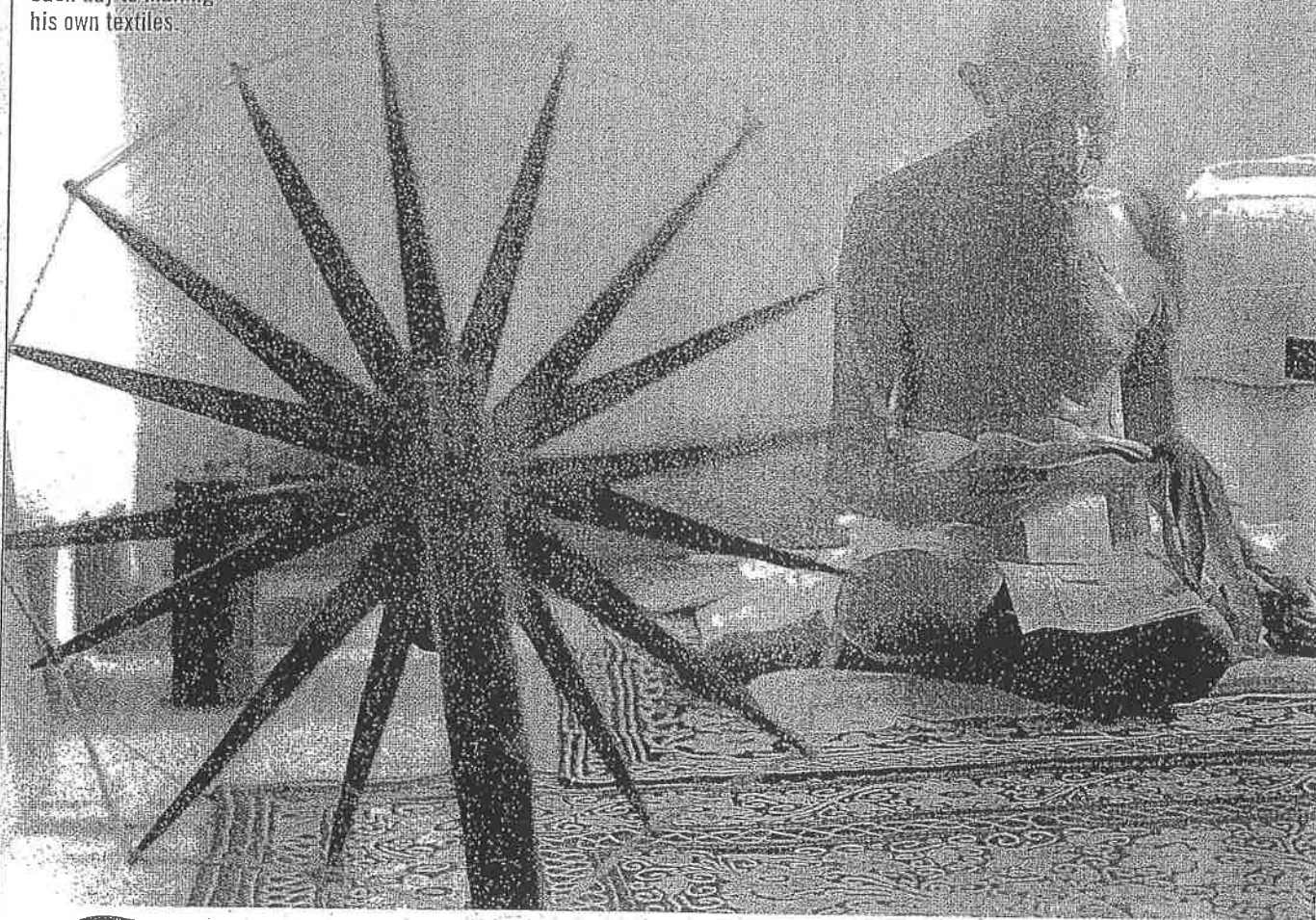


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Mohandas Gandhi sits near a spinning wheel. He devoted one hour each day to making his own textiles.



