

Reporting Gandhi's Visits to Kolkata: Mahatma in Contemporary News (1896-1902)

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Abstract: Mahatma Gandhi, Father of the Nation, had a good relation with Bengal, though he had to face fierce criticism several times from different sections of the people of this province. Kolkata, formerly known as Calcutta, the capital of Bengal, witnessed Gandhi in different roles. Many important political decisions were taken by him in this city. Here he delivered many lectures at mass meetings. Many meetings were held in his honour also. The present paper endeavours to reveal Gandhi's detailed activities in Kolkata reflected in contemporary newspapers before he was accepted as a leader of Indian nationalist movement. A thorough and wide search has been made of the existing source of information through a careful study of contemporary newspapers like The Englishman, The Amrita Bazar Patrika, The Hindusthan Standrad, The Bengalee, The Statesman, The Indian Mirror and various published works.

Keywords: Gandhi, Kolkata, All India National Congress, Gokhale, P.C.Roy, Rabndranath Tagore, Sister Nivedita, Public lecture, Saraladevi,

Date of Submission: 13-07-2018

Date of acceptance: 28-07-2018

Introduction

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi set out for South Africa in April, 1893 and reached Natal via Lamu-Mombasa- Zangibar - Mozambik at the end of May to join the Dada Abdulla and Company, a Memon firm of Porbandar in Gujarat, that had built up an extensive business in South Africa and needed a barrister for a year to sort out a complicated case which demanded forty thousand pound. Nearly three years after Gandhi came back to India for the first time in July, 1896 to take his family with him to Natal. He boarded the *SS Pingola*, a steamer, which headed for Kolkata on June 5, 1896 and touched the edge of the city of Kolkata on the 4th July. This was the first time Gandhi came to this city. He left the city on the same day as he was scheduled to go to Bombay via Allahabad. Gandhi boarded the train at Howrah station which was located on the right bank of the river Ganges and opposite to the city of Kolkata. He was then quite unfamiliar in Bengal.

Gandhi: Back home in 1896

Gandhi reached Rajkot, his native land, on July 9. During his stay there he published the *Green Pamphlet* which was actually entitled *The Grievances of the British Indians in South Africa*. The title itself describes the content of the book. He depicted the condition of the Indians in South Africa under the colonial rule in the pamphlet. Ten thousand copies were printed for distribution among the leaders of all political parties of India and to all newspapers. As its cover was green in colour, it came to be popularized as *Green Pamphlet*. On the other hand Gandhi decided educating public opinion about the condition of Indians living in South Africa by delivering lectures in mass meetings and writing in black and white. As desired he went to Bombay and on advice of Justice Ranade and Badrudin Tyabji he met with Ferozeshah Mehta who helped him to arrange a public meeting at a hall in Sir Cowasji Jehangir Institute of Bombay where Ferozeshah Mehta presided on September 26, 1896 in presence of eminent citizens of the city. It was a successful meeting where Gandhi delivered his first public lecture in India on apartheid in South Africa. He explained how the opposition by the colonialist and European government was going up there day by day against the Indians and how their political degradation and economic ruin were to be the result of an anti-Asiatic laws enacted by the colonial government. He appealed to the Indians and the imperial government of India to take initiative for the protection of their interest. From Bombay he went to Pune, then to Madras and then came to Kolkata.

Gandhi in Kolkata: the second visit of a 'wandering Jew'

Gandhi's fame reached Bengal first while he was fighting against the racist regime in South Africa. He came to Calcutta for the first time, as it is said earlier, on July 4, 1896 on his way back from South Africa to Bombay. Three months after Gandhi again came to Kolkata. On October 31, 1896 he reached this city via Nagpur from Madras where he addressed a public meeting on the same issue. As he knew nobody in this city, he took shelter in the Great Eastern Hotel, opposite to the present Governor House. On the same evening he watched a play purchasing a Dress Circle ticket for 4 *anna*.¹ In this hotel he came in contact with John Ellerthorpe who was a journalist, associated with *The Daily Telegraph* and was staying in the Bengal Club. He invited Gandhi there. But when Gandhi went there he was refused to sit in the drawing room of the club as Indians were not allowed there. Ellerthorpe did not know it. When he came to know about the restriction, he took Gandhi to his living room and apologized for his inability to take him to the drawing room and expressed his sorrow regarding this prejudice of the local Englishmen.²

Gandhi wanted to organize a public meeting in the city like that of Bombay and Madras to make people of Bengal aware of the condition of the migrated Indians in South Africa. But nobody was zealous to such meeting and he was given cold reception everywhere by then leaders of the city. He first met with Surendranath Banerjee who said to him that the people would not be interested in his work as there were a few difficulties prevailed in then Kolkata. He advised him to meet with the representatives of the British Indian Association and *maharajas* of Kolkata like Raja Sir Pyarmohan Mukherjee and Maharaja Jyotindramohan Tagore who were in view of him 'liberal-minded' and used to take initiative in public work. Gandhi met with those people but those meetings could not yield any fruitful result. None of them gave him importance and he was told that it was not an easy task to organize a mass meeting in Kolkata. If anything could be done, it would depend on Surendranath Banerjee.³ It is noteworthy here that Surendranath Banerjee was then a first rank political leader of the city. But all his efforts went in vein. None of the leaders of Kolkata came forward to help him to organize a meeting which Gandhi could organize earlier in Bombay and Madras with the help of local leaders, though in 1902 in a public meeting at Calcutta Pyeri Mohun Mukherjee claimed that a representation was sent to the Government at Gandhi's request on the subject by the British Indian Association of which he was the Vice-President. Not only that he persuaded Dr. Hunter to write on the condition of the Indians in South African in *The Times* newspaper.⁴

Gandhi had noted in his autobiography that Calcutta leaders did not show any interest in his appeal but we notice that Surendranath Banerjee's *Bengalee* reported the news of the Bombay meeting where Gandhi first discussed the condition of the Indians in South Africa. It wrote:

On Saturday evening Mr.M.K.Gandhi, Barrister-at-Law, delivered in Bombay a lucid address on the political disabilities of British Indian subjects in South Africa, at a largely attended public meeting, held under the auspices of the Bombay Presidency Association. The Hon. Mr. Mehta, C.I.E. presided. The following resolution proposed by the Hon. Mr. Javerilal U. Yajnik, seconded by Mr. W.Chambers, and supported by the Hon. Mr. Rahimtoola M.Sayani, was adopted by the meeting amidst loud applause: "This meeting resolves that the chairman be authorized to address H.M.'s Secretary of State for India soliciting his attention to the hardships and disabilities under which H.M.'s Indian subjects in South Africa are at present suffering as set forth in the various memorials presented on their behalf and imploring him to take suitable measures for their redress."⁵

Gandhi went to the newspaper houses like *The Amrita Bazar Patrika* and *the Bangabasi*, a Bengali newspaper, expecting them to throw light on the South African problem. But they also did not pay heed to him. At the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* office, the man whom Gandhi met with, thought him of a 'wandering Jew.' The editor of the *Bangabasi* kept him waiting for an hour and though the editor had many interviews with others in that period, yet he did not look at Gandhi. Mohandas then ventured to raise his issue before the editor who abstained him saying, 'Don't you see our hands are full? There is no end of number of visitors like you. You had better go. I am not disposed to listen to you.'⁶ Gandhi was offended but realized the editor's position as he was invariably attended by visitors and at the same time South Africa was hardly known in those days.

However he did not lose hope and met with the editors of the Anglo-Indian newspapers of Kolkata. *The Statesman* and *The Englishman* realised the importance of the subject, interviewed him and those interviews were published in full. A representative from *The Statesman*, a daily newspaper of the city interviewed him and this was published on November 11, 1896 under the headline *Aggrieved Indians in South Africa/Interview with Mr.M.K.Gandhi*.⁷ It reported as follows:

"Readers of Indian Newspapers had lately many opportunities of making themselves acquainted with the grievances of the British Indians in South Africa. The Indians, have secured in Mr.Gandhi, an Indian Barrister who has spent some time in Natal and other African towns ,a spokesman who is at present making a tour through the presidential capitals of this country, with the object of securing public support for their agitation for better treatment from the government and the white population of the colony in which they have taken up their home; and in England they have enlisted the good offices of Sir William Hunter, the *Times*,

and the British Committee of the National Congress, with the same end in view. As Mr. Gandhi who after lecturing on the subject in Bombay and Madras is at present in Calcutta, a representative of the *Statesman* seized the opportunity yesterday of a personal interview with him. Mr. Gandhi, it may be premised, is a dapper young man, a Hindoo belonging to Kathiawar, in the Bombay Presidency, who possesses to a marked degree the facility of speech that characterises the educated classes of his countrymen.

'Will you please tell me, Mr. Gandhi in a few words' the interviewer said, 'something of the grievances of the Indians in South Africa?'

"There are Indians", Mr. Gandhi replied, "in many parts of South Africa ---- in the colonies of Natal, the Cape of Good Hope, the South African Republic, the Orange Free State, and elsewhere, in all of which, more or less, they are denied the ordinary rights of citizenship. But I more particularly represent the Indians in Natal, who number about fifty thousand in a total population of some five hundred thousand. The first Indians were, of course, the coolies who were taken over under indentures from Madras and Bengal for the purpose of labouring in the various plantations. They were mostly Hindus, but a few of them were Mahomedans. They served their contract time, and on obtaining their freedom they elected to stay in the country, because they found that, as market gardeners or hawkers of vegetables they could earn from three to four pounds sterling per month. In this way, there are, at present about thirty thousand free Indians settled in the colony, while some sixteen thousands others are serving their indentures. There is, however, another class of Indians numbering about five thousand, Mohamedans from Bombay side who have been attracted to the country by the prospects of trade. Some of the latter are doing well. Many are lands owner in a large way, while two own ships. The Indians have been settled in the country for twenty years and more, and, being prosperous, were contented and happy.

