# CHAPTER XI

GANDHI GOES TO JAIL

here was nothing passive about Gandhi. He disliked the

term ‘Passive Resistance 5 . Following the collective vow at

X the Imperial Theatre, Gandhi offered a prize for a better

name for this new kind of mass-yet-individual opposition to

government unfairness.

Maganlal Gandhi, a second cousin of Gandhi who lived at

Phoenix Farm, suggested ‘Sadagraha 5 : ‘firmness in a good cause 5 .

Gandhi amended it to ‘Satyagraha 5 ; satya is truth, which equals

love and agraha is firmness or force. ‘Satyagraha 5 , therefore, means

truth-force or love-force. Truth and love are attributes of the soul.

This became Gandhi’s target: to be strong not with the strength

of the brute but with the strength of the spark of God.

Satyagraha, Gandhi said, is ‘the vindication of truth not by

infliction of suffering on the opponent but on one’s self 5 . That

requires self-control. The weapons of the Satyagrahi are within him.

Satyagraha is peaceful. If words fail to convince the adversary

perhaps purity, humility and honesty will. The opponent must

be ‘weaned from error by patience and sympathy 5 , weaned, not

crushed; converted, not annihilated.

Satyagraha is the exact opposite of the policy of an-eye-for-an-

eye-for-an-eye-for-an-eye which ends in making everybody blind.

You cannot inject new ideas into a man’s head by chopping it

off; neither will you infuse a new spirit into his heart by piercing

it with a dagger.

Acts of violence create bitterness in the survivors and brutality

in the destroyers; Satyagraha aims to exalt both sides.

Gandhi hoped that if he practised the Sermon on the Mount,

Smuts would recall its precepts. Satyagraha assumes a constant

beneficent interaction between contestants with a view to their

ultimate reconciliation. Violence, insults and superheated

propaganda obstruct this achievement.

Several days after the spiritual baptism in Satyagraha at the

Imperial Theatre, the Transvaal government released Asiatic

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women from the necessity of registration under the ‘Black Act’.

This may or may not have been a result of the new Indian

movement, but Indians felt encouraged by the success of Gandhi’s

tactics.

Before confronting the Government with Satyagraha, Gandhi

thought it desirable to go to London. Transvaal was a Crown

Colony; the King could, on advice of his ministers, withhold royal

assent from legislation. Accompanied by a Moslem soda water

manufacturer named H. O. Ali, Gandhi sailed for England. It

was his first visit since his shy law-student days. Now he was the

vocal lobbyist. He interviewed Lord Elgin, the Secretary of

State for the Colonies and Mr. John Morley, Secretary of State

for India and, like many champions of causes before and since,

addressed a meeting of M.P.s in a committee room of the House

of Commons. It gave Gandhi special pleasure to work with

Dadabhai Naoroji, ‘The Grand Old Man of India’. Dadabhai,

as everybody called him, was president of the London Indian

Society for more than fifty years, a teacher of Gujarati in Univer¬

sity College, London, a past president of the Indian National

Congress party, and on July 6th, 1892, at the age of sixty-one, was

elected to the British Parliament as the Liberal Member for

Central Finsbury by a majority of three votes. Before the poll,

Lord Salisbury, the British Prime Minister, had said, ‘I doubt if

we have got to that point of view where a British constituency

would elect a black man.’ The gibe gave Dadabhai his seat and

fame. As a student in the Inner Temple, Gandhi once sat,

reverent and silent, at the feet of Dadabhai. Now, autumn 1906,

Gandhi and Dadabhai were associates in a political enterprise.

Throughout the six weeks’ sojourn, Englishmen assisted Gandhi

in winning friends, arranging meetings, licking stamps, pasting

envelopes, etc. Their generous co-operation led him to remark

that ‘benevolence is by no means peculiar to the brown skin’.