# GANDHI: MAN OF PEACE

## A frail man stands up to a mighty empire

By Victor Landauro

**W**hen he was a young boy, Mohandas Gandhi was forbidden to play with his friend Uka. Gandhi's mother explained that Uka belonged to the Dalit caste, a class considered to be "untouchable." Most Hindus believed that contact with a Dalit would pollute their souls.

Despite wanting to please his mother, young Mohandas did not give up his friend. He continued

to play with Uka—but in secret, far from his mother's watchful eyes. Someday, Gandhi told himself, he would change India so that all Indians would be treated equally.

Gandhi grew up to become a lawyer. In 1893, at the age of 24, he joined a law firm that assigned him to South Africa.

Like India, South Africa was then a British colony. As a British subject, Gandhi expected his legal rights to be recognized. But in South Africa, he experienced discrimination

because of his skin color.

One day on a train, the conductor ordered Gandhi to ride in the baggage car. Gandhi said that he had a first-class ticket. But that did not matter. No person of color could sit in the whites-only passenger car, the conductor explained. Gandhi refused to move and was thrown off the train at the next station.

He told a friend, who was also Indian, about the incident. The friend explained that such an experience was not unusual. This

acceptance of injustice only outraged Gandhi more.

The event proved to be a turning point in his life. A slight and timid man, Gandhi had faced life meekly. But after witnessing racial discrimination against Asians and black Africans, Gandhi knew that he had to act. He began to campaign tirelessly for human rights in South Africa.

Gandhi developed a method of social protest that was based on the principles of nonviolence, tolerance, and truth. He called this method *satyagraha*, a Hindu word that means "force of universal truth." An essential part of social protest, Gandhi said, is peaceful resistance to all forms of injustice.

"One cannot hate. Hate is against nonviolence," Gandhi told his followers. "Therefore one respects enemies, one teaches them. And nothing is as strong as a non-violent movement. It can conquer anything, if it is used properly."

#### INDEPENDENCE FOR INDIA

**W**hen Gandhi returned to India, many people viewed him as a national hero because of his civil rights work in South Africa. To his embarrassment, people started referring to Gandhi as "the Mahatma," meaning great soul. His reputation as a political and social leader brought him to the forefront of India's nationalist movement.

In 1919, the British government passed the Rowlatt Acts, laws designed to curb (restrain) the growing campaign for Indian independence. The laws censored newspapers and denied Indians their right to a fair trial.

### Gandhi developed a method of social protest based on the principles of nonviolence, tolerance, and truth.

To protest these laws, Gandhi called for a national day of prayer. Shops and factories were closed, while people stayed home and fasted (abstained from eating).

Not everyone agreed with Gandhi. His critics argued that a violent revolution would hasten (speed up) India's independence.

Gandhi refused to abandon his principles. He saw that many Indians lived in poverty. A revolution might bring independence, Gandhi argued, but not economic security. He realized that India relied heavily on British food, textiles, and other goods. Gandhi said that to win political independence, India must become economically independent.

In 1920, Gandhi began the Homespun Campaign, a national program of weaving and cloth-

making. Instead of buying British textiles, he said, India must make its own cloth.

