

## **Platinum Jubilee of Salt Satyagraha Dandi March: a pilgrimage to Swaraj**

*- Savita Singh*

Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore who was on a visit to Sabarmati Ashram on 18<sup>th</sup> January, 1930 enquired from the Mahatma. “What Gandhi had in store for the country in 1930”. “I am furiously thinking night and day,” Gandhiji replied, “and I do not see any light coming out of the surrounding darkness”.

Ever since his release from the prison in May 1924 Mahatma Gandhi had in all practical sense stepped out of the mainstream politics and turned his attention towards constructive programme aimed at what he called “a more important task of nation building from the bottom up.”

This was also the period when he traveled extensively through the length and breadth of the countryside. In his speeches and writings of these years five themes are recurrent: spinning-wheel, untouchability, basic education, upliftment of women and communal harmony - all pillars of a healthy and vibrant society.

He used his tours to liberate the people from an age-long inertia, fear and superstition. He would chide the people for wasting money on garlands for him. **“For every rupee saved on these garlands you should give sixteen women one meal”**. He was deeply disturbed by the filthy conditions obtaining in the villages, towns and cities. He would admonish the people for this. **“So long as you do not take the broom and bucket in your hands you cannot make towns and cities clean”**.

The Calcutta session of the Congress (December 1928) had given to the British Government, in the words of Jawaharlal Nehru **‘an offer of a year’s grace and a polite ultimatum’** to grant dominion status to India by 1929. Mahatma Gandhi was watching the situation keenly from the periphery. In December 1929 events were on the march, there was a promise of a struggle. At midnight on December 31, 1929 as the New Year

dawned the Indian National Congress unfurled the flag of Independence at Lahore on the banks of the river Ravi. And on 26<sup>th</sup> January 1930 the pledge for *Purna Swaraj* (Complete Independence) was taken.

On the eve of Independence Day, Gandhiji wrote: “Remember that 26<sup>th</sup> is the day not to declare independence but to declare that we will be satisfied with nothing less than Complete Independence as opposed to dominion status so called.

He further said, “We believe that is the inalienable right of the Indian people, as of any other people, to have freedom and to enjoy the fruits of their toil and have the necessities of life, so that they may have full opportunities of growth. We believe also that if any government deprives a people of these rights and oppress them, the people have a further right to alter it or to abolish it. The British Government in India has not only deprived the Indian people of their freedom but has based itself on the exploitation of the masses, and has ruined India economically, politically, culturally and spiritually. We believe, therefore, that India must sever the British connection and attain Purna Swaraj or Complete Independence....”

Two hundred years of British domination virtually ruined India’s traditional economy. “Village industries, such as hand-spinning, have been destroyed, leaving the peasantry idle for at least four months in the year, and dulling their intellect for want of handicrafts, and nothing has been substituted, as in other countries, for the crafts thus destroyed....”

“Culturally, the system of education has torn us from our mornings, our training has made us hug the very chains that binds us...”

Once again all eyes turned to Sabaramti, curious to know what Gandhiji would do next.

There was little doubt that in executing the decisions of the Lahore session, the nation would be guided by Gandhiji. Once again, his writings and speeches acquired the forthright frankness, which had marked them ten years earlier. “The people had the right,

he wrote, to alter or abolish an unjust government. If the atmosphere remained non-violent”, he promised, “to lead a civil disobedience campaign. He was conscious of the risks inherent in a mass movement. The lesson of *Chauri Chaura*, however, had not been lost on the country. At the same time, Gandhi made it known that there was to be no easy reversal of the movement once it was launched; while every possible effort was to be made to restrain the forces of violence, civil disobedience would continue ‘so long as there is a single resister left free or alive’. In 1920-22 Gandhi had proceeded cautiously, spent months in preparing the country, graduated the programme of non-co-operation and shown an obvious reluctance in embarking upon mass civil disobedience. In 1930 he proceeded with swifter and surer steps; it was as if his labours in the previous decade had not been wasted and he was picking up the thread where he had left it off in 1922. ‘The call of 1920,’ he wrote, ‘was a call for preparation. The call in 1930 is for engaging in final conflict’.

Gandhi was not spoiling for a fight: in Satyagraha struggle is the last step, when all other avenues have been tried. In *Young India* of January 30, 1930, he made an offer to the Viceroy: if the British Government would accept ‘Eleven Points’, he would not press on with civil disobedience. These ‘Eleven Points’ (which included reduction in land revenue, abolition of salt tax, scaling down of military and civil expenditure, release of political prisoners, and levy of duties on foreign cloth) seemed to the official world a conveniently wide net to win to his movement peasants as well as industrial workers, professional classes as well as business interests. To Gandhi’s own colleagues, a month after the declaration of independence, the proposal was something of an anti-climax. Gandhi knew fully well that the ‘Eleven Points’ did not add up to political independence, but by listing them he was setting up a tangible test for the willingness of the Government to part with power. “The Eleven Points were of course too high-pitched and unrealistic for the Government, which took scarcely any notice of them”.

Gandhi’s eleven points raised a storm of indignation in the British Press.

