
UNIT 5 GANDHI IN SOUTH AFRICA

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5.1 INTRODUCTION

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, one of the greatest personalities in the history of man kind, and revered by millions all over the world, left an undying legacy of rare ethical insight through the experiences of his eventful life. The saga of his travails in South Africa began a career but ended up in giving India and the world one of the greatest leaders who practised nothing but truth and non-violence to achieve a formidable task of protecting the rights of Indian labour in the Dark Continent. In the eventful life of the Mahatma, the years ranging from 1893 to 1914 were very significant because they contributed immensely to his mental and spiritual growth, and his transformation into a leader of the masses. The South Africa phase in Gandhi's life is a crucial and fascinating one in that it helped him carve his own philosophy and techniques of a non-violent struggle that helped India achieve its goal of independence many a year later.

Aims and Objectives

After reading this Unit, you would be able to understand

- the background of the prevailing conditions of Indians in South Africa
- the significance of a non-violent struggle and Satyagraha
- Gandhi's evolution as a leader of the masses

5.2 GANDHI IN SOUTH AFRICA

Gandhi had come to South Africa in 1893 as a diffident youth of 24, who had attained his degree of Barrister of Law from the Inner Temple, England in 1891. On his return to India, he started his practice in his home state. By his own admission, he was painfully shy and could not utter a word in the court. He returned to Rajkot where he took to drafting applications for his brother's partner who had a settled practice. An offer from

Meman Firm (A Muslim Mercantile community mostly based in Bombay and Kathiawar), who were in search of a barrister to help their Firm resolve a lawsuit, made him set sail for South Africa in April 1893 and reached Durban, where he was received by his employer Abdullah Sheth, one of the most prosperous Indian businessmen in Natal. Thus, providence took the inexperienced youth to a land which was to be the testing ground for his moral resources, spiritual experiences and physical grit and determination in the face of various forms of racial discrimination and humiliations heaped upon him and his compatriots. The extraordinary series of events leading to the evolution and implementation of Satyagraha in South Africa may appear startling at present, but were a natural progression of circumstances leading to epic proportions of a nonviolent struggle, spread over two continents. The mass-movement led by Gandhi, generated on the basis of the power of truth and conviction, are unsurpassed in history till date.

Experiences of Racial Discrimination

When Gandhi arrived in South Africa on a one year contract to help a Firm involved in a law suit, he could not foresee that this land was to be his home for the next two decades and that his years of struggle in South Africa for the rights of Indians settled and working there, would give to the world the unfailing weapon of Satyagraha. The dreadful racist regime of South Africa was revealed to him through various humiliating incidents and made him resolute to stay back and fight for the restoration of human dignity of the Indians in South Africa. Besides attending to his legal work, he expanded his contacts and studied the problems which the Indian community was facing, even as his personal trials and tribulations continued in the forms of racial abuse, which he faced stoically and emerged victorious.

It is to be noted at the background that the Indians were brought to South Africa to further the economic interests of the British rulers, because without indentured labour they could not exploit the immense natural resources of the Natal Coast belt. The Indians arrived in hordes, worked in various capacities and brought prosperity to Natal, be it as indentured labourers or free businessmen. In due course of time, the Europeans began to feel threatened by the increasing number of Indians who were in many ways taking over some of their monopolised occupations. This resentment gave rise to colour prejudice and the Indians were considered (to quote Lord Milner's words) as "strangers forcing themselves upon a community reluctant to receive them."

This hatred was manifested through racial abuses, unjust laws and heaps of humiliations. This was brought home to the youthful Gandhi for the first time at the Petermaritzburg Railway Station, where he was unceremoniously thrown out of the railway coach, in spite of holding a valid first class ticket. Left alone to shiver in the cold weather, this experience completely changed Gandhi's life, thoughts and deeds. Swinging between the dilemma whether to return to India or fight the discrimination, he eventually decided on the latter course of action. The racial abuse was also evident in the refusal of his entry to the hotels and lodges where Indians, called coolies, were prohibited from entering.

