



Gandhi - film and reality

PART 2: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND - GANDHI IN BRITISH EYES

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In the movie *Gandhi* Gandhi shakes hands with MacDonald outside No. 10 Downing Street, The filmscript mentioned: 'MacDonald smiling the politician's smile, Gandhi smiling rather sadly'. We found many pictures of Gandhi before No. 10 Downing Street, one of them you see on the previous page, but no one together with the prime-minister.

Introduction

This volume offers the possibility to see Gandhi through British eyes.

In volume 1 most documents explain ideas of Gandhi at different occasions. In other documents Gandhi's beliefs can be compared by Christian principles. In the last part of volume 1 Gandhi's closest political companion Nehru gives his opinion about Gandhi and his ideas.

Volume 3, in Dutch language, contains a description of the content of the film, the film script, the entire spoken text in the film, Dutch

reviews of the movie, and recommendations for the use of the film in secondary education.

Summaries of the film, the filmscript and cast and crew credits in English you can find on internet.

The content of this edition is derived from a publication of the project 'Bouwstenen voor intercultureel onderwijs' of the University of Leiden.

2 *The Times* about Gandhi and the British in 1919

In March 1919 the Rowlatt Act (Anarchical and Revolutionary Crimes Act) came into effect. The Act provided for stricter control of the press, arrests without warrant, indefinite detention without trial, and juryless trials for proscribed political acts. The accused were denied the right to know the accusers and the evidence used in the trial. Tensions running high, which resulted in strong protests and rioting.

1 'WE REFUSE TO OBEY THE ROWLATT ACTS'

The Times April 9, 1919

Opposition to the Rowlatts Acts

'Such occurrences have happened before in big Indian centres of population, and they are generally either the work of inflammatory agitators or the outcome of religious differences. They are regarded with coolness by the British in India, and should not cause excited comment in this country, more especially as just now they may be repeated.

The British nation, which continues to regard the welfare and advancement of India as a sacred trust, has to ignore vague aspirations and to get down to hard facts. We find these facts when we turn again to the Delhi riots. The disturbances were ostensibly a mark of the public disapproval of the new Rowlatt Acts. The opposition to the Acts was never very sincere. Politicians of repute wanted an expedient by which they could create enough excitement to enforce, as they

hoped, the granting of the utmost possible constitutional changes. The revolutionary party wanted something with which to incite mobs to commit violence. Both found what they sought in the Rowlatt Acts.

Midway between the two stood the figure of Mr. M.K. Gandhi, an emotional but sincere agitator well known in South Africa a decade ago. Mr. Gandhi has been nurtured on the doctrines of Tolstoy, and is about as practical as his mentor. Tolstoy thought that the best way to get good government was to abolish all governments. Mr. Gandhi does not go quite so far, but acts as though he believed this subversive principle.

Entirely well-meaning himself, he becomes an unconscious foe to peace and order because he is in touch with far more subtle associates. Mr. Gandhi conceived a violent hostility to the Rowlatt Acts, and started a movement of passive resistance against them. The covenanters, as he called them, had to take a pledge of which the following is the salient part: We solemnly affirm that in the event of these Bills becoming law, and until they are withdrawn, we shall refuse civilly to obey these laws, and such other laws as a committee to be hereafter appointed may think fit: and we further affirm that in this struggle we will faithfully follow truth and refrain from violence to life, person, and property.

Mr. Gandhi stands apart as an enthusiastic visionary who proposes to set up a committee to decide what laws the public are to obey. Such a committee would be the negation of government.

The new agitation comes at a time when the British Government are about to introduce a measure of popular representation so spacious that it will enfranchise millions of peasants unable to read and write.

The Times, April 15, 1919

'April 11 – Punjab telegraphed this evening in the following terms repeated for your information:'

Serious rioting took place at Amritsar today, subsequent to the removal of Kichlu and Satya Pal, the two agitators. A goods shed was destroyed, the Town Hall and National and Chartered Bank were burned, and the telegraph office was wrecked. Three Europeans, one of whom was a railway guard, were killed. Infantry are being sent as early as possible from Lahore, numbering 100 British and 200 other troops.'