Mahatma Gandhi was also under tremendous pressures to think of an appropriate mode of protest drawing from his experience of the campaigns in 1919-1921 when a number of Young Indians saw an opportunity of striking a bloody blow for freedom. For six weeks, Gandhiji had been waiting to hear the Inner Voice. And on 27<sup>th</sup> February 1930 he had the answer – the magic word was : Salt.

As a result, a new and surprisingly explosive energy began to surface spontaneously at the call given by Gandhiji to his countrymen and women to break the Salt law and challenge the British Empire by manufacturing Salt. Not surprising, for the Gandhian techniques nurtured by years of experimentation were grounded in the common experience of the masses of people and they knew what Gandhiji wanted them to do. Gandhiji believed that the leaders could start a movement only when they correctly interpreted the mood of the masses. The nationalist workers and local leaders merely hastened the process of anticipating the mind of the masses. Gandhiji himself said that ‘he had never created a situation’. He could only instinctively feel what was stirring in the hearts of the masses and only then he built up a programme and gave a shape to what was already there.

Why Salt Satyagraha? Why did Mahatma Gandhi choose the salt tax as the issue? Its abolition had been advocated in India generally, and by Gandhi in particular, decades before the salt satyagraha. Gopal Krishna Gokhale, Gandhi’s political guru (mentor), roundly condemned the salt tax in 1902 before the Imperial Legislative council in Bombay. Gokhale dwelt on the “unquestioned hardship” that the salt tax “imposes upon the poorest of the poor of our community”.

Gandhi explained his position on February 27. In the first extensive comment that he had ever made on the salt tax, he outlined the reasons for his choice of this particular tax in characteristically inclusive terms: “Next to air and water, salt is perhaps the greatest necessity of life. It is the only condiment of the poor....There is no article like salt outside water by taxing which the State can reach even the starving millions, the sick, the

maimed and the utterly helpless. The tax constitutes therefore the most inhuman poll tax that ingenuity of man can devise.”

In 1905, Gandhi wrote from South Africa that the tax should be abolished immediately, and the demand is repeated, though not stressed, over the years. In his blanket indictment of British rule in *Hind Swaraj*, Gandhi makes a special point of commenting that “The salt-tax is not a small injustice.” By January 1930, the issue of the salt tax had been elevated to one of Gandhi’s primary concerns, being listed as fourth in this eleven demands for basic reforms presented to Lord Irwin. However, it was not until February 5, only five weeks before the march, that the press reported that Gandhi would undertake civil disobedience “in connection with the salt tax.” Gandhi’s choice of salt as a symbol of protest had amused many. It struck even the most loyal of Gandhi’s followers as a poor choice for an issue to fight the campaign. Manufacture of salt occurred mainly along the coast and it was difficult to imagine how a nationwide protest might be organised. When Gandhi proposed it to the Working Committee of the Congress in mid-February, the response was incredulity.

The ruling elite termed it as “an amusing interlude”. Little did they know that soon Salt is going to turn into a nightmare for them. The British had laughed while the Congress intellectuals were bewildered by the strange idea. This, once again, proved Gandhi’s genius for seizing the significance of the seemingly trivial but essential details of daily living, which are relegated to the woman’s sphere. Salt is one of the cheapest of commodities, which every woman buys and uses as a matter of routine, almost without thought...

If the issue of the salt tax was amazing, then the method of the march constituted unique means of attacking it. Mahatma Gandhi’s methodical procedure of walking through dozens of village, pausing regularly to hold public meetings, and covering a remarkable distance of more than 241 miles in 24 days, is regarded as a massive political campaign. The gradual cumulative force of this leadership converted the streams of “volunteers” who converged around it into a human tide, quickly rising and eventually sweeping the

movement to the sea. The way in which this floodtide grew, carrying such diverse elements in its flow, is phenomenal.

### **From Great March to Dandi March.**

How and when did the conception of a march form in Gandhi's mind? During his stay in South Africa, he had used the technique of the march before, in 1913. As part of a strike of Indian labourers, he had led a large contingent from Natal into the Transvaal. The "Great March" as it came to be called, took five days, from November 6 to 10 and involved 2,037 men, 127 women, and 57 children. Many scholars have found a great deal similarity between the 'Great March' of 1913 and Dandi March of 1930.

Yet there were significant differences between the two marches. The much larger size of the South African group gave it an unwieldy and untrained character that the press derided as a "pathetic Indian army" or "a long struggling line of weary and footsore travellers" that fell into the waiting arms of the police. Moreover, the relatively short period of five days did not allow for the same build-up of suspense and publicity. Gandhi had not acquired an international reputation in 1913 and so the event received no attention in the world press.

The overall contrast between the marches of 1913 and 1930 reveals how much Gandhi's leadership and power had matured in seventeen years. In addition to this his experiences of the non-cooperation movement of the 1921 also helped him a great deal. This time he laid more emphasis on training and self-discipline. By 1930 Gandhi's leadership had gained dramatically in self-confidence and political control: satyagraha had acquired a degree of political power that measured favourably against the imperial government of India. Gandhi's whole strategy showed a confidence that he possessed a "method of action ripe for use."