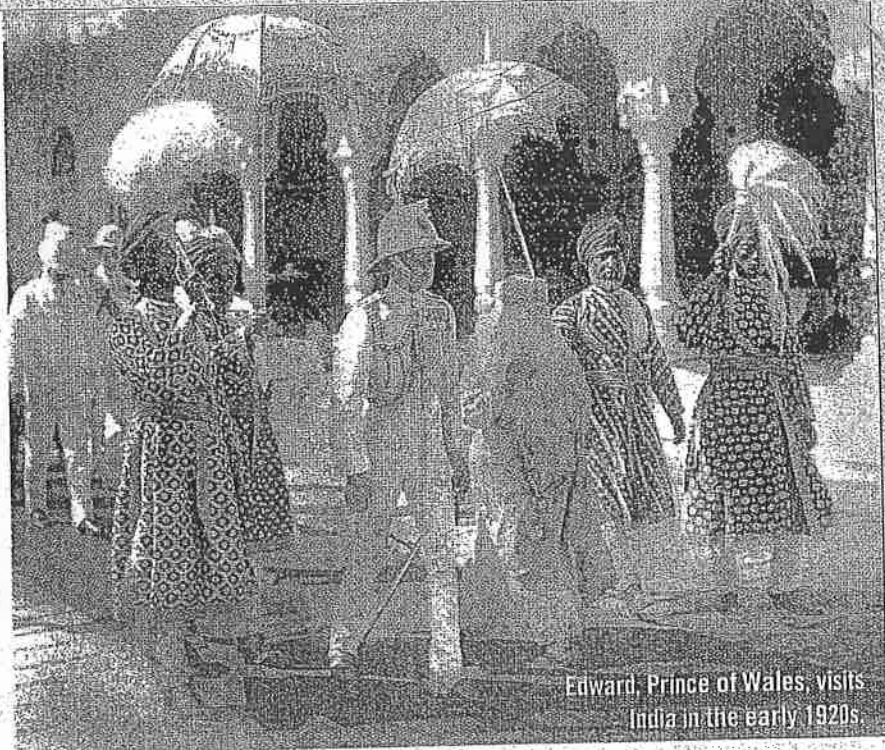
Britain faced a difficult decision: deny India independence and lose a trading partner, or let India become free and hope to continue trading with the independent country.

#### GRAINS OF SALT

**I**n 1930, Great Britain imposed the Salt Act. People in India could only buy salt sold by the British government. A hefty tax made that salt very expensive.

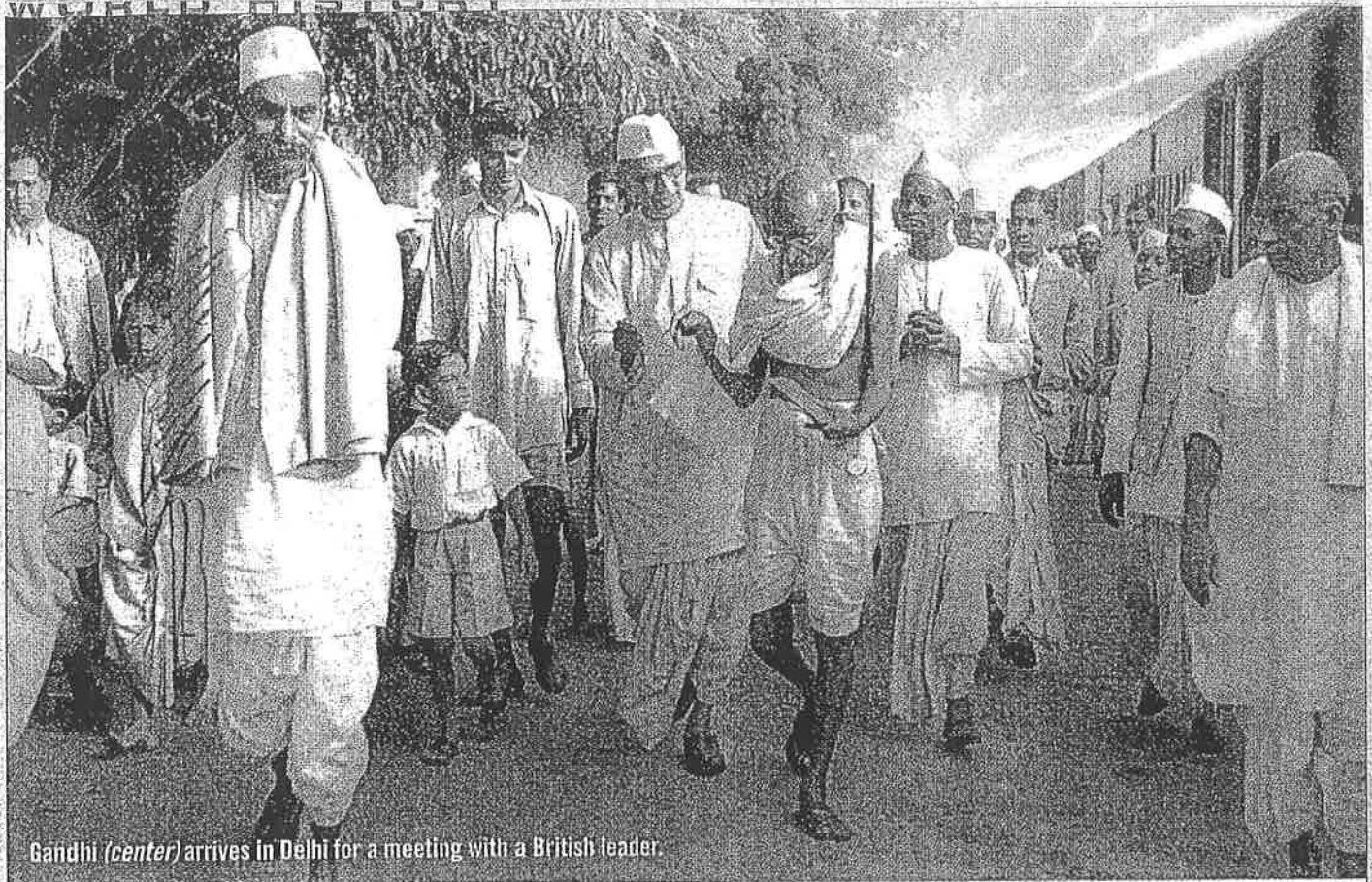
In protest, Gandhi led 78 of his supporters on a 240-mile march from Sabarmati to the coastal village of Dandi. They stopped in village after village along the way to explain their cause. By the time Gandhi reached the sea, he was leading a peaceful army of several thousand people.

