

FOREWORD

To have nurtured in our bosom a man of the calibre of Gandhi the universal revered originator of passive resistance as a means of struggle against oppression, is indeed astonishing.

Within the tiny Indian community at the turn of the century and into its first decade Gandhi wrought and practised this philosophy against formidable adversaries. Success was limited but the fulfilment here was of limitless value.

But no leader nor saint can succeed without a constituency and the recounting of the story of Gandhi : Mahatma in the Making is a celebration also in honour of the hundreds of men and women without whose support, suffering and encouragement, Gandhi would have failed. Indeed the spark of resistance fired by Gandhi had never died down and the succeeding generations of all South Africans caught the spark and ushered in the change in this country in April 1994.

It is for this reason that this booklet needs to be read by as wide a spectrum of people as possible and especially students so that this stirring tale of Gandhi and the oppressed peoples struggle against discrimination and tyranny is not forgotten.

Hassim Seedat (Attorney)

INTRODUCTION

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was born in Porbandar in India on 2 October 1869. After completing his schooling in India he proceeded to London where he qualified as a barrister in 1891. Two years later his professional services were engaged by Abdulla Haji Adam Jhavery (Dada Abdulla), a wealthy Durban trader, in a 40 000 pound lawsuit against a rival firm in Pretoria. Gandhi arrived in Durban on 23rd May 1893.

The young Gandhi was unaware of the racial prejudices existing in South Africa at that time. While on a train to Pretoria, a white passenger entered the train and objected to Gandhi's presence in the compartment. The guard on duty requested Gandhi to move to a van compartment. Gandhi refused to move as he held that his ticket

entitled him to travel first class. The guard subsequently, threw Gandhi off the train at Pietermaritzburg where he was left shivering in the cold. This was Gandhi's first bitter experience of racism in South Africa and as he said later this experience transformed his life. While in court he was requested to remove his turban, an item of the traditional dress of India allowed to be worn in Indian courts. As a lawyer he was expected to carry a certificate of exemption against the 9.00pm. curfew. On another occasion he was assaulted while walking on the footpaths which were reserved for whites only. These harsh experiences firmly planted the seeds of resistance in him against race discrimination.

NATAL INDIAN CONGRESS AND FRANCHISE

After the conclusion of his case, a farewell party was given in his honour at which Gandhi alerted Indian merchants of the intention of the Natal legislature to disenfranchise them which he described as a nail in their coffin. At the behest of the merchants who promised him retainers Gandhi decided to stay in Natal to take up the fight for them. Immediately a petition containing 2500 signatures was sent to the Natal Legislative Council protesting against the offending legislation. The legislation was temporarily halted.

Gandhi had felt the need to organise local Indians politically. The franchise question had brought together some 2500 signatories and this was used as a catalyst in the formation of a political organisation. Subsequently, the Natal Indian Congress (NIC) was formed on 22 August 1894. The NIC became the mouth piece of the Indian people, its primary objective was to strive for equal treatment of Indians locally. However, most of the members were drawn from the merchant class. The membership fee of 3 pounds was prohibitive to the labourers most of them being still under indenture. Gandhi became the organisations first secretary and was a driving force behind it. Gandhi thereafter, not without some difficulty, was admitted as an advocate and started practising law in Durban.



Natal Indian Congress (Founders) 1894

GANDHI RETURNS FROM INDIA

Gandhi became acutely aware of the disabilities suffered by local Indians and sought to make the public in India

and Britain aware of this. On his trip to India in 1896 to fetch his family, he published and distributed the 'Green Pamphlet' which set out the conditions under which the Indians lived in South Africa. In Natal, the white colonists perceived Gandhi's legitimate act as being hostile. Hence, a wave of anti-Indian feeling was aroused, locally.

Gandhi returned to the shores of Natal in 1896 with his wife and children on the Courland. It, together with another ship, the Naderi, were not allowed to land passengers. The excuse was that disease was rampant on these ships and they had to be quarantined. Despite demonstrations at the Point by 5000 white agitators to prevent Gandhi and others from landing, they never-the-less stepped ashore on the 13th of January 1897. On landing, Gandhi was almost lynched by a hostile mob but was timeously rescued by the police superintendent's wife Mrs. Alexander. Thereafter, Gandhi sought refuge in the home of Parsee Rustomjee, a prominent trader who later proved to be an ardent passive resister.