To meet the growing expectations of the masses and sensing their restlessness the Government suggested a Round Table Conference to dilute the situation arising out of the Purna Swaraj Pledge. But Mahatma Gandhi was convinced that if India is to live as a

nation, if the slow death by starvation of her people is to stop, some remedy must be found for immediate relief. The proposed conference is certainly not be remedy. It is not a matter of carrying conviction by argument. The matter resolves itself into one of matching forces. Conviction or no conviction, Great Britain would defend her Indian commerce and interests by all the forces at her command. India must consequently evolve force enough to free herself from the embrace of death.

By the end of February, Gandhi declared his intention to “start the movement only through the inmates of the Ashram and those who have submitted to its discipline and assimilated the spirit of its methods.” In this way, Gandhi underscored both his dissatisfaction with the undisciplined politics of the time, “and his own position that among his adherents only one quality really counted, a disciplined belief in the creed of non-violence”.

In the month before the march began Gandhi moved to strengthen the preparation. Timing was a key consideration. The route and major stopover were determined and announced in Gandhi’s weekly *Young India* three days before the march began. Advance groups of students from the Gujarat Vidyapith (a national university founded by Mahatma Gandhi in Ahmedabad) were chosen to scout the area of the march thoroughly. They were to collect data about each of the villages on the route from a questionnaire prepared by Gandhi. This information was then used in the talks that he gave in these villages. Weather was a vital factor because the cool Gujarat mornings yielded to intolerably hot mid-afternoons, so that a marching schedule was devised to make maximum use of the hours between 6:00 and 10:00 each morning and evening.

Mahatma Gandhi was a shrewd planner and believed in studied strategy. He sought to prepare for the event through a series of public statements from Sabarmati, issued both at his regular prayer meetings and directly to the press. The general climate of expectation was heightened by his repeated anticipation of arrest in these statements.

Once satisfied with the preparation Gandhiji sent an offer letter to Lord Irwin on 2<sup>nd</sup> March, 1930.

The letter bears the unique style of Gandhiji's leadership and his politics. There is an openness in this letter to Irwin, informing that adversary in advance of the plan of battle. It is the antithesis of an exclusivist style, with its core concept of a small secret conspiratorial circle open hand extended to the opponent, inviting him to join in an accord. Beginning in Gandhi's classic manner with "Dear friend," it sets the tone of congeniality and trust, which befuddled his adversaries at first in his dealings with Gandhi. So it did to Lord Irwin. And hand involving him to join in an accord. The letter opens with a humble request that the Viceroy help him "find a way out" so that he may somehow avoid undertaking an action he dreads: civil disobedience.

At the outset Gandhiji made it clear that while he regards "British rule to be a curse," he does "not intend harm to a single Englishman." How could he, when he has "the privilege of claiming many Englishmen as dearest friends," and when he has learned much about the evil of British rule from "courageous Englishmen" who dared to tell the truth. Thus Gandhi makes one of his favourite points, "distinguishing the evils of institutionalised imperialism and racism from the instinctive goodness of individuals who are unwittingly serving these institutions. The implication is clear, that the sins of the system will be visited upon the heads of its servants: but only if they continue to cooperate with it".

### **British Rule a Curse**

The Satyagraha so forcefully drew the world attention on the economic injustice that the continuance of the British rule in India was causing to her 'dumb millions'. Gandhiji in his letter asked the Viceroy to examine his own salary and to realize that he is earning "much over five thousand times India's average income [whereas] the British Prime Minister is getting only ninety times Britain's average income". Therefore, "a system that provides for such an arrangement deserves to be summarily scrapped." Yet, the system will not die an easy death, for "Great Britain would defend her Indian commerce and



interests by all the force at her command. India must consequently evolve force enough to free herself from that embrace of death.” What sort of force? Not of violence. Yet, violence of two kinds is already growing fast in India, the violence of the terrorists and the “organised violence of the British Government.” Another kind of force must be applied in order to sterilize violence and liberate India from this cancer. Only “non-violence....expressed through civil disobedience” will achieve not only swaraj for Indians, but also the “conversion” of the British people, making “them see the wrong they have done to India”.

Gandhi concludes, “If my letter makes no appeal to your heart,” and the eleven demands, are denied, then civil disobedience is unavoidable, and he provides the date and place that it will begin. The specific issue is the salt tax, for its is “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.” He assures the Viceroy that he has no desire to cause him “unnecessary embarrassment” and asks of Irwin the “favor” not to obstruct his path. The letter ends with an archetypal Gandhian touch : since it is “not in any way intended as a threat,” he has chosen “a young English friend,” who believes in non-violence and India’s freedom and “whom Providence seems to have sent to me” to hand-deliver the letter to Irwin. The symbolic meaning of this final gesture of a heaven-sent Briton, having seen the truth and charged by Gandhi with the personal task of carrying it to the Viceroy, was not lost on India or on history. As a gesture it perhaps spoke more eloquently for inclusiveness than any words that Gandhi could devise”.

Gandhiji after a good deal of deliberation selected Reginald Reynolds as his messenger because he wanted “to forge a further check” upon himself against any intentional act that would hurt a single Englishman.

The Viceroy’s prompt reply was an expression of regret that Gandhi should be “contemplating a course of action which is clearly bound to involve violation of the law and danger to the public peace”.