2 'THE AMRITSAR OUTRAGES'

The Times, April 22, 1919

The Punjab Government publishes an official account of the events at Amritsar and Lahore. On the early morning of April 10 orders under the Defence of India Act were served on Dr. Saifuddin Kichlu and Satya Pal, two local agitators whose speeches and activities during the previous few weeks had combined to bring about a state of general unrest in Amritsar.

They were removed by motor-car and train shortly before 11 a.m. The news of these arrests rapidly spread through the city, and a large crowd, numbering possibly ten or twenty thousand, thereupon collected and endeavoured to rush the civil lines. In anticipation of possible trouble pickets had been posted at the railway over-bridge and the level crossing connecting the city with the lines. When they arrived at the over-bridge the demonstrators refused to obey orders

to disperse or retire, and stones were thrown at the pickets. The District Magistrate gave orders to fire.'

'Military reinforcements arrived in Amritsar during the course of the evening, and by nightfall the mob was confined to the limits of the city, which was practically surrounded. On the following evening detachments of troops entered the city itself and encountered no resistance.

The total number killed among the crowd is believed to have been between 20 and 30.

People are asking whether this organized attack on communications has any connection with the Bolshevik plans to raise a revolution in India recently reported by The Times' Helsingfors Correspondent (published in *The Times* of March 20).

The Bengal Moslem Association has passed a resolution strongly condemning the violent methods adopted by the champions of the so-called passive resistance movement, and placed on record its strong disapproval of the unprecedented innovation of converting Moslem places of worship into public platforms for political propaganda, thus violating their sanctity and endangering their safety.'

3 'CAUSE OF INDIAN DISORDERS – FACTITIOUS AGITATION – MODERATES ALARMED FOR THE REFORMS'

The Times, May 12, 1919

From our own correspondent, Simla, April 15 (by mail).

There are various indications that the more thoughtful politicians in different parts of the country have aroused themselves to the necessity of resorting to propaganda against the 'passive resistance' movement. They realize that the reform proposals are being endangered



Riots broke out in Amritsar after the arrest of two nationalist leaders, April 10. British Brigadier General R.E.H. Dyer banned on April 11 in a proclamation demonstrations and meetings. Indian opposition held on April 13, still a large meeting in Amritsar. The meeting took place in an area surrounded by houses and walls. The general gave order to shoot without warning on a defenseless throng of ten to twenty thousand peaceful protesters. Ten minutes 50 soldiers fired all their ammunition. There were 379 deaths and three times as many wounded. In England the population heard after several months and a large inquiry of a Committee of the Government of India what had happened in full.

4 Fact and fiction in Richard Attenborough's *Gandhi*

If a moviemaker decides to make a film about the life of Gandhi, he has a lot of problems to solve.

- Historical events are complicated. Everybody's life consists of a lot of facts. *No filmmaker escapes selecting and omitting facts.*
- How to respect the different viewpoints in colonial times as well as in his own time?
- How to know exactly what has happened on different occasions in the past? As always historians and eyewitness disagree.
- And last but not least: how to get the money and the cooperation of the governments of India and England?

This chapter and the next offer the opportunity to look for answers to these questions.

1 THE SALT MARCH

The British imposed high salt taxes in India. They also prohibited the Indians from making their own salt. Gandhi thought this very unfair. He decided to lead a 400 km demonstration march to the coast. There the demonstrators broke the salt laws and collected salt from the sea. The British arrested thousands of Indians, including Gandhi. Opposition continued and the British finally gave in. The prisoners were released and the Indians were allowed to make salt again.

On the black and white press photo you see Gandhi with a few supporters at the beginning of the Salt March in 1930. The woman



walking next to Gandhi is Sarojini Naidu. From 1916, she campaigned fervently alongside Gandhi for Indian independence. She also fought for women's rights. Her birthday is now celebrated as Women's Day. The Salt March also features in the movie (pictured below), but the filmmakers didn't explain why the Salt March was held.





2 GANDHI VISITS ENGLAND 1931

Gandhi used his stay in England to meet as many Englishmen from all social classes. He pleaded with them for the independence of India. He refused to sleep in an expensive hotel in the center of London and stayed in the poor East End. He also visited a textile factory in Lancashire. To his surprise, the workers were



very enthusiastic. He had expected that they would despise him because he wanted the Indians to spin and weave their own clothes instead of buying cotton from Lancashire. The movie picture (on the right) shows clearly that the filmmakers have used the press photo of his visit to the factory.