When the ship on which they were returning to South Africa

stopped at the Portuguese island of Madeira, Gandhi and Ali

received a cable from London announcing that Lord Elgin would

not sanction the Transvaal anti-Asiatic bill. In the next two weeks

on board ship, Gandhi and Ali were happy: they had won.

It transpired, however, that Lord Elgin had employed a

‘trick’. He had told the Transvaal Commissioner in London that

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the King would disallow the registration ordinance. But since the

Transvaal would cease to be a Crown Colony on January ist,

1907, it could then re-enact the ordinance without royal approval.

Gandhi condemned this as a ‘crooked policy’.

In due course, Transvaal set up responsible government and

adopted the Asiatic Registration Act to go into effect on July 31st,

1907. Indians stigmatized it as the ‘Black Act’, morally black,

aimed at black, brown and yellow men. Gandhi, who was light

brown, often referred to himself as ‘black’.

Gandhi confidently told the Indian community that ‘even a

crooked policy would in time turn straight if only we are true to

ourselves’. The Indians prepared to offer Satyagraha. Uneasy,

Prime Minister General Botha sent them a message saying he

‘was helpless’; the white population insisted on the legislation.

Therefore the Government would be firm.

So would the Indians. One Moslem, Ahmad Mohammed

Kachhalia, apparently speaking for many Satyagrahis, said, ‘I

swear in the name of God that I will be hanged but I will not

submit to this law.’

Some Indians took out permits under the Act, but most did not.

A number of Indians were accordingly served with official notices

to register or leave the Transvaal. Failing to do either, they were

brought before a magistrate on January nth, 1908. Gandhi was

among them. He had attended the same court as a lawyer. Now

he stood in the dock. Respectfully he told the judge that as leader

he merited the heaviest sentence. Judge Jordan unobligingly gave

him only two months’ simple imprisonment ‘without hard labour’.

It was Gandhi’s first term in jail.

Gandhi recorded this jail experience in an article printed at the

time. The prison authorities were friendly, the meals bad, the

cells over-crowded. Gandhi went in with four other Satyagrahis.

From notes kept in prison with his customary meticulousness, he

knew how many joined them each day and the figures are

reproduced in the published account. By January 29th, their

number had risen to 155.

Gandhi read the Gita in the morning and the Koran , in English

translation, at noon. He used the Bible to teach English to a

Chinese Christian fellow prisoner. He also read Ruskin, Socrates,

Tolstoy, Huxley, Bacon’s essays and Carlyle’s Lives . He was

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happy; he believed that ‘whoever has a taste for reading good

books is able to bear loneliness in any place with great ease’.

Indeed, he seemed to regret that his sentence was so short for he

had commenced to do a Gujarati translation of a book by Carlyle

and of Ruskin’s Unto This Last , and: ‘I would not have become

tired even if I had got more than two months. 5

Reading and translating were interrupted by a visitor from the

outside; he was Albert Cartwright, editor of the Johannesburg

Transvaal Leader and a friend of Gandhi; he came as an emissary

from General Jan Christian Smuts. Cartwright brought a com¬

promise solution drafted by Smuts.

Smuts’s proposal required the Indians to register voluntarily.

Then the ‘Black Act 5 would be repealed.

On January 30th, the Johannesburg Chief of Police came to the

jail and personally conducted Gandhi to Pretoria for a meeting

with Smuts. The prisoner, in prison uniform, and the general had

a long talk. Gandhi wanted assurances of the repeal and he

stipulated that public mention be made of the Indians 5 resistance.

Smuts said, ‘I could never entertain a dislike for your people.

You know I too am a barrister. I had some Indian fellow students

in my time. But I must do my duty. The Europeans want this

law ... I accept the alterations you have suggested in the draft.

I have consulted General Botha and I assure you that I will repeal

the Asiatic Act as soon as most of you have undergone voluntary

registration. 5

Smuts rose.

‘Where am I to go? 5 Gandhi asked.

‘You are free this very moment. 5

‘What about the other prisoners? 5 Gandhi asked.