It is interesting to note that by the end of 1896, Natal whites led by Harry Escombe (later to become Prime Minister of Natal) had adopted a hostile anti-Indian attitude. Escombe stated categorically that Indians were appreciated as labourers, but were 'not welcome as settlers and competitors'. This attitude, persisted in later years when succeeding governments pushed for repatriation in order to reduce the Indian population to a manageable compass.

ANGLO-BOER WAR

Gandhi's concept of non-violence did not include passivity or cowardice in the face of violence or the abdication of one's duty. Gandhi offered his services freely during the Anglo-Boer War of 1899. He formed an Indian Volunteer Ambulance Corps of 1400 men, many of whom were traders and professionals. They saw to the needs of the sick and wounded and often worked in the thick of battle in areas such as Spion Kop, Colenso and Ladysmith. For their efforts, members of the Corps were decorated with medals.



Stretcher-bearers during Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902

INDIAN OPINION

The Indian Opinion was founded by V. Madanjit in Durban (1903) but the printing press was moved to Phoenix a year later. The newspaper not only reported on matters concerning the Indian population, but became the mouthpiece for the Natal Indian Congress. The paper stands out as the most faithful record of the passive

resistance movement for the period 1906 to 1914. According to Gandhi, the Indian Opinion was meant to serve and keep the local and international communities informed of the events in South Africa and thereby function as an effective and potent weapon in the struggle. Gandhi contributed many articles to the newspaper which became a vehicle for his thoughts and ideas. He would often fund the newspaper when it experienced financial difficulties.

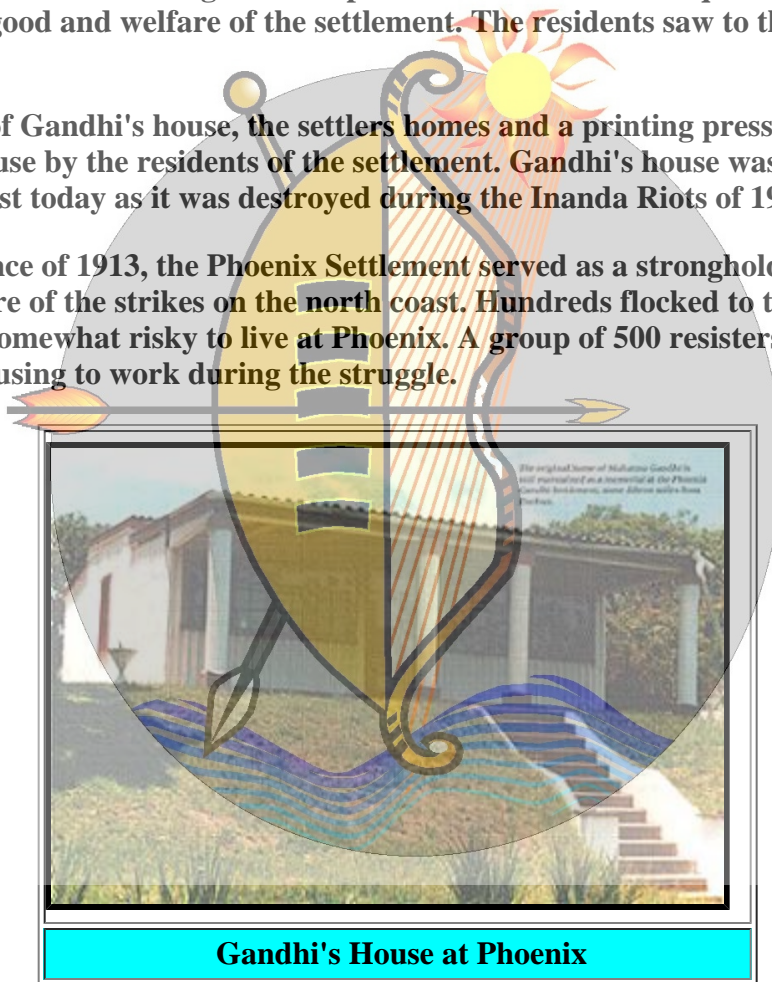
Whilst Gandhi was pre-occupied by the struggle or was abroad, the Indian Opinion was edited by others. Some of the editors were M. West, Rev. J. Doke, H. Polak and M. Nazar.