“On bended knees I asked for bread and I have received stone instead” Gandhi exclaimed, “The Viceregal reply does not surprise me”. Gandhi announced that he would himself perform the first act of civil disobedience by leading a group of Satyagrahis to the sea-shore for the breach of the Salt Laws. He communicated his plans to the Viceroy in a letter, which was an indictment of British rule as well as an appeal for restoring to India what was her due.

Gandhi decided to lead the first band of Satyagrahis from Ahmedabad to Dandi on the sea-shore. The Satyagrahis were elected from Sabarmati Ashram that had according to the testimony of one of its inmates, reached ‘its zenith in physical energy and moral strength’. Sabarmati was now assuming the role that Phoenix and Tolstoy Ashrams had done in South Africa; it became the recruiting ground for the vanguard of freedom and a hub of political activities. There was nothing secret about these activities. Richard Gregg has recorded how a correspondent of a British-owned paper, who had been sent to Ahmedabad to report what was going on in ‘the enemy’s camp’, instead of being turned away was, at Gandhi’s instance, accommodated in the Sabarmati Ashram, treated as a guest, and allowed to see things for himself.

The prayer meeting on the evening of March 11 had a record attendance. ‘Our cause is strong’, said Gandhi, ‘our means the purest, and God is with us. There is no defeat for Satyagrahis till they give up truth. I pray for the battle which beings tomorrow’. That night perhaps the only person in the Ashram who slept was the Mahatma himself. Next morning, at 6.30, he began the 241 mile march to Dandi on the sea-shore. The seventy-nine Satyagrahis included scholars, newspaper editors, untouchables, and weavers. The oldest was the sixty-one-year-old leader, the youngest a boy of sixteen. The people of Ahmedabad turned out in the thousands to cheer them. The roads were strewn with green leaves. Gandhi, the oldest member of his volunteer band, walked so fast that younger men found it difficult to keep pace with him. He felt all the better for the exercise; he rose as usual at 4 a.m., conducted the morning prayers, addressed meetings in villages through which he passed, did his daily quota of spinning, wrote articles for his journals and letters

to his correspondents. He announced that he would not return to Sabarmati Ashram until the Salt Tax was repealed.

Meanwhile, the authorities had been watching the movement with mingled anxiety and bewilderment. The British had no intention to liquidate their Indian Empire. Earl Russell, the Under-Secretary of State for India, had commented on the Congress demand for complete independence: 'None knows better than the Indians themselves how foolish it is to talk of complete independence. Dominion status is not possible at the moment and would not be for a long time'.

The same opinion had been expressed by Lord Irwin when he said that the assertion of a goal was not the same thing as its attainment.

The first impulse of the Government, as of the Congress intellectual, was to ridicule 'the kindergarten stage of political revolution', and to laugh away the idea that the King-Emperor could be unseated by boiling sea-water in a kettle. The experts of the Government of India did not take the breach of the Salt Tax seriously. Tottenham, a member of the Central Board of Revenue (the department which dealt with Salt Tax), described the breach of Salt Laws 'as Mr. Gandhi's somewhat fantastic project'. A committee of two senior officers reported early in February that salt did not appear to be a promising field for initiating a no-tax campaign; that the most that could happen was that small quantities of inferior salt would be sporadically produced in certain areas and consumed locally; that neither government revenues, nor the price of salt were likely to be affected.

The Collector of Kaira, one of the districts through which Gandhi's itinerary lay, was so apprehensive of the political effects of Gandhi's march that he recommended to the Bombay Government that the march should be prohibited. 'So long as it is conducted peacefully,' wrote the Government of Bombay to the Government of India, 'there is no provision of law which permits prohibition of the march'. The Government of India concurred in the view and added that the time for arrest would come when the matter had

passed from the 'sphere of words to that of action'. Section 117 of the Indian Penal Code, under which the arrest was proposed, being bailable, there was nothing to prevent Gandhi from continuing the march if he chose to be bailed out. Moreover, neither the Bombay Government nor the Government of India could rule out the possibility that Gandhi's march might end in a fiasco: if the 'salt earth' collected by Gandhi's party, after it reached the sea-shore were confiscated and no one was prosecuted, would not Gandhi 'look ridiculous'? The Government of India therefore saw the wisdom of 'waiting on events' and taking action only when the results of the march became clear. The district magistrates through whose districts Gandhi was to march were therefore directed to telegraph daily reports simultaneously to New Delhi and Bombay to enable the policy-makers of the provincial and central governments to adjust the official policy to the exigencies of the political situation.

A study of the Salt Satyagraha clearly shows that Mahatma Gandhi was at his best; it was indeed the pinnacle of Gandhian movement wherein his organizational principles and technique of mass mobilization stands out as brilliant. It displays his art of combining immediate goal with long-term perspective above all it shows his method of achieving the unity of theory and praxis of nonviolent mass action. It forcefully demonstrates the power of the Gandhian method of popular penetration even in the socially and politically most backward agrarian regions, and his method of collective persuasion and education of the masses.

The Salt satyagraha was formally launched on March 12 at 6.30 a.m. with the whole world watching on, when Gandhiji started with seventy-eight followers on the historic march of Dandi. A huge crowd followed. For miles and miles the roads were watered and bestrewn with green leaves; the flags and festoons gave an appearance of festival. Gandhiji at the head of the procession set a fast pace with his staff in hand.