‘I am phoning the prison officials to release the other prisoners

tomorrow morning. 5

It was evening and Gandhi did not have a copper in his pockets.

Smuts’s secretary gave him the fare to Johannesburg.

In Johannesburg Gandhi encountered stormy opposition. ‘Why

was not the Act repealed first, before registration? 5 Indians

demanded at a public meeting.

‘That would not be in the nature of a compromise, 5 Gandhi replied.

‘What if General Smuts breaks faith with us? 5 they argued.

‘A Satyagrahi, 5 Gandhi said, ‘bids goodbye to fear. He is

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therefore never afraid of trusting the opponent. Even if the

opponent plays him false twenty times, the Satyagrahi is ready

to trust him for the twenty-first time — for an implicit trust in

human nature is the very essence of his creed.’

Optimism about human nature was the starting post of all

Gandhi’s activities; it sometimes made him sound naive. His

optimism sprang from a belief that ‘man can change his tempera¬

ment, can control it’ although he ‘cannot eradicate it. God has

given him no such liberty’. Change and control, therefore,

require constant effort.

Smuts had made the point that unless Indians in the Transvaal

registered, there would be no check on Indian immigration, and

the State might be inundated with unwanted Asiatics. Gandhi

accepted this and told the public meeting that voluntary registra¬

tion would indicate that ‘we do not intend to bring a single Indian

into the Transvaal surreptitiously or by fraud’.

Gandhi took into consideration the pressure on the Government

from race-prejudiced whites. Therefore he was ready to accept

voluntary registration. But he objected to compulsory registration

by statute because a government must treat all citizens equally.

He did not want Indians to bow to force: that reduced the dignity

and stature of individuals. On the other hand, Gandhi explained

to the meeting, collaboration freely given — in view of the

opponent’s known difficulties — was generous and hence en¬

nobling. Smuts had withdrawn the compulsion from registration;

that changed the entire situation.

A giant Pathan from the wild mountains of north-west India

near the Khyber Pass stood up and said, ‘We have heard that

you have betrayed the community and sold it to General Smuts

for fifteen thousand pounds. We will never give the fingerprints

nor allow others to do so. I swear with Allah as my witness that

I will kill the man who takes the lead in applying for registration.’

Gandhi’s book on Satyagraha records this charge for posterity.

He defended himself against it, and declared, despite the threat,

that he would be the first to give his fingerprints. Then he added,

‘Death is the appointed end of all life. To die by the hand of a

brother, rather than by disease or in such other way, cannot be

for me a matter of sorrow. And if, even in such a case, I am free

from the thought of anger or hatred against my assailant, I know

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that that will redound to my eternal welfare, and even the assailant

will later on realize my perfect innocence/ The audience listened

in silence; it could not have foreseen a nearly fatal assault in the

immediate future or the death of Gandhi, forty years later, at the

hands of a brother.

Gandhi arranged to register on February ioth, the first to do

so. He went to his law office in the morning as usual. Outside

he saw a group of big Pathans. Among them was Mir Alam, a

client of Gandhi’s, six feet tall and of powerful build. Gandhi

greeted the Pathans, but their response was ominously cold.

After a little while, Gandhi and several companions left the

office and commenced walking to the registration bureau. The

Pathans followed close behind. Just before Gandhi had reached

his destination, Mir Alam stepped forward and said, ‘Where are

you going?’

‘I propose to take out a certificate of registration,’ Gandhi replied.

Before he could finish the explanation a heavy blow struck

Gandhi on the top of his head. ‘I at once fainted with the words

“Hey, Rama” (Oh, God) on my lips,’ reads his own account.

Those were his last words on January 30th, 1948, the day he died.

Other blows fell on Gandhi as he lay on the ground; and the

Pathans kicked him for good measure.

He was carried into an office. When he regained consciousness,

the Reverend Joseph J. Doke, a bearded Baptist idealist, was

bending over him. ‘How do you feel?’ said Doke.