Another unfortunate incident occurred when he had to travel from Charlestown to Johannesburg by stage coach. Gandhi was made to sit with the coachman on the box outside by the conductor, who later ordered him to sit on the floor on a dirty sack cloth. On his refusal to do so, he was subjected to a violent physical assault by the conductor. A timely intervention from some of the white passengers, who protested at this brutality, saved Gandhi from further humiliation.

Similar other experiences helped Gandhi to strengthen his resolve to fight for justice, in a way unprecedented in the annals of history and marked the beginning of the civil disobedience. This method of non-violent but firm struggle against apartheid in South Africa saw him emerge as a “Skilled Lawyer”, a “Political leader of great maturity, flexibility and imagination,” and the “Mahatma, the great soul”. Gandhi gave the world the mighty unique weapon of Satyagraha, with the conviction of truth and power of non-violence. The veteran Gandhian, Dr. R. R. Diwakar, aptly defines Satyagraha as “a new way of life. Moral strength was the major resource of the non-violent mode of action. Moral purpose gave it an element of invincibility.” Further, Gandhi’s inherent humanity and sense of social justice had been aroused by the numerous personal experiences of indignities to which he and his countrymen were being subjected to.

5.3 INDIANS IN SOUTH AFRICA

Gandhi studied the situation thoroughly and discovered that there were three categories of Indians in South Africa:

- I. The indentured labourers had been brought to South Africa under a contract prepared in 1860 and comprised the largest sector of Indians in that country. Under the contract, the Indians were to be sent to Natal as workers, recruited by Indians under the supervision of emigrant agents appointed by the British Colonial Government. The five year contract agreement was conducted in the presence of the protector of emigrants appointed for the protection of the rights and interests of the recruited labourers. The indentured labourers were promised the provisions of free food, housing facility, clothes, and medical benefits besides their monthly wages. On completion of three years, they were allowed to be freed from the agreement for which they had to pay 5 Pounds for the remaining two years under a rule made in 1859. After Five years of indenture, they could work at other places on better wages. Upon completing 10 years, they were either given free passage to India or could get land equal to the value of the passage fare for their homeland. A majority of these labourers opted for settling down in South Africa, even after their agreements were over. The agreements promised better deals but the actual implementation of the same was far from satisfactory. The labourers were forced victims of ill-treatment resulting in severe hardships and suffering, even leading to deaths and suicides and often cheated by their so called protectors or agents. This system of indentured labour was almost akin to slavery for the poor labourers.
- II. The second group of Indians was that of the children born to the indentured Indian labourers who had settled down in South Africa after the completion of their indentured labourers’ agreement period.
- III. The third category of Indians settlers was the smallest but was in many ways more affluent than their fellow compatriots. They were called “Passengers” because they had come to South Africa at their own expense, looking for business opportunities; many among them went on to become successful businessmen due to their hard work and thrifty habits. The economic success of this group of Indians gave rise to jealousies among the Whites and they resorted to racial abuses and discriminations against the Indians to express their resentment.

5.4 STRUGGLES AGAINST RACIAL DISCRIMINATION

Having suffered painful experiences of arrogant racism himself, Gandhi could understand why his fellow Indians were neither shocked nor surprised at his having been thrown out of the first class train compartment or various similar insults meted out to him. He was informed as to how almost every Indian was subjected to a series of such indignities and insults but suffered silently because of livelihood compulsions.

The condition of Indians living in Transvaal was worse than those in Natal, where they were forced to pay a poll tax of 3 Pounds, live in ghetto like conditions, no right to vote, not allowed to walk on the roads or pavements and was not allowed to stay outdoors after 9 P.M. unless they had a special permit. Even Gandhi was no exemption and was once beaten up by a policeman on duty for walking out at night; he was saved in time by Mr. Coates, an English Quaker friend.