- "What then, was the cause of all the present trouble, Mr. Gandhi?"

- "Simply trade jealousy. The colony was desirous of securing all possible benefits from the Indians as labourers, because the native of the country do not work in the fields, and the Europeans cannot. But the moment the Indian entered into competition with the European as a trader, he found himself thwarted, obstructed, and insulted by a system of organized persecution. and gradually, this feeling of hatred and oppression has been imported into the laws of the colony. The Indians had been quietly enjoying the franchise for years, subject to certain property qualifications, and in 1894, there were 251 Indian voters on the Register against 9,309 European voters.

"But the Government suddenly thought, or pretended to think, that there was a danger of the Asiatic vote swamping the European, and they introduced into the Legislative Assembly a Bill disfranchising all Asiatics save those who were then rightly contained in any voter's list. Against this Bill, the Indians metelrialised both the Legislative Assembly and the Legislative Council; but to no purpose, and the Bill was passed into law. The Indians then memorialized Lord Ripon, who was in those days at the Colonial Office. As a result, that Act. has now been repealed by an Act which says: "The Natives, or descendants in the male line of natives, of countries which have not hitherto possessed elective representative institutions founded on the parliamentary franchise shall not be placed on any voter's list unless they shall first obtain an order from the Governor-in-council exempting them from the operation of the Act. It also exempts from its operation those persons who are rightly contained in any voters' list. This Bill was first submitted to Mr. Chamberlain, who has practically approved of it. We have yet thought it advisable to oppose it, and with a view to secure its rejection, we have sent a memorial to Mr. Chamberlain, and hope to secure the same measure of support that has been extended to us hitherto."

"Then are we to understand" the interviewer asked, "that the Indians in Natal ---the great bulk of whom are coolies, who would never have aspired to free institutions in their own country---are desirous of wielding political power in Natal?"

"By no means." Mr. Gandhi replied, "We are most careful to put out, in all our representations to the government and the public, that the object of our agitation is merely the removal of vexatious disabilities devised, as we believe, to degrade us as compared to the European population. With the object of still further discouraging Indian colonization, the Natal legislature has passed a Bill to keep indentured Indians under contract for the whole term of their stay in the colony; if they object to renew their contract at the end of their first term of five years, to send them back to India, or if they decline to return, to compel them to pay an annual tax of £3 per head. Unfortunately for us, the Indian Government, on the *ex-parte* representation of a commission that visited India from Natal in 1893, have accepted the principle of compulsory indenture; but we are memorializing both the home and the Indian Governments against it."

"We have heard much," the interviewer reminded Mr. Gandhi, "of daily annoyances to which Indians in Natal are said to be subjected at the hands of the white colonists."

"Oh yes!" he replied, "and the law supports the Europeans in this system of persecution, either openly or covertly. The law says that an Indian must not walk on the foot-paths but pass along the middle of the road; that he must not travel either first or second class on the railways; that he must not be out of his house without a pass after 9 o'clock at night; that he must take out a pass if he wishes to drive a cattle; and so on. Imagine the

tyranny of these special laws! For the infraction of them, Indians --- men of the highest respectability who might sit in your Legislative council---are daily insulted, assaulted, and taken up by the police. And in addition to these legal disabilities, there are social disqualifications. No Indian is permitted in the tramcars, in the public hotels, in the public baths.”

“Well, but Mr. Gandhi, suppose you succeed in having the legal disabilities removed, what about the social disqualifications? Will they not pinch and gall and fret you a hundred times oftener than the thought that you cannot return a member to the Legislative Assembly?”

“We hope”, Mr. Gandhi rather doubtfully explained, as he said good-bye, “that when the legal disabilities are removed, the social persecution will gradually disappear.”- which seems to show that he is mixing up cause and effect. In any case he is satisfied that this agitation will result in relief to Indians in Natal, and intends to convene a public meeting in Calcutta for an expression of opinion on the subject.”⁷

On the next day, i.e., November 12, he received a cable from Dada Abdulla from Durban asking him to return to Natal sharply as the parliament was opening there in January. So he could not arrange any public meeting in Kolkata. He addressed a letter to the press informing the reason of his early departure from Kolkata⁸ and left the city. His letter in this regard to the editor of *The Englishman* was published in that paper on November 14, 1896.

John O'Brien Saunders was the proprietor and the editor of *The Englishmen*, an Anglo-India daily newspaper of Kolkata. He favoured Gandhi very much this time. But before that he interrogated him in many ways and realized that Gandhi was impartial in his statement which was free from exaggeration and full of truth. In his autobiography Gandhi wrote that he placed his office and paper at Gandhi's disposal and even allowed him to make any kind of change in leading articles of his paper written by Saunders on the South African situation. Even he promised to render every kind of help he could. In fact a friendship developed between them and they kept in touch with each other through correspondence until Saunders became seriously ill.⁹

Before leaving Kolkata, Gandhi was interviewed by a reporter of *The Englishman* where he confessed that the Indians were disliked by the colonists in South Africa on economic ground, especially for trade jealousy as the Europeans disliked competition from India traders. He discussed the legal hindrances imposed on the Indians there. The interview was published on November 14, 1896 as follows:

“Gandhi: There has always been a dislike of the Indian from the first day of their migration to Africa, but it was only when our people began to trade that the antipathy became marked and took shape in the imposition of disabilities.

“Reporter: Then all these grievances you speak of are the outcome of commercial jealousy and prompted by self-interest?

“Gandhi: Precisely. That is just the root of the whole matter. The colonists want us cleared out because they do not like our traders competing with them.

“Reporter: Is the competition a legitimate one? I mean, is it entered into and conducted on a fair and open basis?

“Gandhi: Is the competition is an open one and conducted by the Indians in a perfectly fair and legitimate manner. Perhaps a word or two as to the general system of trading may take matters clear. The bulk of Indian engaged in trafficking are those who get their goods the large European wholesale houses, and then go about the country hawking them. Why, I may say that the colony of Natal of which I speak particularly from knowledge and experience, is practically dependent for its supplies on these travelling traders. As you know, shops are scarce in those parts, at least away from the towns, and the Indians gets an honest livelihood by supplying the deficiency. It is said that the petty European traders has been displaced. This is true to a certain extent; but then it has been the fault of the European trader. He has been content to stop in his shop, and customers have been compelled to come to him. It is to be wondered at, therefore, that when the Indian, at no small trouble, takes the goods to the customers, he readily finds a sale. Moreover the European trader, no matter in however small a way, will not hawk his goods about. Perhaps the strongest proof of the trading capabilities of the Indian and generally speaking, of his integrity, is to be found in the fact that the great houses will give him credit, and in fact, many of them do the bulk of their trade through his agency. It is no secret that the opposition to the Indian in Natal is but partial, and by no means represents the real feeling of a good portion of the European community.

“Reporter: What briefly are the legal and other disabilities placed upon the Indian residents in Natal?

Gandhi: Well, first there is a ‘curfew’ law which prohibits all coloured persons being out after 9 o'clock at night without a permit from their master, if indentured servants, or useless they can give a good account of themselves. The great cause of complaint on this score is that this law may be used by the police as an engine of oppression. Respectable, well-dressed, educated Indians are sometimes subjected to the humiliation of arrest by a policeman, being marched to the lock-up, incarcerated for the night, brought before the magistrate next morning and dismissed without a word of apology when their *bona fides* have been established. Such occurrences are by no means rare. Then there is the deprivation of the franchise, which was brought out in the

article you published. The fact is the colonists do not want the Indian to form part of the South African nation --- hence the taking away from him of franchise rights. As a menial he can be tolerated, as a citizen never.

“Reporter: What has been the attitude of the Indians on this question of the exercise of political rights in an alien country?

“Gandhi: Simply that of the person who claims to enjoy the same rights and privileges in a country as those who are not native to the country freely enjoy. Politically speaking, the Indian does not want the vote; it is only because he resents the indignity of being dispossessed of it that he is agitating for its restitution. Moreover, the classifying of all Indians in one category and the non-recognition of the just place of the better class is felt to be a great injustice. We have even proposed the raising of the property qualifications and the introduction of the education test, which would survey give the hallmark of fitness to every Indian voter, but these has been contemptuously rejected, proving that the sole object is that of discrediting the Indian and depriving him of all political power, so that he will be forever helpless. Then there is the crippling imposition of the £ 3 poll tax per annum on all who remain in the country after fulfilling their indenture. Again, the Indians has no social status, in fact, he is regarded as a social leper---- a pariah. Indignities of all kinds are heaped upon him. No matter what his station may be, an Indian throughout South Africa is a coolie, and as such he is treated.

“On the railway he is restricted to a certain class, and although in Natal he is permitted to walk on the foot-path, this is refused to him in other states.

Reporter: Will you tell me something about the treatment of Indians in these states? Gandhi: In Zululand no Indians can buy landed property in the township of Nondweni and Eshowe. Reporter: Why was the prohibition imposed?

“Gandhi: Well, in the township of Melmoth, which was the first established in Zululand, there were no such regulations and the Natal Indians availed themselves of the right to buy landed property, which they did to the extent of over £2,000 worth. Then the prohibition was passed and made to apply to townships subsequently founded. It was purely trade jealousy, the fear being that the Indians would enter Zululand for trade purposes as they had done in Natal.

