

Document A

Source: Mohandas Gandhi, "Letter to Lord Irwin," March 1930.

Note: Lord Irwin was the English governor in India. Gandhi wrote this letter before marching to the sea and breaking the English Salt Tax law. Gandhi's march to the sea is generally called "The Salt March." Most historians consider it the turning point of the movement to free India from British control. The Salt Tax Law made it illegal for Indians to manufacture or collect their own salt.

Sabarmati, India (March 1930)

Dear Friend,

Before embarking on Civil Disobedience and taking the risk I have dreaded to take all these years, I would ... approach you and find a way out. I cannot intentionally hurt anything that lives, much less human beings, even though they may do the greatest wrong to me and mine. Whilst therefore I hold the British rule to be a curse, I do not intend harm to a single Englishman or to any legitimate interest he may have in India.... And why do I regard the British rule a curse? ...Even the salt [the peasant] must use to live is so taxed as to make the burden fall heaviest on him.... The tax shows itself still more burdensome on the poor man when it is remembered that salt is one thing he must eat more than the rich man....

My ambition is no less than to convert the British people through nonviolence, and thus make them see the wrong they have done to India.... But if you cannot see your way to deal with these evils and if my letter makes no appeal to your heart, on the eleventh day of this month I shall proceed with such co-workers of the Ashram [Community] as I can take, to disregard the provisions of the Salt Laws....

Document Analysis

1. Who is the "Friend" that Gandhi is writing this letter to? What is the meaning of "civil disobedience"?
2. Why is Gandhi so opposed to the salt tax?
3. What is the specific act of civil disobedience that Gandhi is threatening to carry out?
4. Why do you think Gandhi tells Lord Irwin that he dreads carrying out an act of civil disobedience? Is civil disobedience always a nonviolent tactic?
5. How does this letter help explain why Gandhi's tactics were successful?

Document B

Source: Webb Miller, "They That Turn the Cheek," *I Found No Peace: The Journal of a Foreign Correspondent*, 1936.

Note: Madame Sarojini Naidu was a well-known Indian poetess who was to take Gandhi's place should he be arrested. The author of this document, Webb Miller, was a foreign correspondent present at both the raid and the hospital where the wounded (320 injured and two dead) were taken afterwards. This is the report he filed.

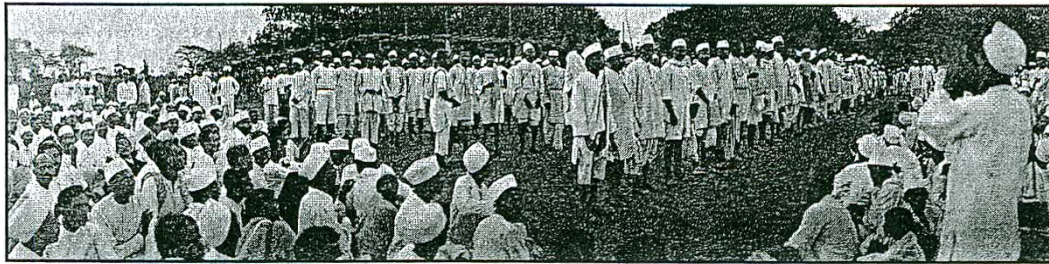
The Dharasana Salt Works, 150 Miles North of Bombay, India (May 21, 1930)

Mme. Naidu called for prayer before the march started and the entire assemblage knelt. She exhorted them: "Gandhi's body is in jail but his soul is with you. India's prestige is in your hands. You must not use any violence under any circumstances. You will be beaten but you must not resist; you must not even raise a hand to ward off blows." Wild, shrill cheers terminated her speech....

In complete silence the Gandhi men drew up and halted a hundred yards from the stockade [surrounding the Dharasana Salt Works].... Suddenly, at a word of command, scores of native police rushed upon the advancing marchers and rained blows on their heads with their steel-shod [clubs]. Not one of the marchers even raised an arm to fend off the blows.... The survivors without breaking ranks silently and doggedly marched on until struck down.... The blankets used as stretchers were sodden with blood.

At times the spectacle of unresisting men being methodically bashed into a bloody pulp sickened me so much that I had to turn away. The Western mind finds it difficult to grasp the idea of nonresistance.

Source: Protesters preparing to march in Dharasana.



Document Analysis

1. What was the date of the march by Gandhi's followers to the salt works of Dharasana?
2. Where was Gandhi on the day of the Salt March?
3. What evidence is there in the document that the marchers were disciplined?
4. What evidence is there in the document that the marchers practiced nonresistance?
5. It is recorded that the Salt March story filed by eyewitness reporter Webb Miller was carried by 1350 newspapers around the world. Explain why this is important when explaining the success of Gandhi's movement.

Document C

Source: M.K. Gandhi, reflections about Johannesburg, South Africa, January 1908.

I had just heard (that my fellow Indian protesters) had been sentenced to three months' imprisonment with hard labor, and had been fined a heavy amount.... If these men had committed an offense, I had committed a greater offense and I therefore asked the Magistrate to impose upon me the heaviest penalty.... I well remembered that I ... did not feel the slightest hesitation in entering the prisoner's box.

On vegetable days which were two in a week we cooked twice and on other days only once, as we were allowed to cook other things for ourselves only for the noonday meal. We were somewhat better off after we began to cook our own food. But whether or not we succeeded in obtaining these conveniences, every one of us was firm in his resolution of passing his term in jail in perfect happiness and peace.

Note: Gandhi spent the early part of his adult life working for the rights of Indians living in British South Africa. In this instance he was imprisoned for burning his ID passbook. Beginning in 1908 and over the next 40 years, Gandhi would spend a total of 2,338 days in jail.

Document Analysis

1. What was Gandhi doing in Johannesburg in 1908?
2. What might explain why Gandhi asked the Magistrate (judge) to give him a heavy penalty?
3. During his lifetime, how many days did Gandhi spend in jail?
4. Explain how Gandhi could use personal time in jail as an effective way to bring about nonviolent change in India. Consider its effect on followers, on opponents, and on world opinion.