All this while, Gandhi worked on the lawsuit, studied the case thoroughly and arrived at the conclusion that his client had the stronger case, but litigation would cause nothing but ruin for both claimant and defendant. He requested for the appointment of an arbitrator and finally his client won the case. Gandhi also urged his client to reclaim the payment from the loser party in installments and achieved success through mediation.

Meanwhile, Gandhi felt that his compatriots in South Africa needed to be brought together to fight the injustice heaped upon them. After the preliminary survey, he called a meeting of the Indian community settled in Pretoria, and asked them to be truthful and honest in their business dealings and personal lives.

Having completed his work in Pretoria, Gandhi was to return to India; but, during the farewell dinner that was organised in his honour, Gandhi came across a news item in 'Natal Mercury' about the Natal Government's plan to introduce a bill to disfranchise Indians. Gandhi immediately realised the implications of this bill which, he said, 'would strike at the root of our self-respect.' Having realised the importance of his services, the Indian community requested him to stay on and guide them. As Gandhi tells us in his autobiography 'The farewell party was thus turned into a working committee.'

Gandhi enrolled as an advocate of the Natal Supreme Court and drafted a petition to the Natal Legislative assembly, which received good publicity in the local press. Though the bill was passed, Gandhi did not give up his efforts and started working on another petition to Lord Ripon, the secretary of state for Colonies. Within a month the petition had ten thousand signatures and was sent to Lord Ripon and a thousand copies were also printed for distribution. The justice for the Indian claim for franchise was also admitted in a large section of British Press.

Gandhi chose Durban to set up his law practice and was helped by Indian businessmen who gave him retainers. He acquired a high level of reputation among the Indians, Europeans and the judiciary as well for his truthful honesty, which was the basic foundation of his social and political work, all his life.

Within the first five years of his stay in South Africa, Gandhi had studied the prevailing condition thoroughly and felt that the Indian community needed to be awakened from the white regime's new and atrocious rules on the Indians through various Acts. A tax of 3 Pounds was imposed on the Indians for their stay in South Africa and was justified by the Attorney General of Natal who stated that the Indians "are not to form a part and

parcel of the South African Nation...The Indians are to come here, appreciated as labourers but not welcomed as settlers and competitors.” The tax was grossly unfair to the Indians and was initially not enforced strictly, but later when it was done so, it was great hardship on the basis of the very meagre wages of the indentured labourers (about ten Shillings per month).

The next step taken by the racist regime was the legal disenfranchisement of the Indians in 1894, which incidentally was the main reason for Gandhi’s extended stay in South Africa. The European community was afraid of possible Indian domination if they had the right to vote and therefore decided to deprive them of it. Further, the license authority was given absolute authority in 1897 to issue trading license at its own discretion and it was almost always the Indian trader whose request for a trading license was turned down.

In the same year, the entry of Indians, who were freed, was restricted into Natal and under the Immigration Restriction Act 1897, an education test in any European language was imposed upon the Indians. This caused serious problems for Indian immigration as it blocked the entry of those helping hands the Indian traders wanted for their business. Most Indians in South Africa were poor and illiterate and therefore could never pass any education test to enter Natal. Gandhi decided to counter these unfair practices and hardships in a legal and peaceful manner.

Gandhi faced this challenge bravely, although he was only an inexperienced young man leading the Indian settlers who were just beginning to be politically aware of their rights. Gandhi enabled them to bring into action all the possible and available forces to protest, awaken and strengthen them for a righteous conflict, which went on to become the great Satyagraha movement for the rights of all Indians in South Africa. Gandhi thus brought to the fore a peaceful and non-violent resistance to tyranny and oppression.

It was in South Africa that Gandhi discovered his own self. From a shy and timid young man, he matured into a successful practising lawyer, an able organiser of men, a great leader knitting together the Indians of South Africa, who came from diverse backgrounds and different parts of India, spoke different languages and practised different faiths. He organised the Natal Indian Congress as the forum to express the Indian point of view in an alien land.