“In the Orange River Free State, the purchase of any property by an Indian has been made impossible by simply classifying him with the Kaffir. It is not permitted him to hold immovable property, and every Indian settlers in the state has to pay an annual tax of ten shillings. The injustice of these arbitrary laws may be gauged from the fact that when they were promulgated the Indians, mostly traders, were compelled to leave the State without the slightest compensation, causing losses to the extent of £ 9,000. Matters in the Transvaal are hardly any better. Laws have been passed which prohibit the Indian from engaging in trade or residing otherwise than in specific localities. On the latter point, however, proceedings are pending in the law courts. A special registration fee of £7 has to be paid, the 9 o'clock rule is operative, walking on the footpath is forbidden (at least this is so in Johannesburg), and travelling first and second class on the railways, is not permitted. So you will see that the India's life in the Transvaal is not altogether a pleasant one. And yet, in spite of all these disabilities, nay, unwarrantable indignities and insults, the Indian, unless Mr. Chamberlain interferes, will be liable to compulsory military service. According to the Commandeering Treaty, all British subjects were exempted from this service, but, when the Transval Volksraad was considering the point, they added a resolution to the effect, that the British subjects means 'whites' only. The Indians, however, memorialized the Home Government on this question. Cape Colony, following on the same lines has recently empowered the East London Municipality to prohibit trading to Indians, walking on the same foot paths and limiting them to residence in certain locations. So you see almost everywhere in South Africa there is a dead set against the Indians. Yet we ask no special privileges, we only claim our just rights. Political power is not our ambition, but to be let alone to carry on our trading, for which we are eminently suited as a nation, is all we ask. This is, we think, a responsible demand.

“Reporter: So much of these grievances, which seem to be general throughout South Africa. Now tell me, Mr. Gandhi, how do Indian advocates fare in the law-courts?

“Gandhi: Oh there is no distinction between advocates and attorneys of whatever race; in the courts, it is only a question of ability. There are many lawyers in the colony, but on the whole, forensic talent cannot be said to be of very high order. A good many European leaders are to be found, and it goes without saying that those with English training and degrees monopolise the practice of the courts. But I suppose it is the English degree, for those of us who have taken it, which places us more on a level footing. Those with an Indian degree only would be out of place. There is scope, I believe, for Indian lawyers in South Africa, if at all sympathetically disposed to their fellow-countrymen.”¹⁰

The Leader in danger

On November 14th, 1896 Gandhi left Calcutta and from Bombay he set sail for South Africa for the second time on December 1, 1896 along with his wife, Putlibai, two sons --- Harilal of nine years and Monilal of five years only and ten years old Gokuldas, the only son of his widowed sister. On reaching Durban, after

eighteen days, i.e. December 18, 1896. Gandhi along with other passengers of the *Courland* and *Naderi*, two steamers full of Asiatic passengers were not allowed to disembark and when allowed after seven days Gandhi had to face a hostile situation and was assaulted by a section of Durban mob. His life was marginally saved by the tact and intelligence of the Superintendent of Police of the city and his wife. The news came to Kolkata through *The Statesman* which reported the entire incident under the headline "Indians in South Africa/ Mr. Gandhi mobbed" on March 4, 1897:

"Mr. Gandhi, the Bombay barrister, who in November last toured in India with the subject of enlisting sympathy for Indians in South Africa, narrowly escaped being lynched on landing on his return to Natal. Mr. Gandhi travelled from Bombay to Natal by the steamer *Courland*. As Reuter's telegrams stated at the time the steamer *Courland* and *Naderi* arrived at Natal with about six hundred Indians aboard for Natal, Delagoa Bay, Mauritius, Bourbon, and the Transvaal. Mr. Gandhi had spent seven years in South Africa, and on his return to India last year he published a pamphlet, his object being, to quote his own words, "to place the entire facts regarding the position of the Indian in South Africa before the Indian public. The people in Natal believe that India does not know exactly how many Indians were outside the country, and what their status was, and his object was to draw their attention to the subject, and it was with that view...the pamphlet was published. My...object was to have the status of the Indians decided to our satisfaction, that is to say, in terms with proclamation of 1858. I hope that with the help of the Indian public in India, we shall achieve the end very quickly." When the *Courland* and *Naderi* arrived in Natal Harbour, the colonists determined that the Indians should not be permitted to land. The Natal government however through their Attorney General, Mr. Escombe, assured Captain Milne, the commander of the *Courland*, that his passengers were "as safe under the Natal Government laws as if they were in their own native villages." Mr. Gandhi landed in the afternoon, and the experience he went through is thus described by a Natal paper: "About 4-30 he left the *Courland* by row-boat, accompanied by Mr. F. Laughton, solicitor, and landed at Cato's Creek at 5 o'clock. Entering Stanger Street, Mr. Gandhi was recognized by some boys who were fishing, who at once hooted him and caused a crowd to quickly collect. Mr. Laughton, apprehending danger, hailed rickshaw, but the puller was intimidated by the youngster, for the cry of Gandhi ---'Boo-ool' seemed to bear untold significance to the kafir mind, and he refused the preferred fare. Mr. Gandhi and his friend therefore to make their way townwards on foot, and every moment the yelling crowd increased, and became more excited, inflamed, and dangerous. On getting near Messrs. Parker, Wood and Co.'s establishment, West Street, European boys began throwing mud at him. An Indian ran to warn the police. The crowd then began to throw stones and fish. At this a lady rushed up and defended Gandhi from the missiles with her umbrella. The crowd now included a considerable number of adults, and some of these run up and attempted to strike Mr. Gandhi. The police arrived on the scene a few minutes after receiving warning, and wanted Mr. Gandhi to go to the police station. He said he preferred to go to Parsee Rustamjee's house, where he had made arrangements to stay. The police accordingly escorted him up West Street across Gardiner Street and up Commercial Road. By this time the crowd had increased to several hundred; many Kafirs being among the crowd. The police managed to land Mr. Gandhi into Parsee Rustamjee's store, Field Street, and stationed a number of native constables round the doors. Mr. Gandhi on his way to Field Street maintained a calm appearance, and said, "I expected something like this." On being cautioned about going further than the police station he said, "I am going to my house and leave it to their justice." One of the most serious parts of the affair was that most of the crowd persuaded the kafirs that they were 'going for' the coolies. The native constables were instructed to stop all fights between the coolies and kafirs. The crowd by this time commenced to realise that they were being balked of their prey, and threatened to set fire to the house unless they could get Gandhi. Meantime a clever thing was being done. One of the passengers employed by the Corporation who with two or three Indian constables, was standing in the crowd in his uniform and turban, was sent by Superintendent Alexander over the back wall of the building with instructions to Mr. Gandhi to change clothes with one of the Indian constables, as his life was in danger if he remained in the house. Detective Sergt. McBeath was then told to get in as best he could to see to the disguising business. With Sargt. Ball he entered, and in a short time he reappeared by a side passage with his face blackened, and looking like an Othello, and was not recognized by anyone. With him was Sargt. Ball attired as an Indian coachman, with his whip, and a third party, dressed as an Indian constable, followed. They walked past the crowd while Superintendent Alexander engaged them with a bit of banter for staying there. He called for a song, and as Gandhi was safely making his way from that quarter of the town they were singing, "We'll hang old Gandhi on a sour apple tree." After getting outside the crowd a carriage drove up, McBeath entered, and was driven off by Sergt. Ball. A little further on he picked up the Indian constables, and was out of danger before the song had ceased. Superintendent, Alexander, however, had some difficulty in persuading the mob that Gandhi had escaped. Ultimately Messrs. Trimble, Spradbrow, and Inspector Dougherty were allowed to search the building to satisfy the crowd. This they did, and reappeared with the intelligence that wherever Gandhi was he could not be found in that building. This statement seemed to satisfy a good many, who retired, and shortly after the rain began to fall and disappeared the remainder, the last of the crowd leaving about 11 o'clock."¹¹

Thus a new chapter started in Gandhi's life in South Africa.

Mahatma in Kolkata: First appearance in Indian National Congress

Gandhi came back to India again on December 19, 1901 and decided to spend some days by travelling different parts of the country. In that year the seventeenth annual session of the Indian National Congress was scheduled to be held in Calcutta. He decided to attend the session. This was the first time Gandhi was present in the Congress session which was presided by Dinshaw Wacha. He boarded the train from Bombay to reach Calcutta. Pherozshah Mehta and D.E. Wacha were also travelling on the same train but in a separate saloon. On the way Gandhi getting down from his compartment went to Firozshah Mehta's saloon to inform him about South African issue and got their consent to raise the issue in the Congress.