"Today the pilgrim marches onward on his long trek," Jawaharlal Nehru observed. "Staff in hand he goes along the dusty roads of Gujarat, clear-eyed and firm of step, with his faithful band trudging along behind him. Many a journey he has undertaken in the past,

many a weary road traversed. But longer than any that have gone before is this last journey of his, and many are the obstacles in his way. But the fire of a great resolve is in him and surpassing love of his miserable countrymen. And love of truth that scorches and love of freedom that inspires. And none that passes him can escape the spell, and men of common clay feel the spark of life. It is a long journey, for the goal is the independence of India and the ending of the exploitation of her millions”.

A particular phenomenon noted by the nationalist press and in government dispatches alike, was that “women assembled in thousands’ to applaud Gandhi and were taking an uncommon interest in the campaign. This was the unique feature of the Salt Satyagraha that it saw the women power to the fore.

Though, initially, Gandhi did not envisage the presence of women in the forefront of the Salt Satyagraha. One finds from his writings that he was faced with the dilemma in selecting the first batch of Satyagrahis for the Dandi march. Women were equally excited like their male counterparts to join the March. After deliberating on the issue for sometime Gandhi told the women that ‘*their time was not just yet*’. In his message to *the women of India* Gandhi explained that since a sufficient number of men were likely to respond, the presence of women was not essential. “The impatience of some sisters to join the good fight is to me a healthy sign. It has led to the discovery that however attractive the campaign against the salt tax may be, for them to confine themselves to it would be to change a Pound for a Penny. Not only would they be lost in the crowd but also, there will be in it no suffering for which they are thirsting”.

Other practical reasons for excluding women were the essential aspect of Satyagraha never to take advantage of his rivals. Justifying his action, Gandhi said: “I must be considerate to the opponent. We want to go in for suffering and there may even be torture. If we put the women in front, the Government may hesitate to inflict on us all that they might otherwise inflict. A delicate sense of chivalry towards the opponent is what decides me against women in the first batch”!

According to Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya, Gandhi's decision to exclude women applied only to the march. "It was the Congress Committee rather than Gandhi, that decided to exclude women from the Salt Satyagraha. She met Gandhi on the eve of the Dandi March and asked him to make a special appeal to women. Gandhi apparently laughed and said that they would do so anyway, but on Kamaladevi's insistence he wrote a brief appeal to the women to join the movement. This she took to the Congress Committee and upon reading it they withdrew veto".

Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay led a procession of 15,000 women to raid Wadala Salt Works. Kasturba initiated women's participation by leading thirty-seven women volunteers from the Ashram at Sabarmati to offer satyagraha. Sarojini Naidu with Manilal Gandhi led the raid on Dharasana Salt Works in the course of which the police force went berserk trying to crush the non-violent satyagrahis.

By sunset of that first day of the Salt Satyagraha on 6<sup>th</sup> April 1930 it turned into a mass movement and swept the entire country. Decades later in a moving interview to Radha Kumar Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay recalled, "how on that memorable day thousands of women strode down to the sea like proud warriors. But instead of weapons, they bore pitchers of clay, brass and copper: and instead of uniforms, they were wearing simple cotton saris of *Village of India*.

... Women young and old, rich and poor, came tumbling out in their hundreds and thousands shaking off the traditional shackles that had held them so long.

Valiantly they went forward without a trace of fear or embarrassment. They stood at street corners with little packets of salt, crying out: 'we have broken the Salt Law and we are free! Who will buy the salt of freedom?' Their cries never went unheeded. Every passer-by stopped, slipped a coin into their hands and held out proudly a tiny pinch of salt".

The immediate effect of women going to jails, undergoing hard labour and suffering untold miseries filled the nationalist movement with new energy. The success of the Salt Satyagraha in particular had been due to the new moral force that women's entry brought into the movement. The presence of women generated public support and mobilised the 'apathetic and the marginally interested' to join the movement above all it exposed the Government of the day as inhuman and unjust. Gandhi was quick to understand that "women are endowed with the power to teach the art of peace to the warring world thirsty for that nectar. She can become the leader in the Satyagraha which does not require the learning that books give but does require the stout heart that comes from suffering and faith".

Gandhi was so fascinated by the women's role in the Salt Satyagraha, their coming out of their homes in 'one mass' and showing an awakening which he found miraculous that he almost took upon himself as a mission to enlighten the people of this country through public meetings about how "women took part in processions, defied the law, and bore *lathi*, without raising a little finger, without swearing at the police, and used their power of persuasion to wean the drunkard from drink and the sellers and purchasers of foreign cloth from it". Gandhi paid his tributes to hundreds of "unlettered women who had borne *lathi* blows on their heads standing unflinching whilst they bled profusely".

Another fascinating feature of the Salt Satyagraha was the media attention Gandhiji received. From the very beginning of his public career Gandhiji had understood the power of the role of media. As early as 1903 he started a journal *The Indian Opinion*'. Gandhi's influence and impact as a mass leader derived in large part from both a professional use of the media and a performer's sense of his audience: he staged and executed his events with an uncanny sensitivity to the mood and temper of those around him.