In 1896, Gandhi visited India and in an attempt to arouse interest in the grievances of Indians in South Africa, he wrote a popular brochure called *The Green Pamphlet* citing the poor conditions of the Indian settlers in South Africa. It was a very dignified account of the Indian case, but was distorted by Reuters and sent through cable to South Africa. It created unnecessary misunderstanding in the white community resulting in unpleasant consequences later for Gandhi and other Indians. He also travelled extensively to various cities of the country, met various important people and editors of newspapers acquainting them with the unfortunate conditions of Indians in South Africa.

He met veteran Indian leaders like Badruddin Tyabji, Sir Pherozeshah Mehta, Surendranath Banerjee, Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Gopal Krishna Gokhale. He addressed a large public meeting in Bombay and was also scheduled to speak in Calcutta, but before that, he received an urgent telegram from the Indian community in Natal, asking him to return immediately. He sailed for Durban with his wife and children in November 1896.

On arrival in Durban, he was put into five days’ quarantine as the European community

was angry due to the false versions and interpretations of Gandhi's 'Green pamphlet'. They threatened the Indians, including Gandhi, with dire consequences if they landed in South Africa; however, while disembarking, Gandhi was brutally attacked by an angry mob. Following the news of this vehement and cowardly attack, Joseph Chamberlain, the British Secretary of State for the Colonies in England sent an order to Natal to prosecute the wild attackers of Gandhi. But Gandhi himself refused to take an action against them as he felt they were misled into attacking him. This gained him a lot of respect even among his opponents.

It was in the second phase of his life in South Africa that Gandhi's lifestyle underwent gradual changes. Though initially he preferred maintaining a lifestyle of an English barrister, he gradually realised the futility of affluence and veered towards a life of austere simplicity. He reduced his wants and expenses, "studied the art" of laundering (washing and ironing of clothes), and cleaned his own chamber pot and of his guests as well, volunteered his free service for two hours daily as a compounder in a charitable hospital, read books on nursing and midwifery and actually served as midwife during the birth of his fourth and last son.

Boer War

In 1899 the Boer War broke out and Gandhi advised the Indian Community to support the British cause as they claimed their rights as British subjects. He organised and trained, with the help of Dr. Booth, an Indian Ambulance Corps of 1,100 volunteers and offered its services to the Government. The Corps rendered valuable service in the Boer war and Gandhi as its leader felt immensely happy when he saw Indians of various castes and creeds coming together to work like brothers.

In 1901 Gandhi returned to India, promising the Indian community in South Africa to return if the Indian community needed him within a year. He attended the Indian National Congress Session at Calcutta where his resolution on South Africa was passed with acclaim. He was advised by Gokhale to tour India and chose to travel by the third class in order to know the people.

Just as he had set up his legal practice in Bombay, Gandhi received a cable from the Indian community in Natal, recalling him. As per his promise, he sailed for South Africa again and represented the Indian case to Joseph Chamberlain who was visiting South Africa. Gandhi discovered that the condition of Indians in Transvaal was going from bad to worse and therefore enrolled as an advocate of the Supreme Court and set up practice in Johannesburg. He revived the British Indian Association to act as the mouth-piece of the Indians settled in Transvaal. His stay in South Africa was specifically to challenge the European arrogance and fight injustice but it was a struggle where there was no hatred in his heart for his opponents. His respect for all religions and his willingness to learn and absorb all the good points from their teachings, made him realise the importance of basic principles of all religions that were commonly connected through truth, non-violence, compassion and love for all humanity. True to his principles, when the Zulu rebellion broke, he formed the Indian Ambulance Corps to help the government in nursing the dying Zulus unattended by the Europeans.