The train arrived at Howrah on the 23rd December. Gandhi was put up in the Ripon College, presently known as Surendranath College, along with other delegates and Tilak as well. The sanitary condition of this Congress camp was very poor and unhygienic, as the number of latrines was inadequate and those were filled with filth and bad smell. Gandhi drew the attention of the volunteers to the condition of the place but they refused to submit to him as it was a sweeper's duty. Gandhi then asked for a broom and cleaned the filth on his own.¹²

As Gandhi arrived in Calcutta on 23rd December, the Congress session was yet to be held two days later on the 26th of the month. Hence he decided to serve the Congress office so that he might get some experience and, therefore, approached to Bhupendranath Bose and Janakinath Ghoshal, then secretaries of the Congress, seeking some work to be performed. Bhupendranath Bose was an ardent Congress worker and in later days turned into a prominent leader of Bengal specially in those days of the Swadeshi movement. He became the Vice-Chancellor of the Calcutta University also. Gandhi left his comment on these men in his autobiography:

"...I went to Bhupenbabu and offered my services. He looked at me, and said: 'I have no work, but possibly Ghosalbabu might have something to give you. Please go to him.' So I went to him. He scanned me and said with a smile I can give you only clerical work. Will you do it?' 'Certainly', said I, 'am here to do anything that is not beyond my capacity.'" ¹³

Janakinath Ghosal did not know Gandhi but when he came to know about his past, he felt sorry for asking him to perform the clerical job and appreciated Gandhi's spirit for taking it as his job. Soon they became very close to each other. Janakinath used to get his shirt buttoned by his bearer. One day Gandhi volunteered the bearer's job and Janakinath did not mind to get the job done by Gandhi. While Gandhi was doing so he jokingly said that being the Congress Secretary, he was so busy that he had no time even to button the shirt. Though Gandhi was amused by this naivete, the job did not create any dislike in him. On the contrary, he acknowledged immense benefit by rendering service in this way.

The Calcutta session of the Congress was held for three days from the 26th to 28th December, 1901 at Beadon square. Gandhi attended the Congress on all the three days. This was for the first time he was in Congress session. On the second day i.e., December 27, 1901 he moved a resolution on the South African issue. He himself has recorded the events of this Congress in his autobiography:

"In the Congress at last. The immense pavilion and the volunteers in stately array, as also the elders seated on the dias, overwhelmed me. I wondered where I should be in the vast assemblage.

"Sir Pherozshah had of course agreed to admit my resolution. But I was wondering who would put it before the Subject Committee, and when..." "so we have done? Said Sir Pherozshah Mehta.

"No No there is still the resolution on South Africa. Mr. Gandhi has been waiting long 'cried out Gokhale. Have you seen the resolution 'asked Sir Pherozshah. 'of course.'"

'Do you like it?'

'It is quite good. Well then let us have it, Gandhi.'

'I read it trembling. Gokhale supported it.'

'Unanimously passed,' Cried out everyone.

You will have five minutes to speak on it, Gandhi' said Mr. Wacha.

The procedure was far from pleasing to me. No one had troubled to understand the resolution, everyone was in a hurry to go and because Gokhale had seen the resolution, it was not thought necessary for the rest to see it or understand it!...

'As soon as it was time for my resolution, Mr. Wacha called out my name.... I stood up. My head was reeling. I read the resolution somehow....'

'Just at this moment Mr. Wacha rang the bell. I was sure I had not yet spoken for five minutes. I did not know what the bell was rung in order to warn me to finish in two minutes more. I had heard others speak for half an hour or three quarters of an hour, and yet no bell was rung for them. I felt hurt and sat down as soon as the bell was rung... And yet the very fact that it was passed by the Congress was enough to delight my heart.'¹⁴

What Gandhi said in his speech while moving the resolution on South African issue, has not been mentioned in his autobiography. The *Amrita Bazar Patrika* reported it on December 28, 1901 as follows:

Mr. Gandhi, a delegate from the Indian settlers of South Africa moved the following resolution:

"The Congress sympathises with the British Indian settlers in South Africa in the struggle for existence and respectfully draws the attention of His Excellency The Viceroy to the anti-Indian legislation there and trusts that while the question of the status of British Indian in the Transvaal and the Orange River Colonies is still under the consideration of the Right Hon'ble the Secretary of State for the colonies, His Excellency will be graciously pleased to secure for the settlers a just and equitable adjustment thereof.

"All Indian no matter to what class they belonged, were called coolies. If the worthy gentleman who was presiding over the Congress were to go to South Africa he would be classed as a coolie (shame, Shame). Asiatics are considered as barbarians. Mr. Gandhi then mentioned an instance in which the son of a Bombay merchant who was a member of the corporation, who had no friend in Natal, was not admitted into any hotel there on the ground that he was coolie. He then referred to the case of one Kaikabad who was not allowed by the plague officers to land because he was taken to be a coolie and to release him they had to move the colonial secretary at Natal. His own case he then referred to. He had once been kicked in the Transval because he was a coolie and was not allowed to travel first class although he paid the fare.

"Mr. Gandhi thought that Mr. Chamberlain was sympathetic towards them, he had even promised to look into their grievance after consulting Lord Milner.

"This was the time or never, exclaimed Mr. Gandhi, to ameliorate the condition of the British Indians in South Africa. He was commissioned to lay their grievances before the Indian Congress, so that the Congress might raise its powerful voice in their behalf. What the Indians there wanted was not their money, for even they contributed 2000, no doubt a widow's mite, to the Indian Female fund. What they wanted was their sympathy. One thing that Mr. Gandhi struck was that if better classes of Indians, say lawyers, doctors, engineers etc. emigrated to South Africa, they could command respect and the condition of the Indians there might improve with them.

"Mr. Agrogiaswamy Pillal seconded the resolution which being put to the vote was carried unanimously."¹⁵
This was the last resolution as the President declared the session adjourned on account of Ramjan.

Gandhi with Gokhale and P.C.Roy

When the Congress session came to an end Gandhi decided to stay in Kolkata for some days more as his intention was to meet with the Chamber of Commerce of the city and many people in connection with work of South Africa. This time he spent a month here and decided to stay in the *Indian Club* instead of any hotel. In those days as Indian leaders used to lodge in the *Indian club*, Gandhi, in view to come in contact with them, decided to take refuge there with an expectation that after knowing about the condition of the Indians in South Africa, they would do something for them. When Gandhi was staying there, Lord Curzon held his *Darbar* in Calcutta. Some Indian kings who were invited to that *Darbar* were members of the club. They took shelter there for some days and Gandhi watched them very closely. The condition of these Indian Kings under the British rule aggrieved him. He noted his observation on them in his autobiography:

"In the club I always found them wearing fine Bengali *dhoties* (long cloth) and shirts and scarves. On the darbar they put on trousers befitting khansamas, and shining boots. I was pained and inquired of one of them the reason of the change.

'We alone know our unfortunate condition. We also know the insults we have put up with, in order that we may possess our wealth and titles,' he replies.

'But what about Khansama turbans and these shining boots?' I asked.

"Do you see any difference between Khansamas and us? He replied and added, "They are our khansamas, we are our Curzon's khansamas..."

I was distressed to see the Maharajas bedecked like women---silk pyjamas and silk achkans, pearl necklaces round their necks, bracelets on their wrists..."¹⁶

In those days Gopal Krishna Gokhale used to visit the *Indian Club* to play Golf and on such a day he invited Gandhi to stay with him. Gandhi accepted his invitation and went with him to his residence. Gandhi first met with Gokhale in the campus of the Fergusson College when he went to Poona to organize a mass meeting on the grievances of Indians in South Africa in 1896. In those days there were two groups in that city ---one led by Lokmanya Tilak and the other by Gopal Krishna Gokhale. Gandhi first met with Tilak and then with Gokhale in Fergusson College where he was a professor. Gandhi was accorded an affectionate welcome by Gokhale and his mannerism won Gandhi's heart very soon. He compared Gokhale with the river Ganges where one could have a refreshing. Afterwards Gandhi wrote that in the sphere of politics the position which Gokhale occupied in his heart was absolutely unique.¹⁷

Staying with Gokhale made Gandhi familiar with the foremost Bengali families which led to the beginning of intimate relationship with the Bengalis. Gokhale was then the member of the legislative council.

Those who used to visit him, Gokhale introduced Gandhi to every of them. Here Gandhi first came in contact with Prafulla Chandra Roy, the eminent scientist and professor of Chemistry at the Presidency College in Kolkata. Prafulla Roy lived in next door to Gokhale's residence and was a frequent visitor to Gokhale who introduced him to Gandhi by saying, "This is Professor Roy, who having a monthly salary of Rs.800, keeps just Rs.40 for himself and devotes the balance to public purposes. He is not, and does not want to get married."¹⁸ They were always in discussion about public welfare or about topics which had educative value. This sometimes appeared to Gandhi very painful.

First public lecture in the city

Prafulla Chandra Roy in his *Life and experience of a Bengali chemist* has referred to his first meeting with Gandhi. He wrote:

"Towards the end of 1901, there came a notable visitor to Calcutta as a guest under Gokhale's roof--- Mohandas Karam Chand Gandhi. Needless to say, I was attracted to him from the very first day by his magnetic personality and our common devotion to asceticism, my esteem for and intimacy with him have grown in intensity as the years have rolled on."¹⁹

Gandhi's company and discussions with him made a deep and lasting impression on P.C.Roy. In 1932 when his autobiography was first being published, Gandhi's words of 1902 were still ringing in his ears. He wrote in his book: "He (Gandhi) was then earning as barrister several thousand rupees a month but he was utterly regardless of worldliness---'I always make it a point to travel third class in my railway journey, so that I might be in close personal touch with the mass---my own countrymen ---and get to know their sorrows and sufferings.' Even after the laps of thirty years, these words still ring in my ears."²⁰ From Gandhi's lips Prafulla Chandra Roy first came to know about 'vivid and moving account' of the disabilities of the Indian settlers in South Africa. He was the man who first decided to organize a public meeting in Calcutta in which Gandhi would be the principal speaker and the initiative was supported by Gokhale. With this object in view Prafulla Chandra took the leading role in organizing a meeting at the Albert Hall to make people aware of the humble condition of the Indians in South Africa.²⁰ He persuaded Narendranath Sen, the veteran editor of the *Indian Mirror* to preside over the meeting which was held on January 19, 1902. This was the first public meeting where Gandhi addressed the citizens of Kolkata. *The Bengalee*, edited by Surendra Nath Bannerjee, who expressed his inability to organize a mass meeting concerning the South African issue in 1896 when Gandhi wanted it to happen, appealed to the people to be present in the meeting through his paper. It appealed:

"We need hardly remind our readers that Mr. Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, Bar-at-Law, will relate his experiences in South Africa at the Albert Hall, today, at 4p.m. Mr. Gandhi is one of our most earnest patriots and his name is well-known in connection with his services to the Indian settlers in South Africa and he deserves the grateful thanks of his countrymen. We welcome him warmly in our midst, and we are sure our educated countrymen will not miss this opportunity of bearing him on a topic in which we all are vitally interested. We understand the Hon'ble Mr.Gokhale will also speak on the occasion."²¹

The *Amrita Bazar Patrika* reported the meeting under the headline 'My experiences in South Africa/A lecture by Mr.Gandhi' as follows:

"On Sunday evening at the Albert Hall before a crowded meeting of the residence of Calcutta, presided over by Babu Narendranath Sen, Mr. M.K.Gandhi of the South Africa fame narrated his experiences gained there in Natal, the Cape colony, the Transvaal and the Orange Free State, now called Orange colony as an Indian settler. Mr. Gandhi who is a Barrister at Law and a native of Bombay went to Natal in 1893 to the capacity of a legal advisor to a wealthy Indian merchant of the place. In that capacity he had to spend a year in the colony and during this period he saw enough to convince him that the position of the Indian settlers were getting more and more desperate and that they requested an advocate to plead their case before the Colonial and finally the British public. About this time an anti-Indian legislative measure was brought before the colonial Parliament, the object of the Bill being to discourage Indian emigration into the land and to put a check upon the growth of the Indian settlers already there. The introduction of this measure into the legislative anvil at once, led Mr. Gandhi to make up his mind to stay at the colony and fight out a battle on behalf of his weak countrymen there, for none of them were educated and most of them were unlettered. So girding up his lions Mr. Gandhi gave his first battle to the colonials in the shape of a memorial addressed to the governor punting out vigorously the injustice of the measure about to be enacted into a law of the land. This was revelation to the colonials, they had never seen before memorials from the Indian community, much less a memorial so ably drawn as the present one. Thenceforth Mr. Gandhi began to draw the attention of the colonials and his subsequent acts on behalf of the Indians only intensified their ire against him. An attempt was subsequently made at Durban by the colonials to prevent Mr. Gandhi from landing there about 600 Indians including Mr. Gandhi reached Durban from Bombay in two steamers .When it became known that Mr. Gandhi had come, the colonials raised a violent agitation against the landing of the Indians. It was said that as plague had broken out in India, Indians must not be allowed to land at Durban. Of course, by the law of the land they could not absolutely forbid the landing of

the Indians but as the European authorities yielded to the demands of the Demonstration Committee, by which appellation the colonial agitators made themselves known, a prohibitive quarantine of 24 days, which Mr. Gandhi facetiously termed "political quarantine" was introduced and the steamers were placed under it. It was fondly hoped that this long quarantine would lead the Indians to leave Durban and return to Bombay. But their political persecutors counted without their host. The Indians remained and passed through the trying ordeal. The landing day at last approached. It became however known to everybody that it was Mr. Gandhi's landing alone and not that of the others 599 Indians that had provoked all the oppositions. The colonials were determined to see that Mr. Gandhi might not land in safety at Durban. Personal violence to Mr. Gandhi was thus expected in many quarters. On the eve of his landing Mr. Gandhi received a letter from a high official offering him the service of a Government carriage at nightfall so that he might secretly land at night and thus escape any demonstration against his landing or any personal violence that might be directed against him. While thanking the official for his very generous proposal Mr. Gandhi declined to sneak into Durban in that way. The next morning he landed with all the other emigrants and proceeded on his way with a European friend of his and his wife a few steps ahead of him. But they had not proceeded far when a colonial mob overtook them and began to attack Mr. Gandhi. Brickbats and clods of earth were flung at him with the result that blood began to flow out his cheek and forehead. The attack became so furious that Mr. Gandhi was obliged to take shelter in the house of a Parsee gentleman. The next object of attack of the mob was the house of the Parsee. The house was besieged on all sides, brickbats were thrown into it and threats and abuses were hurled at the inmates. All this took place in the day time in the town of Durban in persecution of an Indian. The District Superintendent of Police at last arrived in at the scene and managed to pass away Mr. Gandhi in the guise of a policeman. When at last the mob were persuaded to realize that their prey had escaped they desisted from causing further mischief to the house and dispersed.

"Such are among some of the personal experiences of Mr. Gandhi in the lead of his adoption. All the above however did not come out from the address he delivered narrating his personal experiences in South Africa. He had of course to refer to them but any reference to his personal share in them was studiously avoided, such was the unassuming character of the man, as Mr. Gokhale observed. The above facts all came up from the telling speech that the Hon'ble Mr. Gokhale made in seconding a vote of thanks to the lecturer.

"Mr. Gandhi in his address had to repeat many things concerning the treatment the Indians received in South Africa which had already appeared in the papers, but he observed his mission before them was not give the dark side of the situation with which they were partially familiar but the bright, the roseate side. He then narrated how since the war they had been able to enlist the sympathy of some of the colonials and the cause of the Indians, he thought, was a little progressing. He however strongly deprecated the latest Anglo-Indian measures which sought to exclude every Indian from the colonies who could not read any of the European languages. The gentleman present at the meeting who all knew at last the English language, might not fully appreciate the gravity of the situation, but his effect would be disastrous upon a people, the vast majority of whom were unlettered and those who knew any language knew only the vernaculars of India. The hatred of the colonials against them was no doubt intense but what Mr. Gandhi proposed was to conquer that hatred by love. The Indians in South Africa believed in this maxim and they tried to follow it. The war which must have proved disastrous to others came to them as a blessing as it furnished the Indians with an opportunity to prove their matter. Before the war broke out the colonials often used to taunt them by saying that in times of danger the Indians would scuttle off like so many rabbits, and such was the people who demanded privileges like them. But the war showed that the Indians did not scuttle off, they put their shoulders to the wheel and were prepared to take equal responsibility with others. When the war broke out the Indians irrespective of their opinion whether the war was right or wrong, (for which the Sovereign, and Sovereign alone was responsible, they thought) agreed to give their services free to government and with that view approached it with a petition, but their prayer was not granted. Subsequent to this, however, Colonel Galway who apprehended to a certain extent what the affair at Colenso would be, wrote to leading Indian to organize an ambulance corps and this was done with 36 Indians as leaders and 1200 Indians as ambulance bearers. What sort of service they rendered to the country was known to them all and this had even drawn forth the admiration of the violent Colonials who for the first time then saw the good trait in the Indian. Mr. Gandhi added that in one sense the Indians themselves were to blame for the feeling of hatred raised in the colonials against them. If the Indian settlers had been followed by the better class Indians who could be the peers of the colonials in every phase of life so much bad blood would not have been created. However, the feeling had now been improving, it had improved so much that it enabled some of the Indians to start a national Famine Fund to help India in her last famine and to raise a sum of £ 5000 of which £ 3300 were paid by the colonials.

"Raja Peary Mohun Mukherjee in proposing a vote of thanks to the lecturer said that he had known Mr. Gandhi since 1894 when the latter came to Calcutta and at his request a representation was sent by the British Indian Association of which he was then A Vice-President, to the Government on the subject. He, the Raja, also

made the late Dr. Hunter feel interest in the question of the Indians in South Africa and write articles in *The Times* newspaper.

"The Hon'ble Mr. Gokhale seconded the resolution which was carried with acclamation. Babu Bhupendranath Bose and Mr. J.Ghosal, Secretaries of the last Congress bore testimony to the unassuming character of Mr. Gandhi who used to do at the Congress office any manner of work from 10 o'clock in the morning to 12 o'clock at night without letting even his personality known to them. When at last they came to know him they were simply filled with admiration for the man.

"With a vote of thanks to the chair and with three cheers for Mr. Gandhi the meeting dissolved."²²

Gopal Krishna Gokhale had never commented earlier on South African issue in public as it was a colonial matter, though he was familiar with Gandhi since 1896. In this meeting while seconding the resolution he first expressed his opinion on the subject as follows:

"The Hon'ble Mr. Gokhale, in seconding the vote of thanks, said that he first met Mr. Gandhi in 1896, when the latter gentleman paid a brief visit to Poona, and he distinctly remembered the impression which Mr. Gandhi then made on his mind by his ability, earnestness and tact, and also by his manner, at once so gentle and yet so firm, which was one of the principal charms of his friend. And since that time, the speaker had followed Mr. Gandhi's career with the deepest interest and with profound admiration, and having studied every utterance of his and watched every moment in which he had any share, the speaker could say without any hesitation whatever Mr. Gandhi was a man made of the stuff of which heroes were made. Mr. Gokhale asked his hearers to think of what Mr. Gandhi was in 1893 when he first went to south Africa, and of the position which he now occupied among British Indians in that country. Mr. Gandhi first went to South Africa in connection with a lawsuit to instruct Counsel on behalf of one of the parties. He had to stay there for one year for that work, and during the time his character and capacity inspired such confidence among his countrymen in Natal that they pressed him to settle there. Mr. Gandhi, however, like so many other Indians who have been for a short time out of their country, was anxious to return to India when the anti-Indian legislation that was then being passed by the Natal Legislature attracted his attention, and he decided to throw in his lot with the countrymen there, and helped them to the best of his ability. And from that moment Mr. Gandhi had been working for the British Indians in South Africa, with a zeal and tact and courage and a sense of responsibility which the speaker could only describe as exceedingly rare. In the performance of this work, Mr. Gandhi had to face and overcome the fiercest opposition from the European population of Natal. The speaker here narrated at some length the deplorable incidents connected with Mr. Gandhi's landing in South Africa in 1896, when large crowds of Europeans tried to prevent his landing by force and mobbed him in the street. What Mr. Gokhale admired in this connection in Mr. Gandhi was the fact that in spite of such treatment meted out to him two years ago, there was not a trace of bitterness in Mr. Gandhi's mind against the European community of Natal, but that, on the contrary, he was very anxious to express his just appreciation of their good qualities, and the generous help that he received from individual Englishmen. The speaker then referred to the Indian Ambulance Corps which Mr. Gandhi principally instrumental in organizing in South Africa after the outbreak of the Boer War, and to the improved feeling towards Indians which had resulted from it. After paying a tribute to Mr. Gandhi's earnestness and moral worth and his modest and unassuming ways, Mr. Gokhale dwelt on the lessons which were to be drawn from Mr. Gandhi's work in South Africa. Mr. Gandhi had proved that the fiercest opposition could be overcome and the bitterest misunderstanding removed if only we were true to ourselves and worked in an earnest selfless and straight-forward manner, and refrained from returning insult for insult and abuse for abuse. Truly Mr. Gandhi had illustrated a principal manner that love conquered hate. Then Mr. Gandhi has raised the estimation in which the Indian character was held by Englishmen. When Mr. Gandhi left South Africa it was freely recognized that Mr. Gandhi had throughout acted in the spirit of a perfect gentleman, that he desired to raise the status of his countrymen in South Africa by promoting good feeling between the two races and that he was true friend of the Empire. Above all Mr. Gandhi set an example to the people of India as to how they ought to work in the cause of their country. Mr. Gandhi undertook to organize the Indian community in Natal at the age of 24 when most people had hardly finished their studies and begun life. The very first memorial that he drafted was recognized by friends and opponents alike to be a masterly document conciliatory in tone and remarkable for effective argument. And as he had begun so he continued all through with the result that men, like the late Mr. Escombe, Premier of Natal, who were once strongly against the Indians, became in course of time very friendly to their cause. Perhaps some cynically disposed person might say that Mr. Gandhi had to organize for the most part uneducated men, and that was an advantage as where there were too many educated men, all wanted to be leaders, and there were no followers. But the speaker said that if only public workers in this country showed greater earnestness and greater sense of responsibility, they would not all aspire to be leaders, but would be content and proud to serve under men like Mr. Gandhi who brought to the discharge of their difficult duty those high qualities of truth, conciliation and foresight which their friend had exhibited in so remarkable a manner in South Africa. And Mr. Gokhale felt no hesitation in holding up Mr. Gandhi's example for the emulation of the young friends whom he saw around him, he even felt that if Mr. Gandhi settled in this

country, it was the duty of all earnest workers to place him where he deserved to be, namely, at their head. With those remarks, Mr. Gokhale commended the vote of thanks to the cordial acceptance of the meeting.”²³

Impact of Gandhi's lecture on Kolkata

This lecture had a deep impact on the people of Kolkata. *The Indian Mirror*, a Calcutta daily, spared three editorial columns on three consecutive days on Gandhi's lecture and South African issue. Gandhi made the audience perplexed by his cordial speech which was devoid of oration. It was a lecture delivered from the bottom of his heart. The editorial of the paper praised Mahatma in full voice and advocated the realization of the maxims which were followed by Gandhi in South Africa. Mohandas in that afternoon had impressed his audience with two lessons derived from two maxims: 'Speak the truth and speak truth under all circumstances' and 'Return love for hate.'

The *The Indian Mirror* in its editorial column wrote on 22/1/1902:

“Mr. Gandhi's address on Sunday afternoon last was a revolution to all but a very few who had provisionally enjoyed the privileges of private friendship with him. Apart from the vast amount of local information which Mr. Gandhi was able to supply in an inexhaustible and placid flow of speech, what struck his huge and crammed audience most was his modesty earnestness and self-effacement. There they had a young man of thirty, short and seemingly weak of stature, and yet private and public report had magnified him into a hero. And he was all that. But his own discourse of the affairs of the Indian colonists in South Africa was a complete effacement of himself. The audience listened to the speech, spell bound for a hour and a quarter. They were told of the abilities and disabilities of the indentured Indian coolies as well as of the free Indians, the traders and the artisans. As the story developed the audience listened with bated breath to the simple language, stripped of all oratorical effort. The English of the speaker was unexceptionable, but still more so was the manner of the speech. He spoke direct from his heart, and in that the secret of his mastery over his audience lay.

“In Mr. Gandhi, the audience recognized the man with a mission, a great mission in an India beyond the seas. He took care not to divulge his own share in that mission. It was only the Hon. Mr. Gokhale later on referred to Mr. Gandhi's career in South Africa in feeling and eloquent terms, that the audience realized how much Mr. Gandhi had suffered and achieved on behalf of his despised countrymen in those distant regions. His had been no ordinary life, and Mr. Gokhale's narrative proved that in Mr. Gandhi, we have a man of whom India or, for that matter, any country should be proud.... He has done so by a total effacement of the self in Him. His thoughts and his work have been for others ---never for himself. That is what Mr. Gokhale said, Mr. Gandhi himself seems to be deeply spiritual man, and he impressed upon his audience with all possible earnestness and power, two lessons, as he called them---the two lessons which he had learnt as a lad in Gujarati works, and the two lessons which had served his countrymen in South Africa in very good stead indeed. His maxims have ever been: speak the truth, and speak truth under all circumstances: Return love for hate. Under Mr. Gandhi's direction, the Indians in South Africa returned good for evil and went on doing so undiscouraged by further gross evils that befell them till the hearts of their oldest and worst enemies were touched, and the last state of the Indians is certainly better than their first. Mr. Gandhi has been good and wise in his generations. But a far greater one than he, even the enlightened Lord Buddha himself, had centuries upon centuries ago preached and practiced the maxim: “Hatred ceases not by hatred at any time; hatred ceases by love.” The practice of this golden maxim has so far proved the salvation of our downtrodden countrymen in South Africa. From being accounted as mere ‘coolies’ they have risen in the estimation of their erstwhile traducers and persecutors to be the “sons of the empire after all.” For this result the sole credit is due to Mr. Gandhi. He thought the gospel, and taught it so practically persuasively, that he found ready and attentive, pupils, and the success of his mission, has in a large measure resulted. Can we not put these maxims to the test in this groaning motherland of ours? We are querulous, and we complain, and we return harsh words for hard measures. Speak the truth and nothing but truth about the condition of your life under a foreign rule. But speak not the truth in the bitterness of spirit or language. Do not return hatred for hatred, for the offspring of such intercourse can only be hatred. But hatred ceases by love; therefore, accept the hatred in humility, but give love and service for that hatred. And then in fullness of time the seed of love will germinate even in soil accounted most barren. Remember that Lord Buddha conquered by love. Remember that God Himself is Love.”²⁴

The same paper on 22/01/1902 in another editorial under the headline ‘The Self -effacement of Mr. Gandhi –an example to the people of Bengal’ commented:

“Mr. Gandhi's life and work and the Hon. Mr. Gokhale's comments thereon suggests reflection which, if digested, should serve as useful and valuable lessons to our countrymen. What is the secret of Mr. Gandhi's signal and wonderful success and at so young an age? It is, as we pointed out yesterday, complete self-effacement. We have seen a motto on a Calcutta gentleman's notepaper, “Do good to others.” It is a delightful motto, reflecting the greatest credit on the gentleman using the note paper only it is rather ostentatious. A gentleman in Bombay, famous for his cosmopolitan philosophy, has for his motto on his note-paper Good-thoughts, good words and good deeds.” We dare say, other gentlemen of any and whatever persuasion have

similar ideas flared on the paper they use in their correspondence. What then? "do good to others" sounds a truly altruistic sentiment, but how many of those who publish the sentiment avoid doing good to Number One? As for the other sentiment, that is generally indulged in by prayerful people. But when Acts come to be analysed—mind, we refer to no specific instance ---the prayer is first and foremost for the good and betterment of the suppliant at the stool of the Lord God. Stripped bare of tinsel, the wishes wrapped up in the prayers, humble as they seem, are sinful, because they are selfish. The doing good to others means for the greatest part the doing good to one's self in material welfare. In plain language, it spells: "God! Give me abundance of the world's riches; let me be prosperous first; and I will see to it, that others benefit by my bounty." There is the inevitable. I everywhere and throughout! We do not know how such prayers are answered. But it is egotism that devours this land out of all substance and honour. Benefactions are made, so that the self may be advertised. Tanks are dug in the hope that the digger's name and fame may be perpetuated in a little or at least in a line of generous acknowledgement in the official Gazette. If good words and good thoughts run on these lines, then goodness cease to exist. Selflessness is of the very essence of goodness.

"Returning to Gandhi, what do we find? Has he made riches out of South Africa? Has he worked for gain, while struggling to give or help to give their legitimate rights and privileges to the Indian settlers in South Africa? Has he craved pelf or place? No as Mr. Gokhale testified with genuine feeling, Mr. Gandhi has made innumerable sacrifices of every imaginable kind, and it has invariably been the cause for which he has worked, and never for himself or for any particular friend or clique. And the reward that comes of such spiritual tendencies, of such unselfish labourers, has come to Mr. Gandhi unsought. He is to-day the leader of the Indian community of South Africa, and any and every Indian in those regions will sacrifice his life gladly, so that he may serve this truly good and great man. Our language is enthusiastic, but there is no exaggeration in it. Our testimony will be borne out of to-day by everyone in Calcutta, we mean by every Indian.