‘I am all right,’ Gandhi answered, ‘but I have pains in the teeth

and ribs. Where is Mir Alam?’

‘He has been arrested with the other Pathans,’ Doke said.

‘They should be released,’ Gandhi murmured. ‘They thought

they were doing right, and I have no desire to prosecute them.’

Gandhi was taken to the Doke home, and the wounds in his

cheek and lip were stitched. He asked that Mr. Chamney, the

Registrar for Asiatics, be brought to him so that he could give his

fingerprints without delay. The process hurt Gandhi physically;

every movement was painful. Chamney began to weep. ‘I had

often to write bitterly against him,’ Gandhi declared, ‘but this

showed me how man’s heart may be softened by events.’

Gandhi remained under the tender care of the ‘godly family’

for ten days. Several times, Gandhi, feeling the need of comfort,

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asked Olive, the little Doke daughter, to sing ‘Lead, Kindly

Light’. It was one of his favourite Christian hymns.

After recovering, Gandhi indefatigably preached loyalty to his

registration settlement. Kasturbai and the boys had worried about

him after Mir Alam’s attack; Gandhi visited them at Phoenix Farm

and spent most of the time there writing for Indian Opinion in ex¬

planation of his compromise with Smuts for voluntary finger¬

printing. Many Indians followed Gandhi without really agreeing,

and he tried to convince them.

What was Gandhi’s embarrassment, therefore, when Smuts

refused to fulfil his promise to repeal the ‘Black Act’. Instead,

Smuts offered the legislature a bill which validated the voluntary

certificates but kept the compulsory-registration law.

‘There you are,’ the Indians taunted Gandhi. ‘We have been

telling you that you are very credulous.’

In a charitable and objective mood two decades later, when

Satyagraha in South Africa was published, Gandhi asserted, ‘It is

quite possible that in behaving to the Indians as he did in 1908,

General Smuts was not guilty of a deliberate breach of faith.’

But in the heat of the battle, in 1908, Gandhi contributed articles

to Indian Opinion under the caption, ‘Foul Play’, and called Smuts

a ‘heartless man’.

The Indian community’s temper gradually rose to fever pitch.

A meeting was called at the Hamidia Mosque in Johannesburg

for four o’clock in the afternoon, August 16th, 1908. A large iron

cauldron resting on four curved legs was placed conspicuously on

a raised platform.

The speeches finished, more than two thousand registration

certificates collected from the spectators were thrown into the

cauldron and burned in paraffin as a mighty cheer went up from

the brown throng. The London Daily Mail correspondent in

Johannesburg compared it with the Boston Tea Party.

The issue between the Indians and the Government was now

joined.

Under the Smuts-Gandhi compromise, most of the permanent

residents registered voluntarily. Thereafter, any Indian dis¬

covered without a registration certificate would be subject to

deportation as a new, illegal entrant. The compromise thus stopped-

immigration, and that was the original purpose of the ‘Black Act’.

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Then why did Smuts now reintroduce compulsory registration?

'To insult us, 5 the Indians said. e To stress our inequality. To

force us to admit our inferiority. 5

This, Gandhi declared, is one of the virtues of Satyagraha: it

uncovers concealed motives and reveals the truth. It puts the

best possible interpretation on the opponent’s intentions and

thereby gives him another chance to discard baser impulses. If

he fails to do so, his victims see more clearly and feel more

intensely, while outsiders realize who is wrong.

The Indians now decided not to register under compulsion and

to defy the ban on immigration into the Transvaal.

For the impending contest with the government of the Trans¬

vaal, Gandhi commenced to muster his resources. His law office

at the corner of Rissik and Anderson Streets in Johannesburg

had now been converted, largely, into a Satyagraha headquarters.