The world attention was sustained in the coming months by numerous American journalists. The march received prominent coverage in major U.S. newspapers and periodicals throughout 24 days – and also days preceding the event and beyond. The

American media appreciated the newsworthy quality of the event, commenting on how the Mahatma “Reversing the ‘Boston-tea-party’ method of revolt,” “like a master showman” “ceremoniously defies the British Government’s salt monopoly and its resented tax on salt.” It was this kind of drama that led *Time Magazine* to name Gandhi “Man of the Year” for 1930 and conclude that more than Stalin or Hitler, the Mahatma deserved the award, “the little brown man whose 1930 mark on world history will undoubtedly look largest of all.”

The mass media, involving Indian and foreign correspondents from dozens of domestic, European and American newspapers, together with film companies, recognized the drama of the event and participated actively. Perhaps their coverage would not have been so lavish if Gandhi had not provided ample advance publicity and timed the march to their advantage. As one biographer says, on the Dandi march Gandhi “fully entered the world of newsreel and documentary, and three Bombay cinema companies filmed the event.” He consistently captured front-page headlines of major Indian newspapers, nationalist and otherwise, throughout the month of March.

The Dandi March also demonstrates a masterful awareness and use of symbols that surpasses any other event of Gandhi’s career. Diet, dress, use of commodities, all became means of demonstrating his desire to be at one with his people and to preserve the trust he felt that they had invested in his leadership. His sensitivity to this issue of maintaining public trust is clear from his personal behaviour on the salt march. Throughout it Gandhi became increasingly preoccupied with the maintenance of simple standards of behaviours, and with their symbolic expression. “Extravagance has no room in this campaign.” “Remember that in *swaraj* we would expect one drawn from the so-called lower class to preside over India’s destiny. If then we do not quickly mend our ways, there is no *swaraj* such as you and I have put before the people”.

What exactly was the effect of Gandhi’s method on the power of the Raj as it reacted in 1930 to his civil disobedience? On February 6, the *Times of India*, generally a firm supporter of Government policy, began a series of editorials on the bankruptcy of



Gandhi's leadership, condemning especially the "impracticable nature of his demands." The next day, Lord Irwin spoke at Lucknow on the theme of civil disobedience, saying that it "could not fail to involve India in irreparable misfortune and disaster."

Gandhi now felt the force that the march had summoned and the Government's difficulty. Whereas in the hours before the march he had anticipated his speedy arrest, now he wrote privately to his ashram: "So great is the power of non-violence that they do not have the courage to arrest me."

As Gandhi's arrival at Dandi drew near, he pressed his attack on the Raj with increasing confidence. The government, then, was in a predicament, and another nationalist newspaper expressed succinctly the growing view of the Viceroy's dilemma:

To arrest Gandhi is to set fire to the whole of India. Not to arrest him is to allow him to set the prairie on fire. To arrest Gandhi is to court a war. Not to arrest him is to confess defeat before the war is begun...In either case, Government stands to lose, and Gandhi stands to gain...That is because Gandhi's cause is righteous and the Government's is not."

Gandhi had set April 6 as the day when the salt law would be broken. He had done this, once again, for symbolic reasons. The day marked the beginning of "National Week," first commemorated in 1919 when Gandhi conceived of a national hartal against the Rowlatt Bills. The symbolism of this day was stressed in the nationalist press:

On the 6<sup>th</sup> of April 1919, India discovered her soul. A grander revelation is not far off...The campaign which Mahatma Gandhi inaugurates on the first day of the National Week is one which has never yet been witnessed in the history of mankind. For the first time a nation is asked by its leader to win freedom by itself accepting all the suffering and sacrifice involved. Mahatma Gandhi's success does not, therefore,

merely mean the freedom of India. It will also constitute the most important contribution that any country has yet made towards the elimination of force as an arbiter between one nation and another. It is, therefore, that the eyes of all the worlds are centred to day on Dandi.

Mahatma Gandhi had described Dandi as “my Hardwar” and the march had all along been for him a *yatra* or spiritual pilgrimage. He noted, first, that civil disobedience would commence the next morning and underscored the meaning of that timing: “6<sup>th</sup> April has been to us, since its culmination in the Jaillianwala massacre, a day of penance and purification.” This year it would be marked by him with a bath in the sea. The nation should observe a day of “prayer and fasting”. And this penance would suitably prepare them all for the campaign of civil disobedience immediately following.

On 5<sup>th</sup> April Mahatma Gandhi did not forget the support his pilgrimage had received from the world community. While complimenting the Government of India for its commendable “policy of complete non-interference” in the march, he interpreted this policy, as meaning that “the British Government, powerful though it is, is sensitive to world opinion which will not tolerate repression of extreme political agitation which civil disobedience undoubtedly is, so long as disobedience remains civil and, therefore, necessarily non-violent.” Throughout the march, Gandhi had made appeals to world opinion through the media: now, he gave special attention to this audience. In a “message to America” he insisted that sympathy was welcome but not sufficient: “What is wanted is concrete expression of public opinion in favour of India’s inherent right to independence....if we attain our end through non-violent means India will have delivered a message for the world”. Finally, Gandhi summed up in a sentence his appeal to the world from Dandi: “I want world sympathy in this battle of Right against Might.”