"Watch," he told his followers. He bent over and collected grains of salt left behind by the water. "I am giving the signal to the nation."



Edward, Prince of Wales, visits India in the early 1920s.





Gandhi (center) arrives in Delhi for a meeting with a British leader.

By possessing non-government salt, Gandhi committed a peaceful, but illegal, act of protest. People throughout India followed his example. They boycotted British goods, staged peaceful demonstrations, and ignored unjust laws.

When British soldiers attacked protesters, Indians did not fight back. They calmly stared down violence and injustice. "An eye for an eye," said Gandhi, "only ends up making the world blind."

The demonstrations began to sap the strength of the British Empire's forces. On August 15, 1947, Britain granted India its independence.

#### THE PRICE OF FREEDOM

**B**ecoming an independent nation did not bring peace to India. Britain divided the subcontinent into two countries: Hindu-dominated India and Muslim-dominated Pakistan.

After the partition, many Hindus and Muslims fought violently. More than 500,000 people were killed, and 12 million lost their homes.

The creation of separate Hindu and Muslim nations disappointed Gandhi. He believed that all Indians should be united. Hindus and Muslims, he said, "must be brave enough to love one another, tolerate one another's religion . . . and trust one another." But Gandhi's calls for unity were ignored.

On January 30, 1948, a young Hindu man, angry at Gandhi's tolerance toward Muslims, shot and killed him. With his final breath Gandhi was said to utter "He Ram," the Hindu word for God.

Gandhi's message of peace lived on after his death. Martin Luther King Jr. applied Gandhi's methods of civil disobedience during the U.S. Civil Rights Movement. (See "We Shall Overcome," Jan. 10, 2003.)

Although Gandhi was never elected to any political office, his determination and courage helped India win its independence. The frail and shy man also brought hope that justice would come to **oppressed** (persecuted) people everywhere. **JS**

#### Your Turn

##### WORD MATCH

- |            |                           |
|------------|---------------------------|
| 1. caste   | A. abstain<br>from eating |
| 2. curb    | B. persecute              |
| 3. fast    | C. speed up               |
| 4. hasten  | D. class                  |
| 5. oppress | E. restrain               |

##### THINK ABOUT IT

Would Gandhi's tactics of peaceful resistance and civil disobedience be effective in disputes today? Explain.