Service for Humanity

Gandhi was moved by the misery and the sorrow of people around him; he decided to offer his selfless services, aroused his ingrained compassion and strengthened his resolve

to work for the oppressed humanity all his life. The influence of religious scriptures like the *Bhagavad Gita* was profound; he adopted the *karmayoga* into his daily life in every possible way. The *ekadashavrata* of later years, propounded by him had its roots in the basic teachings of the sacred *Gita*.

John Ruskin's 'Unto this last' deeply influenced Gandhi and the concept of 'Sarvodaya' upliftment of all arose out of this. This led to the beginning of another spiritual journey of self-sacrifice and devotion to the service of mankind and brought to him the essential beauty of community living on the basis of equality and the inherent dignity of manual labour. Gandhi was inspired to set up an Ashram where he could practice this Philosophy and marked the beginning of the Phoenix Settlement, fourteen miles distance from Durban. The writings of Thoreau and Tolstoy also affected him greatly and his entire way of living underwent a spiritual transformation. In 1904 he had started a weekly journal 'Indian Opinion' as a communication medium with the Indians as well as Europeans, in which 'week after week, he poured out his soul in its columns'. This also marked the beginning of Gandhi's future lifelong friendship with Mr. Henry S. L. Polak, with whom he shared similar views on the essential things of life. In 1904 the 'Indian Opinion' and his family shifted to Phoenix Ashram. In 1906 he took the vows of celibacy and voluntary poverty. He founded the Tolstoy Farm near Johannesburg. Gandhi inculcated spartan simplicity and strict discipline and laid great emphasis on moral and physical hygiene as the basic rules of these settlements. In the process of continuous evolution of his life and philosophy, the Sarvodaya experiments were conducted through his constructive programme factors like community living, communal harmony, basic education, emancipation of women, removal of untouchability, cottage industries, trusteeship etc. The Phoenix Settlement and Tolstoy Farm were living examples of his spiritual search for human growth and development.

5.5 BIRTH OF SATYAGRAHA

In Gandhi's great eventful life, the year 1906 was a significant landmark as it saw the first practical application of Satyagraha on the soil of South Africa, giving an undying hope of life to tortured humanity. Gandhi could sense the simmering discontent among the Indian community as one oppressive Act followed another, and realised that this kind of brutal tyranny could only be defeated by spiritual strength arising out of the twin principles of truth and non-violence. He understood the necessity to expand individual resistance to an organised mass movement and create a moral equivalent to war. The concept was clear in his mind but needed a name and the great man tells us himself:

"None of us knew what name to give to our movement, I then used the term 'passive resistance' in describing it. I did not quite understand the implications of 'passive resistance' as I called it. I only knew that some new principles had come into being. As the struggle advanced, the phrase 'passive resistance' gave rise to confusion and it appeared shameful to permit this great struggle to be known only by an English name. Again, that foreign phrase could hardly pass a current coin among the community. A small prize was therefore announced in Indian Opinion to be awarded to the reader who invented the best designation for our struggle. We thus received a number of suggestions. The meaning of the struggle had been then fully discussed in Indian Opinion and the competitors for the prize had fairly sufficient material to serve as a basis for their exploration. Shri Maganlal Gandhi was one of the competitors and he suggested the word 'Sadagraha,' meaning 'firmness in a good cause.' I liked the word, but it did not fully represent the whole idea I wished it to connote. I therefore corrected it to 'Satyagraha.'

Truth (satya) implies love, and firmness (agraha) engenders and therefore serves as a synonym for force. I thus began to call the Indian movement 'Satyagraha', that is to say, the force which is born of Truth, Love and Non-violence, and gave up the use of the phrase 'passive resistance' in connection with it, so much so that even in English writing we often avoided it and used instead the word 'Satyagraha' itself or some other equivalent English phrase. This then was the genesis of the movement which came to be known as Satyagraha, and of the word used as a designation for it."