It consisted of two small and meagrely furnished rooms, an outer

one for a secretary and an inner one where Gandhi worked

amidst photographs of his ambulance unit, of Mrs. Annie Besant,

and some Indian leaders, and a picture of Jesus. Gandhi also

had an office at Phoenix Farm, and he spent more time there

than before because he needed the support of the Natal Indians

who far outnumbered the thirteen thousand of the Transvaal. At

the farm, he led a chaste, frugal, Spartan existence. Except when

it rained he slept in the open on a thin cloth. He eschewed all

material pleasures, and concentrated on the coming battle. ‘A

Satyagrahi,’ he said, 'has to be, if possible, even more single-

minded than a rope dancer. 5

To the Johannesburg office and Phoenix Farm came a steady

stream of Indians and whites. Gandhi’s circle of friends was large;

he attracted people and they usually remained loyal to him.

Olive Schreiner, author of The Story of an African Farm and

Dreams , was one of Gandhi’s best friends in Cape Colony.

'Love was written in her eyes,’ he said. Though she came of a

rich, distinguished and learned family, ‘she was so simple in

habits that she cleansed utensils in her house herself’, and did her

own cooking and sweeping. ‘Such physical labour,’ Gandhi held,

'stimulated her literary ability.’ Colour prejudice was repugnant

to her. She lent her great influence in South Africa to the cause

of fairness-to-Indians. So did her brother, Senator W. P.

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Schreiner, the Attorney-General and, at one time, the Prime

Minister of the Colony. Other prominent persons and high

officials openly aided Gandhi’s movement. Many Christian

clergymen supported him. They saw Satyagraha as Christianity

in action against a system that merely called itself Christian.

Gandhi worked through moral conversion. He preferred it to

physical coercion and even to moral coercion. No true devotee of

Christ could resist this. Christian editors, idealists and ministers

atoned for the white man’s sins by helping the little brown Hindu.

Of all Gandhi’s South African collaborators — Indian or white

— the most intimate, he said, were Henry S. L. Polak, Herman

Kallenbach, an extremely wealthy Johannesburg architect, and

Sonya Schlesin, who came from Scotland.

Kallenbach was a tall, thick-set, squareheaded German Jew

with a long handlebar moustache and pince-nez. He met Gandhi

by chance; a mutual interest in Buddhism brought them closer

together, and thereafter, until Gandhi returned to India, they

were inseparable. If anybody can be called Gandhi’s second-in-

command of the Satyagraha movement it was Kallenbach.

Gandhi characterized him as ‘a man of strong feelings, wide

sympathies, and child-like simplicity’.

When Gandhi needed a private secretary and typist Kallenbach

recommended Miss Schlesin, who was of Russian-Jewish origin.

Gandhi thought her ‘noble’ and the finest person among his

European associates. She wore boyish-bobbed hair and a collar

and necktie. She never married. Though she was young, Indian

leaders went to her for advice, and the Reverend Doke, when

he ran Indian Opinion , liked her to comment on his editorials.

Gandhi put her in charge of Satyagraha’s treasury and books.

For the financing of the resistance movement, Indians and

Europeans in South Africa and Indians in India contributed con¬

siderable sums. Gandhi believed that an organization whose

cause is just and impersonal, and which operates in full public

view, will not lack money. He likewise believed in rigidly

economical spending and scrupulous, detailed accounting.

Suggestions poured in on Gandhi to raise the entire question of

Indian disabilities in South Africa and to mobilize the whole

Indian community of the continent. But he decided that it was

against the principles of Satyagraha to expand or even to shift

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one’s goal in the midst of battle. The issue was the right of Indians

to live in and enter the Transvaal, nothing else.

Gandhi now made a move of arresting and dramatic simplicity.

A Parsi Indian from Natal named Sorabji Shapurji Adajania,

who spoke English and had never visited the Transvaal, was

chosen, at his own request, to test the bar on immigrants. He was

to notify the Government of his intentions, present himself at the

Transvaal frontier station of Volksrust, and court arrest. But the

border authorities let him in and he proceeded unmolested to

Johannesburg.

When their astonishment subsided, the Indians interpreted this

development as a triumph; the Government had refused to fight.