As dusk fell on Dandi on April 5, the tiny village population (460) swelled to more than 12,000, and Mahatma Gandhi addressed his last prayer meeting of the march. “Dandi”,

he observed, had been his destination for the last twenty-four days, but now “our real destination is no other than the temple of the goddess of *swaraj*.”

Many of those who watched on the shore that early morning of April 6 did indeed believe that they were witnessing a miracle. After prayers, Gandhi walked to the water and declared: “This religious war of civil disobedience should be started only after purifying ourselves by bathing in the salt water.” Even this single sentence abounds with symbolism: civil disobedience, clothed in the garb of religious warfare, becomes purified through a special rite, bathing in waters of salt. By one account, as Gandhi and the marchers entered the sea at 6.00 A.M.:

Finally, at 6.30, Gandhi stooped on the shore and picked up the symbolic salt and so offered civil disobedience. The deed was done. “With this,” he said, “I am shaking the foundations of the British Empire.” By the end of the year, more than 60,000 Indians (by government estimate) suffered imprisonment for committing an act no more or less than this.

The Satyagraha with its sheer simplicity directness and force is regarded as the high water mark of India’s freedom struggle. No wonder it attracted worldwide attention. There are several accounts of the historic march from the western writers. Journalists like Webb Miller from America and William Shirer (of Rise and Fall of the Third Reich fame) have made singular contributions in taking India’s fight against colonial rule to the wider world. In recent times the eminent historian from Australia Thomas Weber has produced the most authentic retelling of the march. His work is the result of years of diligent and painstaking research on Gandhi’s journey to Dandi. Dandi march was no picnic. In fact many surmised that the marchers would be shot dead. The march would also have its share of problems as it did.

Gandhi attempted, as soon as the march was over, to broaden the movement to include a wider range of groups and interests. His appeal extended to different social strata throughout India during the 1930-31 civil disobedience campaign, and this is evident,

first of all, from the testimony of the British officials who struggled to cope with it. In the area of Gujarat touched by the march itself, there was a highly successful mobilization of groups.

On the same day, Sir Purshotamas Thakurdas, a critic of Gandhi and one of the Government of India's confidential advisers, gave the Viceroy this judgment from Bombay:

So great is the support to Mahatma Gandhi in this movement here, that the masses here, and in fact, anywhere, will not stand anything said against him publicly.

A month later Irwin reported to Wedgwood Benn, Secretary of State for India in London with a summary statement on the movement:

All thinking Indians passionately want substantial advance which will give them power to manage their own affairs. However much they may deplore the civil disobedience movement, they feel at heart that it is likely to make British opinion more elastic...Student classes are of course ready sympathizers...The movement thus obtains a wider measure of sympathy than many would be willing to accord to it on merits, and in Bombay the commercial classes, largely Gujarati, have openly supported and are said to be financing it.

The masses in the towns are emotional, ignorant, and prone to believe any rumours and accept any promises. The influence of Gandhi's name though it varies in different parts is powerful...We think every European and Indian would tell you that he was surprised at the dimensions the movement has assumed, and we should delude ourselves if we sought to underrate it. Appraisal of its constituent factors might be assessed thus:

The accuracy of Irwin's assessments may of course be questioned. However, these two reports are succinct representations of Government of India views on the movement's impact in its initial phase.

There was a sense now that the movement could never be stopped and Gandhi acknowledged from Dandi what the march had achieved. "At present," he wrote to Mahadev Desai on April 9, "my very thoughts have grown wings and they seem to have effect even when not expressed in speech or action. That is a fact." On the fact and legend of the march, on the wings of Gandhi's creative imagination, the Indian nationalist movement soared, elevated by symbolic forces, sustained by dramatic impact. During this twenty-four day event, from its opening at Sabarmati to its denouement at Dandi, India and an international audience had been treated to vintage Gandhi, and quintessential satyagraha. As Pyarelal remarked, "After Dandi, the world knew what swaraj was all about."

After Dandi March Gandhi emerged as a leader whose principal asset was a persistent determination to translate ideas into action. He generated a theory and practice of change ideally suited to the particular context of India, a way of action that transformed the apparent limitations of the struggle into its strengths. He caught the Raj badly off guard in a manner that it never anticipated. As Bipan Chandra says, "The dilemma in which it [the Government in 1930] found itself was a dilemma that the Gandhian strategy of non-violent civil disobedience was designed to create. The Government was placed in a classic 'damned if you do, damned if you don't fix...'" The dynamics of this strategy as the British perceived them deserve close scrutiny.

Mahatma Gandhi was arrested on May 5, 1930 at Karadi, a village near Dandi, under Bombay Regulation XXV of 1827, which was resurrected from the dusty covers of the state archives to detain him without trial. Just before his arrest Gandhiji had planned a more aggressive phase of his 'non-violent rebellion' by 'raiding' and taking possession of the salt depots at Dharsana. The raid, which was led by the aged Imam Sahib, an inmate of the Sabarmati Ashram, took place on May 21<sup>st</sup>. The leaders were arrested and the rank

and file beaten up; an account of this raid was given in the *New Freeman* by an American correspondent Webb Miller: ‘In eighteen years of reporting in twenty-two countries I have never witnessed such harrowing scenes as at Dharsana. Sometimes the scenes were so painful that I had to turn away momentarily. One surprising feature was the discipline of volunteers. It seemed they were thoroughly imbued with Gandhi’s non-violent creed.’