The racist regime of South Africa had issued an ordinance to be imposed upon the Indian immigrants requiring all Indians over the age of eight, to register with the Authorities, submit to finger printing and accept a certificate which they had to carry with them always. Any Indian who failed to do so could be imprisoned, fined, lose the right of residence and even be deported, even if he owned valuable property or engaged in important commercial transactions. The Indians, under Gandhi's leadership, decided to resist it.

Gandhi was certain that if this ordinance was adopted it would mean "absolute ruin for the Indians of South Africa". Gandhi appraised and explained the Indians the complications of the Black Act and held a public meeting to refuse to submit to this indignity and to court imprisonment by defying the obnoxious law. The meeting held on September 11, 1906 was a historic moment in the struggle of South Africa and gave to the world the unique tool of civil defiance of Satyagraha. In Gandhi's own words, "The old Empire Theatre in Johannesburg was packed from floor to ceiling. I could read in every face the expectations of something to be done or to happen..... The most important among the resolutions passed by the meeting was the famous Fourth Resolution, by which the Indians solemnly determined not to submit to the Ordinance in the event of its becoming a law... and to suffer all the penalties attaching to such non-submission." Gandhi explained in the meeting that "it is a very grave resolution we are making, as our existence in South Africa depends upon our fully observing it.... A few words now as to the consequences. Hoping for the best, we may say that if a majority of the Indians pledge themselves to resistance and if all who take the pledge prove true to themselves, the Ordinance may not even be passed and, if passed, may soon be repealed."

Satyagraha, according to Gandhi, is "the vindication of truth not by infliction of suffering on the opponent but on oneself". Gandhi applied the principle of self-restraint and self-sacrifice and had the courage and conviction to inspire the Indian community to rise as one against injustice. In January 1908, he was arrested for protesting against the Black Act and had the singular privilege of being the first *Satyagrahi* in the world to court imprisonment for upholding human rights. He proved by example that a Satyagrahi "works not with the strength of the brute but with the strength of the spark of God".

The agitation against the injustice continued unabated under his leadership and before Gandhi's first prison term of two months was over, General Smuts sent him an emissary proposing to repeal the Act if the Indians voluntarily registered themselves. Gandhi agreed to it but drew the wrath of many Indians. He was even attacked by some of the pathans while going for his registration but he forgave them; eventually they apologised publicly for attacking him, and became his staunch followers.

As General Smuts went back on his promise, the Indians burnt their registration certificates in protest and even defied the ban on immigration to Transvaal. This was the final and the most organised phase of the great Satyagraha movement in South Africa led by Gandhi. The years 1906 to 1914 were the years of the ultimate evolution and success

of non-violence resistance to tyranny, a struggle which through self-suffering purified the participants, won over the opponents and naturally drew worldwide attention.

As the struggle by Indians continued, Gandhi was arrested in September 1908 and again in February 1909 and was sentenced to two months rigorous imprisonment and 3 months hard labour respectively. He is quoted as saying that “the real road to ultimate happiness lies in going to jail and undergoing suffering and privations there in the interest of one’s own country and religion.”

In the year 1911 Gandhi suspended the struggle as a provisional settlement of the Asiatic issues in the Transvaal was proposed by the Colonial Government that assured to repeal the Black Act, to remove the racial bar from the unfair immigration law and to abolish the 3 Pounds tax on Indians, but Gandhi was wary of these promises as there had been precedents of their being broken. This time again it was no different and the Union Government did back out on its promises. Further, the Supreme Court gave a judgment declaring that only Christian marriages were valid in South Africa, thus making all the Indian marriages illegal and the children born out of these marriages illegitimate. This provoked the Indian community so much that even the shy Indian housewives came out in the streets protesting against this humiliating law. Kasturba Gandhi was in the forefront leading the Indian women.