Even when Sorabji was sentenced to a month’s imprisonment for

not leaving the Transvaal, their enthusiasm for the Gandhi

method remained strong. It was accordingly decided that a

number of English-speaking Indians in Natal, including Harilal,

Gandhi’s eldest son, who had returned from India, should enter

the Transvaal. They were arrested at Volksrust and given three

months in jail. ‘The Transvaal Indians’, Gandhi comments,

‘were now in high spirits . . . The movement was now in full

swing.’ The movement fed on prison sentences.

Gandhi was besieged by people seeking permission to be

arrested. He gratified the wish of some Natal Indians. Transvaal

Indians applied for the same privilege; they had only to tell the

police that they had no registration certificates.

Gandhi too was arrested and confined in the Volksrust prison.

His prison card has been preserved by Manilal. It is cream-

coloured and two and seven-eighths inches wide by three and one-

eighth. His name is mistakenly given as ‘M. S. Gandhi’ instead

of M. K. Gandhi. ‘Trade: Solicitor.’ No alias. ‘Sentence and

date: Twenty-five pounds or two months. October ioth, 1908.’

(Like all other Indians, Gandhi preferred prison to fines.) ‘Due

for discharge: December 13th, 1908.’ On the reverse side, under

‘Prison Offences’, is a blank. He was a model prisoner.

Gandhi had seventy-five compatriots with him in jail, and he

became their cook. ‘Thanks to their love for me’, he wrote in a

contemporary article, ‘my companions took without a murmur

the half-cooked porridge I prepared without sugar.’ In addition

he performed hard labour — digging the earth with a shovel—

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which blistered his hands. The blisters opened and caused pain.

Once the warden wanted two men to clean the latrines. Gandhi

volunteered.

He had brought this suffering on himself and, by his agitation,

on others. Would it not be better to pay the fine and stay at home?

‘Such thoughts’, Gandhi asserted, ‘make one really a coward.’

Besides, jail has its good sides: only one warden, whereas in the

free life there are many; no worry about food; work keeps the

body healthy; no ‘vicious habits’; ‘the prisoner’s soul is thus free’

and he has time to pray to God. ‘The real road to happiness’,

Gandhi proclaimed, ‘lies in going to jail and undergoing sufferings

and privations there in the interest of one’s country and religion’.

This account of life and reflections in jail ends with a quotation

from Thoreau’s famous essay on ‘Civil Disobedience’ which

Gandhi had borrowed from the prison library. ‘I saw’ Thoreau

wrote, ‘that if there was a wall of stone between me and my

townsmen, there was a still more difficult one to climb or break

through before they could get to be as free as I was. I did not

feel for a moment confined, and the walls seemed a great waste of

stone and mortar. . . .

‘As they could not reach me’, Thoreau continued, ‘they had

resolved to punish my body ... I saw that the state was half¬

witted, that it was timid as a lone woman with her silver spoons,

and that it did not know its friends from its foes, and I lost all my

remaining respect for it and pitied it.’

Gandhi cherished this excerpt from Thoreau. He studied the

entire essay.

It has often been said that Gandhi took the idea of Satyagraha

from Thoreau. Gandhi denied this in a letter, dated September

ioth, 1935, and addressed to Mr. P. Kodanda Rao of the Servants

of India Society; Gandhi wrote, ‘The statement that I had derived

my idea of Civil Disobedience from the writings of Thoreau is

wrong. The resistance to authority in South Africa was well

advanced before I got the essay of Thoreau on Civil Disobedience.

But the movement was then known as passive resistance. As it

was incomplete I had coined the word Satyagraha for the Gujarati

readers. When I saw the title of Thoreau’s great essay, I began

to use his phrase to explain our struggle to the English readers.

But I found that even “Civil Disobedience” failed to convey the

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full meaning of the struggle. I therefore adopted the phrase Civil

Resistance.’

