I place before you merely upholds the workers' pledge. There is nothing more in it. I pleaded with the mill-owners as well as I could. I asked them to grant a permanent increase of 35 per cent. They felt, however, that that would be too much...

The mill-owners said that they had their pledge to abide just as we had ours [Gandhi and mill workers]. I told them that they had no right to take such pledge, but they insisted that theirs too was equally valid. I thought over the pledges of both. My fast stood in the way. I could not tell them: "I will break my fast only if you concede my demand." I felt that this would have been cowardice on my part. I, therefore, agreed that for the present both may maintain their pledges... Our settlement, therefore, is briefly this:

On the first day, an increase of 35 per cent will be given in keeping with our pledge; on the second day, we get 20 per cent in keeping with the mill-owners'. From the third day till the date of the arbitrator's award, an increase of 27½ percent will be paid and subsequently, if the arbitrator decides on 35 per cent, the mill-owners will give us 7½ per cent more and, if he decides on 20 per cent, we shall refund 7½ per cent...

[From Gujarati]
*Ek Dharmayuddha

* "Ek Dharmayuddha" is a Sanskrit word that means "One war fought for a righteous end by righteous means and methods."

Source: Speech to Ahmedabad Mill-hands (Mill Workers) [March 18, 1918] Pages 267, *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* Vol. 14: October 9, 1917 - July 31, 1918, Section 183:

https://www.gandhiheritageportal.org/cwmg_volume_thumbview/MTQ=#page/298/mode/2up

4. Here we read another speech that Gandhi gave to the mill workers at Ahmedabad. Mahatma Gandhi made a speech for Ambalal Sarabhai, mill owners, and mill workers at the compound of Ambalal Sarabhai's House, Ahmedabad, British Colonial India on March 18th, 1918. Here Gandhi mentions that the mill workers' strike lasted for twenty-two days.

It appears to me that as days pass, not only Ahmedabad but the whole of India will be proud of this twenty-two days' struggle and India will see that we can hope much from a struggle conducted in this manner. There has been no bitterness in it. I have never come across the like of it. I have had experience of many such conflicts or heard of them, but have not known any in which there was so little ill will or bitterness as in this. I hope you will always maintain peace in the same way as you did during the strike.

I must apologize to the employers. I have pained them very much. My vow [to fast] was aimed at you, but everything in this world has two sides. Thus, the vow had an effect on the employers as well, I apologize to them humbly for this, I am as much their servant as the workers'. All I ask is that both should utilize my services to the full.

[From Gujarati]
* Ek Dharmayuddha

* "Ek Dharmayuddha" is a Sanskrit word that means "One war fought for a righteous end by righteous means and methods."

**Source: Second Speech to Ahmedabad Mill-hands (Mill Workers) [March 18, 1918]
Pages 268, *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* Vol. 14: October 9, 1917 - July 31, 1918, Section 184:**

https://www.gandhiheritageportal.org/cwmg_volume_thumbview/MTQ=#page/300/mode/2up

Salt Satyagraha (Salt March) (March 2, 1930) Documents 5 - 7

Documents 5, 6, 7, and are about the Salt March. The British Empire passed the India Salt Act in 1882, which only allowed British people to manufacture salt in India. The following primary sources include #5 Gandhi's letter to Viceroy of British Colonial India, #6 Gandhi's speech to Indians, and #7 documentary video clip on Gandhi's Salt March.

5. Mahatma Gandhi told Lord Irwin, Viceroy of British Colonial India from 1926 to 1932, in a letter that the peaceful civil disobedience campaign or the salt march. This campaign will take place in India to disobey the India Salt Act in Satyagraha Ashram, Sabarmati, one of residences of Mahatma Gandhi, March 2, 1930. Gandhi did not follow the law by collecting natural salt from the Arabian Sea coast. One notable difference with two speeches from #2 and #3 is that Gandhi addresses himself with his full name "Mohandas K. Gandhi" when he addressed his name in a letter to Lord Irwin.

Satyagraha Ashram,
Sabarmati,
March 2, 1930

DEAR FRIEND,

Before embarking on civil disobedience, and taking the risk I have dreaded to take all these years, I would fain approach you and find a way out...

I have deliberately used the word conversion. For my ambition is no less than to convert the British people through non-violence, and thus to make them see the wrong they have done to India. I do not seek to harm your people. I want to serve them even as I want to serve my own. I believe that I have always served them...

The plan through civil disobedience will be to combat such evils as I have sampled out. If we want to sever the British connection it is because of such evils. When they are removed, the path becomes easy. Then the way to friendly negotiation will be open. If the British commerce with India is purified of greed, you will have no difficulty in recognizing our independence. I invite you then to pave the way for immediate removal of those evils, and thus open a way for a real conference between equals, interested only in promoting the common good of mankind through voluntary fellowship and in arranging terms of mutual help and commerce equally suited to both. You have unnecessarily laid stress upon communal problems that unhappily affect this land. Important though they undoubtedly are for the consideration of any scheme of Government they have little bearing on the greater problems which are above communities and which affect them all equally. But if you cannot see your way to deal with these evils and my letter makes no appeal to your heart, on the eleventh day of this month, I shall proceed with such co-workers of the Ashram as I can take, to disregard the provisions of the salt laws. I regard this tax to be the most iniquitous of all from the poor man's standpoint. As the independence movement is essentially for the poorest in the land, the beginning will be made with this evil. The wonder is that we have submitted to the cruel monopoly for so long. It is, I know, open to you to frustrate my design by arresting me. I hope that there will be tens of thousands ready, in a disciplined manner, to take up the work after me, and, in the act of disobeying the Salt Act, to lay themselves open to the penalties of a law that should never have disfigured the statute book...