Gandhi re-started Satyagraha campaign in 1913 in his usual non-violent manner. He gave the South African regime plenty of time to deal with the strikes and law and order situation in Johannesburg and was very tolerant about pursuing the issues related to the Indian community. But the colonial government failed to understand the concerns and continued to neglect the Indian question. This naturally led to resumption of Satyagraha in October 1913. The government came down with a heavy hand to crush it but could not break its spirit.

The Indian women, led by Kasturba, fearlessly crossed the border between Transvaal and Natal without permits, headed to Newcastle and persuaded the indentured Indian miners there to strike. They succeeded and were arrested, and as a result the strike of the miners spread like wildfire. Thousands of indentured miners and other Indians prepared under Gandhi’s leadership, marched to the Transvaal border as a symbol of non-violent defiance. Gandhi made strict rules to be followed by the Satyagrahis asking them to submit patiently and unhesitatingly to insult, floggings and arrest. Before beginning the march, Gandhi made one last attempt to persuade General Smuts to accommodate the Indian demands but was refused curtly. Gandhi’s indomitable spirit becomes evident even as he writes, “I did not weaken in the face of his incivility. The straight and narrow path I had to tread was before me. The next day (6th November 1913) at the appointed stroke of the hour (6:30) we offered prayers and commenced the march in the name of God. The Pilgrim band was composed of 2037 men, 127 women and 57 children.” The great march was unique in its strength and though Gandhi was arrested and sentenced, the Satyagraha spread rapidly. There were almost fifty thousand indentured labourers on strike and several thousand Indians arrested and put in jails. The government tried to crush the movement with brute force, mistreating the Satyagrahis in prison, trying to force the labourers to go back to work but to no avail. The more there was repression, the more determined were the Satyagrahis, whose spirits remained unbroken even in the face of bullets.

Gandhi’s associates continued to lead the Satyagrahis and some of them deliberately

avoided arrest so that they could communicate with India and England. The brutalities unleashed by the South African government on peaceful marchers and protestors had horrified both the countries. The Viceroy Lord Hardinge openly supported the Indian movement and the Imperial Government of Britain was admonished by public leaders in London, to stop the atrocities in South Africa. The increasing pressure on the government of South Africa led to approving to Indian demands. Gandhi was released from prison on December 18, 1913, and General Smuts appointed the Solomon Commission to redress the grievances of the Indian community. General Smuts and Gandhi reached an agreement on June 30, 1914. An American biographer of Gandhi has very aptly summed up the situation thus, "In the end, General Smuts did what every Government that ever opposed Gandhi had to do-he yielded." This agreement/ Act that came into effect from July 1914 made all non-Christian marriages legal, abolished the three-pound tax on Indian indentured labourers, banned the importation of indentured labourers from India after 1920, and also allowed Indians born in South Africa to enter the Cape Colony.

In his humble and modest way Gandhi did not claim any credit for himself but attributed it to the visionary statesmanship of General Botha and General Smuts. As the agreement was finalised, Gandhi announced his decision to sail back home to India, as his work in South Africa had practically come to a logical conclusion. Gandhi was given a series of emotionally charged farewell receptions, and in the mass meetings and rallies, people from all walks of life applauded his "saintly life," "non-violent struggle," "dedication to the cause", his "experiments with truth and his abiding sense of public duty" with total disregard for personal safety, comfort and self-interest. Rev. John Howard described his life as a "living commentary on the principles of the New Testament". Gandhi advised his countrymen in South Africa to nurse the settlement and with the cooperation of their European friends ensure that what was promised was fulfilled. A meeting of the Transvaal Indian Women's Association was organised on 15th July 1914 in the Ebenzer Church Hall to bid Gandhi farewell. Thanking his compatriots and the people of South Africa regarding the Indian Relief Bill, Gandhi termed it as a morale boosting victory; disclaiming any credit, he acknowledged 'the women children and young people,... who have died for the cause and to those who quickened the conscience of South Africa'. His message to the Indians was that 'Satyagraha' was pure and simple, an infinitely finer and more effective weapon than all the guns put together. To the European friends in South Africa, he appealed to consider the indentured and ex-indentured labourers as sensitive human beings, not as mere cattle.