Nevertheless, Thoreau’s ‘Civil Disobedience’ essay did influence

Gandhi; he called it a ‘masterly treatise’; ‘it left a deep impression

on me’, he affirmed. There is the imprint of Thoreau on much that

Gandhi did. Thoreau had read the Bhagavad Gita and some of the

sacred Hindu Upanishads ; so had Ralph Waldo Emerson who was

Thoreau’s friend and frequent host. Thoreau, the New England

rebel, borrowed from distant India and repaid the debt by throw¬

ing ideas into the world pool of thought; ripples reached the

Indian lawyer-politician in South Africa.

Henry David Thoreau, poet and essayist, was born in 1817 and

died of tuberculosis at the age of forty-five. He hated Negro

slavery and the individual’s slavery to the Church, the State, pro¬

perty, customs and traditions. With his own hands he built him¬

self a hut at Walden Pond outside Concord, Massachusetts, and

dwelt there alone, doing all the work, growing his food and enjoy¬

ing full contact with nature.

Two years at Walden proved to Thoreau’s own satisfaction that

he had the courage and inner strength to be free in isolation. He

accordingly returned to Concord to discover whether he could be

free inside the community. He decided that the least he could do

was ‘not lend myself to the wrong which I condemn’. So he refused

to pay taxes and was imprisoned. A friend paid the tax for him,

and Thoreau came out after twenty-four hours, but the ex¬

perience evoked his most provoking political essay, ‘Civil Dis¬

obedience’.

‘The only obligation which I have a right to assume’ Thoreau

declared in ‘Civil Disobedience’, ‘is to do at any time what I

think right.’ To be right, he insisted, is more honourable than

to be law-abiding.

Thoreau democracy was the cult of the minority. ‘Why does

[the Government] not cherish its wise minority?’ he cried. ‘Why

does it always crucify Christ?’

It was 1849. Thoreau was thinking of Negro slavery and the

invasion of Mexico. The majority which tolerated these measures

was wrong, and he was right. Could he obey a government that

committed such sins? He held that dissent without disobedience

was consent and therefore culpable.

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Thoreau described civil disobedience in exact terms, as Gandhi

understood it: T know this well, 5 Thoreau wrote, ‘that if one

thousand, if one hundred, if ten men whom I could name — if ten

honest men only — ay, if one honest man, in this state of Massa¬

chusetts, ceasing to hold slaves , were actually to withdraw from this

copartnership, and be locked up in the county jail therefor, it

would be the abolition of slavery in America. For it matters not

how small the beginning may seem to be: what is once well done

is done forever. But we love better to talk about it. . . .

‘There are thousands who are in opinion opposed to slavery and

war, who yet in effect do nothing to put an end to them,’ Thoreau

continued. ‘There, are nine hundred and ninety-nine patrons of

virtue to every virtuous man. 5 Thoreau despised professions

without actions. He asked, ‘How does it become a man to behave

towards this American government today? I answer, that he can¬

not without disgrace be associated with it.’ His programme was

‘peaceful revolution’. ‘All men recognize the right to revolution,’

he wrote, ‘that is, the right to refuse allegiance to, and to resist,

the government when its tyranny and efficiency are great and

unendurable.’

This is why Gandhi was in jail at the very moment he read ‘Civil

Disobedience’.

Like Ruskin, Thoreau sought a closer correspondence between

man’s acts and man’s goal. The artist in both required the

integration of word and faith with deed. The great poet, the great

artist has integrity.

Millions had read Ruskin and Thoreau and agreed with them.

Many Hindus had read them and agreed with them. But Gandhi

took words and ideas seriously, and when he accepted an idea in

principle he felt that not to practise it was dishonest. How can

you believe in a moral or religious precept and not live it?

The gulf between word and belief is untruth. The dissonance

between creed and deed is the root of innumerable wrongs in our

civilization; it is the weakness of all churches, states, parties and

persons. It gives institutions and men split personalities.

In attempting to establish a harmony between words, beliefs

and acts Gandhi was attacking man’s central problem. He was

seeking the formula for mental health.

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