"Mr. Gokhale did very well to command Mr. Gandhi's example to the Bengalis. With fine irony but self-evident truth, Mr. Gokhale pointed out, that in Bengal every one, who is anybody or nobody, sets up to be a leader, with the consequence, that no leader has any following of any consequence. Thus the selfishness, the root of all evil, internecine dislikes and dissensions, and thus Bengali society is shaken to its very centre. Why should anyone ever entertain the thought of leadership in his brain? The first thought of every single individual in our society, should be the least for self-seeking and the most for service and the seeking of others. And the leadership will come by the process of natural selection. May our countrymen have the ...spirituality to perceive and grasp the situation! May such one of us know and realize that self-help does not mean selfishness, and that he or she is the most efficient self-helper who without thought of self, promotes the good of others!"²⁵

On the next day *The Indian Mirror* in its editorial under the title 'The Gospel of love for the Indians,' wrote:

"The young men who listened so attentively and so appreciatively to Mr. M.K. Gandhi, on Sunday last, at the Albert Hall, cannot be too grateful to him for the lessons he so unobtrusively preached of love to all men, including one's worst enemies, and of charity in all things. And these lessons ought to be laid to heart even by people grown in years, and ripe in age. The fact of the matter is, that but little love is lost amongst the Indians. The Presidencies are jealous of one another, and so are the provinces... Mr. Gandhi impressed these two lessons of him on his audience in Calcutta. That is, stand by the truth under all circumstances, whatever the consequences: Return hatred by love. These are precisely the two lessons we want to see universally promulgated. We have utmost need of such lessons in India."²⁶

"Seven days after Gandhi delivered another public lecture at the same Albert Hall on the work of the Indian Ambulance Corps at the time of the second Boer on January 27, 1902. Gopal Krishna Gokhale presided over the meeting. *The Bengalee* reported the address as follows:

"There was a large gathering yesterday afternoon at 5 o'clock at the Albert Hall to listen to the interesting and instructive address by Mr. M.K. Gandhi, Barrister at Law, on the Indian Ambulance Corps. In the absence of Mr. Lal Mohun Ghosh Mr. Gokhale was voted to the chair. The Chairman said, gentleman, Mr. Gandhi is a gentleman, who is already well-known to you. Many of you will remember that last week he was here, and therefore, without any remarks of introduction, I will call upon Mr. Gandhi to deliver his address to-day. Mr. Gandhi said:

"Mr. Chairman and gentlemen on Sunday before last I had the honour to address you on experience in South Africa. In the course of remarks, you will recollect, I said that the policy that was followed by our countrymen in South Africa in connection with their legal disabilities, could be summed up in two maxims which guided it, viz to stick to the truth at all costs and to conquer hate by love. This was the ideal to be realized. I then implored you as I implore now to believe that these are no catch phrases, but that we have although these years tried to live up to the ideal. The local Indian contribution to the present war is, perhaps, the very best illustration of the line of action.

"When in the October of 1899, the Boer issued their ultimatum, the British Government, as you are aware, was unready. According to their pre-arranged plan, the Boer crossed the Natal border immediately on the

receipt of the reply from the British government. Sir W. Penn Symons at the cost of his life, gave the enemy's forces a temporary check at Talana Hill, and Sir George White allowed himself and his 10,000 brave men to be surrounded in Ladysmith. These events were as unexpected as they were surprising and followed in such quick succession that the people had hardly any time to turn in and ponder over them. Mafeking and Kimberley were besieged at the same time. Half of Natal was in the Boer hands. And often did we hear that, the Boers were going to take Maritzburg and capture Durban. But strange as it may appear, Sir George White and his army saved Natal by allowing themselves to be besieged and thus occupying the Boer General and the follower of his army. This was the contribution of British India to the colony.

"The calmness and fortitude with which the people of Natal contemplated these events reflect the highest credit and show the secret of the British power. The business went as if nothing had happened. The Natal Government never flinched. Although the treasury was nearly empty, the servants were regularly paid. The common courtesies of ordinary English life were performed. And but for the presence of so many khaki-clad gentlemen and the unusual bustle at the harbor, you would not have noticed that there was any imminent danger of even Durban being taken.

"Volunteers were called out and Durban was emptied of its best sons within twenty four hours of the call. What was to be the attitude of the 50,000 Indian in the colony in such a crisis? The answer came in emphatic earnestness. We claimed the privileges of British subjects. Now was the time to discharge the responsibilities of that status; the local differences were to be sunk if the policy referred to at the outset was to be carried out; we had nothing to do with the question whether the war was right or wrong. That was the function of the Sovereign. Thus argued your countrymen at a great meeting convened for the purpose. Here was the opportunity to answer the oft-repeated charge in the colony, that, if there was a war, the Indian should scuttle away like rabbits. It was resolved at that meeting to offer the services of those assembled there, free of charge, to do any work at the front for which they might be found fit. The Government while taking the volunteers replied that their services were not required. In the meanwhile, there returned from England a gentleman who had devoted 20 years of his life to India work as a medical missionary belonging to the church of England. His name is Canon Booth, now dean of St. John. He was pleased to find that the Indians were ready to serve the empire during the war. He offered to train them as ambulance leaders. And for several weeks they had lessons in First-aid to the wounded from Dr. Booth. In the meanwhile, Colonel Gallwey, the principal medical officer attached to general Buller's Army, in anticipation of a bloody fight at Colenso, issued instructions for raising a European Ambulance Corps. We thereupon telegraphed to the Government informing them as to how we were qualifying ourselves. An intimation was received from the government that we were to help the protector of Indian immigrants in forming a volunteer Indian Ambulance Corps. Within four or five days, about 1000 Indians were collected, a majority from the various estates. This was off course in no way bound to offer their services, nor was the slightest pressure imposed on them. It was entirely a free will offering on their part. They, in common with the European volunteers, received one pound per week and rations while on duty. You will understand the force of these remarks when I tell you that some of the stretcher bearers were traders earning far more than £4 per month. As an officer remarked, however, this was a war of surprises in many respects. Among the Europeans, too there were professional men of the highest standing, serving as stretcher bearers. It was rightly considered a privilege to be able to secure the wounded.

"But the leaders who had undergone the training accepted no remuneration. The good Dr. Booth, too came with us as a leader, without pay. Colonel Gallwey afterwards installed him as medical officer for the corps. The leaders included two Indian Barristers, a gentleman connected with a well-known London firm of agents, shop-keepers and clerks.

"The cops thus constituted served just after the action at Colenso. Thirsty, hungry and fatigue, we reached the Chievelecamp at dusk. The action had just ended after a sanguinary struggle against an unseen enemy. Colonel Gallwey came up and asked the Superintendent of the Cops whether we would be able to carry the wounded to the stationary hospital there and then. The superintendent turned towards the leaders who at once said they were quite ready. By 12 o'clock mid night, about thirty wounded officers and soldiers were removed. The work was done with such despatch that there were none left ready to be carried. It was at 12 o'clock midnight that the bulk of the men broke their fast---men (some of them) who had never been used, to put it in expressive though not quite elegant English, to roughing it.

"The distance to be covered was about five miles. The European ambulance party attached to the army brought the wounded from the battlefield to the field hospital where the wounds were dressed. We carried them to the stationary hospital---each stretcher having six bearers and three bearer parties having a leader whose duty it was to direct the bearers, and to attend to and feed the wounded.

"Early next morning, before breakfast, orders were received to resume work which continued up to 11 a.m. Hardly, however, had the work of removing the wounded finished, when orders were received to break up camp and march. Colonel Gallwey then personally thanked the Corps for the work done and disbanded it---saying that he relied upon a similar response when he needed it. During the interval General Buller was taking

his men across the Tugela to force his way to Ladysmith through Spion Kop. After 10 days recess, the P.M.O. sent orders to re-form the corps, and within three days over 1,000 men were collected.

“Spion Kop is about 20 miles from Frere, which was the railway house, and the station where the wounded had to be brought before they could be taken by rail to the general hospitals. Spion kop---the hill of Spion---overhangs a bush where tents were pitched to form a field hospital, from which the wounded, after being dressed ,had to be removed to Spearman’s Camp—a distance of about three miles. A narrow stream lay between the field hospital and Spearman’s Farm. Across this was created a temporary pontoon bridge which was within the range of the Boer guns. The route between Spearman’s Camp and Frere was rather rugged and hilly.

“Neither the European corps nor the Indian were to work within the range of fire. But the European corps, both at Colenso and Spion Kop, had to work under fire, and the Indian corps, only at Spion Kop and Vaalkranz. Major bapty, Secretary to Colonel Gallwey, who has covered himself with glory by facing great perils, and who has received the V.C., thus addressed us:

“Gentlemen, you have been engaged to work without the range of fire. There are many wounded men to be removed from the field hospital. There is just a chance, though very remote, that the Boer may drop a shell or two on the pontoon. If you are prepared to cross the bridge in spite of the little risk--- and you are at liberty to say no—I shall be glad to lead you.

“These words were spoken in such earnestness and so kindly and so gently that I have rendered to reproduce them, as far as possible, as they were uttered. The leaders and men with one voice offered to follow the gallant Major. The unexpected reverse at Spion Kop kept us incessantly at work for three weeks, though the corps was on duty for over nine weeks. Thrice or four times did it cover a distance of 25 miles per day with its precious load of wounded. And I may be permitted to say for the corps, without any self-esteem, that the work was done so much beyond all expectations that those who were competent to judge thought that the 25 miles marches, with the load, were record marches. Colonel Gallwey had given us the option to do the distance in two days.