Once significant outcome of the Salt Satyagraha is that Mahatma Gandhi forcefully demonstrated the crucial connection between **Satyagraha** and **Swaraj**. The Dandi March was a journey to Swaraj through satyagraha that meant that people could engage in non-violent action and nurture heightened self-esteem, to attain a free India of equality and justice for all. These were the basic ideals behind the independence movement under the unique leadership of Mahatma.

The march symbolized the journey of the Soul, which broke free of its moorings and became truly universal. Mahatma Gandhi set out from the Ashram on the banks of the river Sabarmati to the seashore of Dandi never to return. Either I will have Swaraj or my body will float in the ocean”. By giving up Sabarmati Ashram Gandhiji was only upholding the principle of ‘NON POSSESSION’ and ‘NON ATTACHMENT’ to material world, which he wanted to be inculcated by entire humanity.

According to Legend Rishi Daddhich had his Ashram on the same place where Gandhiji set up his Ashram on the banks of the river Sabarmati. And again, just like Rishi Daddhich, Gandhiji through his sacrifices re-founded the tradition shown by the ancient Sage. Like the Sage, Gandhiji is revered, today, not for what he acquired but what he gave up. For the sacrifices of sage Daddhichi is an example of supreme sacrifice but the sacrifices that Mahatma Gandhi made in modern time is no less inspiring.

The dazzling brilliance of the Salt Satyagraha attracted worldwide attention and acclaim. The image of Mahatma Gandhi that remains etched on the hearts and minds of the people is the walking Gandhi like a colossus striding across the globe. The sheer simplicity and starkness of the image inspires awe and admiration.

Mahatma Gandhi always drew tremendous response and excitement because he remained concerned with 'basics' as it touched the core of the masses – be it basic education, basic health, basic needs of the people. He said, “Swaraj of my dream is the poor man’s Swaraj. The Swaraj of my dream recognizes no distinctions. Nor is it to be a monopoly of the lettered people Swaraj is to be for all but emphatically including the maimed, the blind the starving, and toiling millions. Real Swaraj must be felt by all man woman and child.”

In these intervening seventy-five years India has taken great strides towards progress and development. But the fruits of progress have not been equally shared. Millions of people continue to live in abject poverty, misery and suffering. The vast mass of humanity living under the most inhuman conditions in the sprawling slums across the metropolis of India mock at the privileged and look askance. Is this the Swaraj of Bapu’s dream? Is this the India Bapu lived and died for? The answer is an emphatic No.

It is not surprising. It is a consequence of our failure to heed Gandhiji’s advice. He had warned us. “BELIEVE ME THAT SWARAJ WILL BE DELAYED IN PROPORTION TO OUR FAILURE AND HALF-HEARTEDNESS IN CARRYING OUT THE DIFFERENT ITEMS OF THE CONSTRUCTIVE PROGRAMME, IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO ATTAIN SWARAJ NON-VIOLENTLY UNLESS THERE IS SELF-PURIFICATION”.

Anniversaries and Celebrations are moments of truth. The truth of this moment is that we are yet to usher real Swa-raj (self rule) which is still a long way off but not impossible to achieve. Mahatma Gandhi through his Life’s Message has shown us the path to achieve this goal.

The goal is to build the India of Gandhi’s dream and present this (as he had wished) to the world as a model of development of a New World Order. Come lets us take the pledge together and resolve to redeem it.

Therefore, any programme to commemorate the Salt Satyagraha regarded as the most spectacular movement launched by Gandhiji must address the basic issues involving the people. As this alone would be the most befitting tribute to an event, which was a turning point in India's freedom struggle though the India of Gandhiji's Dreams still remains a distant illusion.

*I SHALL WORK FOR AN INDIA IN WHICH THE POOREST SHALL FEEL THAT IT IS THEIR COUNTRY, IN WHOSE MAKING THEY HAVE AN EFFECTIVE VOICE, AN INDIA IN WHICH THERE SHALL BE NO HIGH CLASS AND LOW CLASS OF PEOPLE; AN INDIA IN WHICH ALL COMMUNITIES SHALL LIVE IN PERFECT HARMONY. THERE CAN BE NO ROOM IN SUCH INDIA FOR THE CURSE OF UNTOUCHABILITY, OR THE CURSE OF INTOXICATING DRINKS AND DRUGS. WOMEN WILL ENJOY THE SAME RIGHT AS MEN. WE SHALL BE AT PEACE WITH ALL THE REST OF THE WORLD.*

*THIS IS THE INDIA OF MY DREAMS.*

M.K.GANDHI

This is the dream realizable only through the youth.

*"I ask you (young men and women) to go to the villages and burry yourselves there, not as their masters or benefactors but as their humble servants. Let them know what to do and how to change their modes of living from your daily conduct and way of living. Only feeling will be of no use, just like steam, which by itself is of no account unless it is kept under proper control when it becomes a mighty force. I ask you go forth as messenger of God carrying balm for the wounded soul of India".*

M.K.Gandhi

**Savita Singh  
Director  
Gandhi Smriti and Darshan Samiti  
5, Tees January Marg  
New Delhi - 110011**