The most important achievement of Gandhi in South Africa was the fact that during the Satyagraha struggle, when he defied the law, crossed provincial boundaries without registering fingerprints, going to prison and out of it, he was actually perfecting the creed of self-sacrifice and learning its immense power and effectiveness as a weapon. Even his staunch adversary in South Africa, General Smuts wrote years later, "It was my fate to be the antagonist of a man for whom even then I had the highest respect". Thus we discover the truth in Gandhi's own words that "it was in South Africa, that God forsaken dark continent, where I found my God.. It was only when I had learnt to reduce myself to zero that I was able to evolve the power of Satyagraha in South Africa".

5.6 Lessons Learned

The successful end of Satyagraha and the amicable settlement of the Indian question placed Gandhi on the "pedestal of national and international glory." Satyagraha, under his

leadership, had given South Africa a great chapter in its history where the strength of the spirit emerged victorious in the face of brutal tyranny.

Gandhi's life in South Africa was an example in itself where all his unique revolutionary ideas acquired shape and form. He came across various philosophical ideas which helped mould his socio-economic ideas. John Ruskins's "Unto this Last", Tolstoy's "The Kingdom of God is within you", Thoreau's writings on 'civil disobedience' and various other works inspired him greatly and enlightened his thinking. The Phoenix and Tolstoy Settlements set formidable examples of community living, peaceful co-existence, equality of all and the dignity of labour.

It was South Africa which saw him present a clear perspective and strategy for his homeland's regeneration in the form of "Hind Swaraj" or the "Indian Home Rule", a seminal work. Gandhi felt that the ill-effects of the contemporary civilisation needed to be purified with a spiritual perspective of development. The genesis and evolution of this great work written in 1909 is explained by Gandhi thus: "It was first published in the columns of the Indian Opinion of South Africa. It was written in 1908 during my return voyage from London to South Africa in answer to the Indian School of violence and its prototype in South Africa. I came in contact with every known Indian anarchist in London. Their bravery impressed me, but I felt that their zeal was misguided. I felt that violence was no remedy for India's ills, and that her civilization required the use of a different and higher weapon for self-protection. The Satyagraha of South Africa was still an infant hardly two years old. But it had developed sufficiently to permit me to write of it with some degree of confidence. I thought that it was due to my English friends that they should know its contents. It teaches the gospel of love in place of that of hate. It replaces violence with self-sacrifice. It pits soul force against brute force. I commend it to those who would care to read it. The booklet is a severe condemnation of 'modern civilization.' I feel that if India will discard 'modern civilization' she can only gain by doing so."

It was during the struggle in South Africa when he endured prison terms that he realised the inner strength of women through Kasturba and used the potential of "Stri-Shakti" (Women power) in the Satyagraha. Satyagraha and Sarvodaya, based on the twin pillars of truth and non-violence, were given concrete shape and form in both theory and practice by him.

5.7 SUMMARY

This unit comprehensively summarises Gandhi's troubles and travails in South Africa and how he adopted the crucial weapon of Satyagraha to achieve the goal of Indian indentured labour rights. The South Africa episode is an eye-opener to those who believed in the brute force and who failed to achieve their ends in a suppressive manner. It is significant to note the spiritual and moral upliftment that Gandhi went through these testing years and to which he remained committed all his life. South Africa proved to be an effective laboratory where Gandhi successfully tried his experiments with truth and non-violence.

5.8 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

1. Briefly examine the conditions of Indians living in South Africa at the time of Gandhi's arrival.

2. Discuss Gandhi's fight against racial discrimination and procuring the rights for Indian labour.
3. Examine at length the birth and significance of Satyagraha.
4. Write a short note on the Boer War.

SUGGESTED READINGS

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