I remain,
Your sincere friend,
M.K. Gandhi

Mahatma, Vol. III, pp. 18-23

Source: Mahatma Gandhi's Letter to Lord Irwin, Viceroy of India (in office

1926-1932): <https://www.mkgandhi.org/selectedletters/62viceroy.html>

6. Mahatma Gandhi told 10,000 Indians on March 11, 1930 that Gandhi and his followers will march from Ahmedabad to the Arabian Sea to collect natural salt at the Arabian Sea on March 12th, 1930 to peacefully resist the British Empire's salt monopoly. Gandhi's action will later be known as the "salt march" or "salt satyagraha (nonviolence)". Gandhi's speech, which was translated from his native Indian language took place during the evening prayer on the Sabarmati sands at Ahmedabad, on the eve of his historic march to Arabian Sea.

In all probability this will be my last speech to you. Even if the Government allow me to march tomorrow morning, this will be my last speech on the sacred banks of the Sabarmati. Possibly these may be the last words of my life here.

I have already told you yesterday what I had to say. Today I shall confine myself to what you should do after my companions and I are arrested. The programme of the march to Jalalpur must be fulfilled as originally settled. The enlistment of the volunteers for this purpose should be confined to Gujarat only. From what I have been and heard during the last fortnight, I am inclined to believe that the stream of civil resisters will flow unbroken.

But let there be not a semblance of breach of peace even after all of us have been arrested. We have resolved to utilize all our resources in the pursuit of an exclusively nonviolent struggle. Let no one commit a wrong in anger. This is my hope and prayer. I wish these words of mine reached every nook and corner of the land. My task shall be done if I perish and so do my comrades. It will then be for the Working Committee of the Congress to show you the way and it will be up to you to follow its lead. So long as I have reached Jalalpur, let nothing be done in contravention to the authority vested in me by the Congress. But once I am arrested, the whole responsibility shifts to the Congress. No one who believes in non-violence, as a creed, need, therefore, sit still. My compact with the Congress ends as soon as I am arrested. In that case volunteers. Wherever possible, civil disobedience of salt should be started. These laws can be violated in three ways. It is an offence to manufacture salt wherever there are facilities for doing so. The possession and sale of contraband salt, which includes natural salt or salt earth, is also an offence. The purchasers of such salt will be equally guilty. To carry away the natural salt deposits on the seashore is likewise violation of law. So is the hawking of such salt. In short, you may choose any one or all of these devices to break the salt monopoly.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IjDErHQGEHM>

Aftermath of the Salt Satyagraha (Salt March) (1930) Documents 8 - 10

Documents 8, 9, and 10 deal with the aftermath of the Salt March. After the Salt March, British and Indians had different reactions to how Gandhi's civil disobedience campaign at Arabian Sea turned out. The following primary sources include two British political cartoons released after the Salt March and Indian independence activist's response to the Salt March.

8. After the Salt March, Paolo Garretto, Italian artist renowned for his caricatures between 1930s and 1940s, was commissioned to make a political cartoon in *The London Graphic Illustrator*, British magazine company in London, British Empire. He depicted Gandhi putting salt on the tail of a lion (British Empire) on March 24th, 1930. His cartoon's caption reads: "Gandhi the Tail-Salter," which is based on the legendary European superstitious belief that a person may catch a bird if he or she puts salt on a bird's tail. In other words, Gandhi sought to defeat the British Empire with salt.



Source: Political Cartoon on the Salt March "Salting the Lion's Tail" Garretto, The London Graphic Illustrator, May 24, 1930:

<https://twitter.com/iSumeetShetty/status/1117255049007255552/photo/1>

10. After the Salt March, Jawaharlal Nehru, Indian Independence activist and first prime minister of India, made a comment on how Gandhi's Salt March changed Indian people in 1934. Nehru worked with Gandhi during the salt march.

Of course these movements exercised tremendous pressure on the British Government and shook the government machinery. But the real importance, to my mind, lay in the effect they had on our own people, and especially the village masses ... Non-cooperation dragged them out of the mire and gave them self-respect and self-reliance ... They acted courageously and did not submit so easily to unjust oppression; their outlook widened and they began to think a little in terms of India as a whole... It was a remarkable transformation and the Congress, under Gandhi's leadership, must have the credit for it.

Jawaharlal Nehru's View Towards Gandhi's Salt March to the Sea from Pages

417~419, Geoffrey Ashe's Gandhi: A Biography (The Geoffrey Ashe Histories) Kindle Edition:

<https://www.amazon.com/dp/B08DKY698F/ref=dp-kindle-redirect?encoding=UTF8&btkr=1>