PHOENIX SETTLEMENT

Influenced by the teachings of Ruskin, Gandhi purchased a farm at Phoenix, near Mount Edgecombe in 1904 in order to establish a communal settlement. The settlement was based on the ideals of communal living whereby all persons irrespective of their social standing and occupation would receive an equal wage. They were to contribute to the common good and welfare of the settlement. The residents saw to the needs of the printing press during their spare time.

The settlement comprised of Gandhi's house, the settlers homes and a printing press. On the farm were fruit trees and acres of crop for use by the residents of the settlement. Gandhi's house was later converted to a museum, but it does not exist today as it was destroyed during the Inanda Riots of 1985.

During the Passive Resistance of 1913, the Phoenix Settlement served as a stronghold of the movement. The settlement became the centre of the strikes on the north coast. Hundreds flocked to the settlement to seek advice and shelter and it became somewhat risky to live at Phoenix. A group of 500 resisters were whiplashed and fired at, here, in Phoenix, for refusing to work during the struggle.



Gandhi's House at Phoenix

BAMBATA REBELLION - 1906

Zulus in Natal were subjected to a crippling and harsh hut tax against which they protested very strongly. The colonial government, however, saw the protest as a rebellion which had to be crushed. The war that ensued between the colonists and Zulus saw casualties on both sides but heaviest on the part of the Zulus. The colonists were not willing to tend to the sick and wounded Zulus. Gandhi formed an Indian Ambulance Corps of twenty men, each of whom were paid 1 shilling and 6 pence by the Natal Indian Congress. The NIC's objective in promoting this venture was 'to show that Indians recognise their responsibilities as settlers'. Gandhi was disgusted with the so-called war, and remarked that this was 'not a war but a man-hunt'. Gandhi's experience in the Zulu Rebellion and the horrors he witnessed changed his life forever. He took the vow of celibacy and his

repugnance of violence made him adopt satyagraha.

GANDHI'S DEVELOPMENT UP TO 1906

By 1906 Gandhi was still in the process of formulating his moral, political and philosophical principles. Satyagraha, as a political weapon was the culmination of a profound development of Gandhi himself. The concept of Satyagraha or non-violence which first emerged in 1906, means 'soul force, pure and simple'. For the satyagrahi inner-strength meant more than the display of brute force. It was used as a new weapon in the campaign for justice of a voiceless people.

Gandhi took a vow of Brahmacharya (chastity) and read many scriptures. He was strongly influenced by the New Testament especially the Sermon on the Mount. Krishna's message to Arjuna in the Bhagavad Gita had a profound impact upon Gandhi. Likewise, Tolstoy's 'The Kingdom is Within You' and Ruskin's 'Crown of Wild Olives' shaped his moral and philosophical outlook of life. By 1906 Gandhi was ready to undertake the first phase of the resistance struggle.

CONDITIONS IN TRANSVAAL 1880-1906

In the Transvaal, Indians began making their presence felt as early as 1880 and economic competition from them was strongly resented by the white traders. As British subjects, Indians were entitled to possess property in the Transvaal. This was made possible by the terms of the London Convention of 1884. However, laws were soon put into place to limit landownership, trade and residence. By Law 3 of 1885, Indians were not allowed to trade or own landed property except in locations set aside for them. In addition, they were subjected to a curfew whereby they were not allowed to be on the streets after 9.00 pm. without a pass. Further, they were not allowed to walk on the footpaths or sit alongside whites in the trams. By these legislative measures the mechanisms for separation and racial discrimination were put into place. These discriminatory practices together with more anti-Indian legislation that followed set the pace for the famous passive resistance struggle.

Whilst in the Transvaal, Gandhi had formed the British Indian Association, a political organisation to address grievances pertaining to the Transvaal Indians. Gandhi set himself up as an attorney and began to address their legal concerns. Thus he was ideally positioned to take up the Indian cause. The Transvaal had gained responsible government thereby strengthening the position of white settlers who subsequently became more assertive. After the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1901), the Transvaal was engaged in post-war reconstruction and in the process reshaped the way Indians had lived.

Many Indians who left the Transvaal during the Anglo-Boer War were returning home. A few entered the Transvaal illegally and this was the basis of friction. An Indian immigrant entering the Transvaal had to have a registration certificate. The Asiatic Ordinance required Indians to carry a pass and to re-register giving their thumb prints. It was argued that those that were already registered should not be required to re-register. In India only criminals gave their thumb-prints. It was further argued, that as British subjects, they should have more rights than non-British whites and that there were many such permitless whites to be found in the colony. Registration was therefore seen to take on a racial dimension.