“The work of the Corps has been honourably mentioned in General Buller’s despatches.

“Such briefly is the record of work of the Natal volunteer Indian Ambulance Corps.

“The Indian merchants, who could not leave their business to join the corps, collected a fund for the support of the dependants of these volunteer leaders who needed it and also supplied uniforms for them.

“A handsome donation was sent to the Durban Women’s Patriotic League Fund for the volunteers who had gone to the front. Indian ladies contributed their quota by making pillow-spins, vests, etc.

“We were also supplied by the, merchants with cigarettes to be offered to the wounded. And all these funds were raised at time when the Indian community of Natal was feeding at its own expense, without encroaching on the general refugees’ relief fund, thousands of Indian refugees, both from Transval and from the parts of Natal occupied the enemy.

“I would not be true to myself if I did not give you an idea of the impression that was created in the mind of many of us about the life of the British soldier when at work, and especially under temporary reverses. I ventured last Sunday week to give you a description of the Trappist monastery and the holy stillness that pervaded it. Strange though it may appear to some of us, the same impression was created in those vast camps. Although the energy put forth was the greatest---not a minute was passed idly by anybody in those stirring times---there was perfect order, perfect stillness. Tommy was then altogether lovable. He mixed with us and men freely. He often shared with us his luxuries whenever there were any to be had. A never-to - be forgotten scene happened at Chieveley. It was a sultry day. Water was very scarce. There was only one well. An officer was doling out tinfuls to thirsty. Some of the bearers were returning after leaving their charge. The soldiers who were helping themselves to the water, at once cheerfully shared their portion with our bearers. There was, shall I say, a spirit of brotherhood irrespective of colour and creed. The Red Cross Badge or the Khaki uniform was a sufficient passport whether the bearer had a white skin or brown.

“As a Hindu I do not believe in war, but if anything can even partially reconcile me to it, it was the rich experience we gained at the front. It was certainly not the thirst for blood that took thousands of men to the battlefield. If I may use a most holy name without doing any violence to our feelings, like Arjun, they went to the battlefield, because it was their duty. And how many proud, rude, savage spirits has it not broken into gentle creatures of God?

“I have been talking flatteringly of our countrymen’s work in connection with the war. I would detain you for a moment to look at the other side. The real work to my mind, has now commenced. Compared with the trials that the soldiers and soldier-volunteers have undergone and are still undergoing, our work was after all very little. It has been well spoken of, because it was never expected. Now that we have raised expectations, shall we in future come up to them? Therein, to my mind, lies the reason for humility instead of self-praise. While, therefore, it was perhaps my duty to bring prominently to your notice the little work of our countrymen, it is equally my duty to remind ourselves of the work that lies ahead of us. I may now, I think, perhaps

pardonably, quote what the late Right Honourable Harry Escombe and others thought, almost too generously, of our work. Mr. Escombe, at our request, blessed us on our departure for the front and spoke as follows:

"I thank you for paying the marked personal compliment of asking me to address a few words of farewell before you leave for the front. You carry with you not only the good wishes of those present here, but of all people in Natal and the Queen's great Empire. This incident is not the least interesting of the many episodes of this remarkable war. The meeting shows the willingness and the resolve of the Indian subjects in Natal to do what they can to promote the unity and the solidarity of the Empire, and they who claim rights in Natal, we recognize, are now performing their obligations to this country. They are going to occupy as honourable a position as those who are doing the fighting, because if there were none to look after the wounded, war would be much more horrible than it now is...It cannot be forgotten that you Indians in Natal---who have been treated with more or less injustice---have sunk your grievances and claim to be part of the Empire and to share its responsibilities. You carry with you the hearty good wishes of those who know what is taking place today. The knowledge of what you are doing will help to bring closer the different classes of Her Majesty's subjects throughout the whole Empire.

"*The Natal Advisor* wrote thus:

"The Indian population of the colony has to be congratulated on the admirable spirit they have shown. This is more commendable because of the attitude of the colony towards Indian immigration, and the Indian population generally. The Indian community might easily have wrapped themselves up in a sullen reserve and said: 'we shall not help the enemy but neither shall we help you, as you have shown yourself so antagonistic to us' but they did not; they took occasion to assist where they could. They subscribed liberally to the various war funds; their ladies assisting in supplying comforts for the sick and wounded, and many of them have gone to the front to assist our troops in whatever capacity they can. This conduct should be appreciatively remembered in their favour. It is no small matter at a crisis of this character, that we should be able to rely upon the unswerving loyalty of our coloured population. And it should make us the more ready to endure the small faults on which perhaps we are prone to expatiate largely in times of peace.

"Such gentlemen, is the testimony in favour of a community that is trying to live by Truth and Love.

Babu Bhupendranath Bose proposed a vote of thanks to Mr. Gandhi for the very instructive lecture to which they had been treated. Mr. J. Chowdhury seconded the vote of thanks which was carried by acclamation.

With a vote of thanks to the chair the meeting separated."²⁷

Gandhi in social life of the city

While staying in Kolkata Gandhi was invited to attend dinner parties. In such a party thrown by Radharaman Kar at his residence at Shyambazar he first saw Rabindranath Tagore, the Nobel laureate. Many other Congress leaders were also invited there. Rabindranath Tagore entertained the guests by singing some patriotic songs. Jyotindranath Tagore also drew a picture of Gandhi along with other Congress leaders assembled in the gathering.²⁸ An information about this party is retrieved from *The Bengali* under the headline *A Congress Dinner*:

"Though the sitting of the Congress are over, yet the social functions in connection with it will take long to be over. Our worthy townsman Babu Radha Raman Kar invited a large number of the Congress workers to an Indian dinner at his house in Sham Bazar Street on Sunday last, and treated his guests to some of the choicest delicacies. There was a large number of eminent Congress workers who sat down to dinner, and among them were noticed: The Hon'ble P. Ananda Charlu, the Hon'ble Mr. Gokhale, Messrs. W. C. Bonnerjee, Gandhi, J. Ghosal, J. Chowdhury, J. N. Ghos, H. d. Dutt, Babu Narendranath Sen, Bhupendranath Bose, Nalin Behari Sarkar, Jadunath Sen, Jyotindranath Tagore, Rabindranath Tagore, Arunendranath Tagore, Prithic Chandra Roy, Debendra Prasad Ghosh, Hemendra Prasad Gosh, Jogendra Krishna Basu, Hemchandra Roy, Kabiraj, Upendranath Sen, Krishna Kumar Mitter and Harendranath Sen. Dinner over Babu Rabindranath Tagore treated the gentlemen present to some patriotic songs and the party left with the pleasantest remembrances of the happy hours spent at their hosts."²⁹

Saraladevi Chowdhurani, nephew of Rabindranath Tagore, who later on became very close to Mahatma, was first acquainted with Gandhi this time. Janakinath Ghosal, then Congress Secretary, and Swarnakumardevi, elder sister of poet Tagore were her parents. We come to know from the testimony of Sarala Devi that Gandhi along with others came to attend an evening party at their residence where she first saw him who was not at all so attractive in appearance but was always with a smile. There was a turban on his head. Though she came in contact with him for a very short time Gandhi saw her with regard. Saraladevi being the editor of then *Bharati*, a Bengali journal, wanted to get an article from him on South African issue and from that point of view she introduced herself to Gandhi. Probably she made Gandhi agree to contribute an article to her journal. Some days after Gandhi sent her an article in English on 'Indian colony in South Africa' which was translated into Bengali and published in the *Bharati* under the title *Dakshin Afrikay Bharotoponibes*.³⁰ Probably

this was the first article by Gandhi published in a Bengali journal. Saraladevi later on became an ardent disciple of Mahatma Gandhi and took initiative to make the non-co-operation movement successful.

While residing with Gokhale Gandhi used to walk down the street and visited most of the places on foot. He used to divide a day between visiting the prominent leaders of Kolkata and studying religious and public institutions of the city. He met with some prominent persons like Kalicharan Bannerjee, Sister Nivedita and Justice Pramatha Mittre, who later became the president of the *Yugantar Dal*, a revolutionary group founded by Aurobindo Ghosh and Barin Ghosh in 1906. When coming back to India from South Africa, Gandhi promised his friends there that he would know about the condition of the Indian Christians. As a result when residing with Gokhale, he decided to meet with Kalicharan Bannerjee, who was a Christian by religion and a Congress leader also. He sought an appointment which was readily given by Kalicharan Bannerjee. When Gandhi arrived at his residence his ailing wife was on death-bed. Kalicharan's simple attire in Bengali dhoti and shirt pleased him. They discussed on religious issues of Christianity and Hinduism. Though Kalicharan could not satisfy Gandhi, he was benefitted by this interview.³¹

He went to visit the Kali temple at Kalighat about which he heard from Kalicharan Banerji as well as reading books. On the way to the temple he saw rows of beggars lined up along the lane bound to the temple and religious mendicants. He was opposed to giving alms to the sturdy beggars though he was surrounded by a crowd of them. He noticed a flock of sheep which were being taken for sacrifice before the Goddess Kali. This cruel custom pained him so much that he wanted its abolition. He was so disgusted to this custom of sacrificing goats in the name of God that in later days he wrote, "I must go through more self-purification and sacrifice, before I can hope to save these lambs from this unholy sacrifice. Today I think I must die pining for this self-purification and sacrifice. It is my constant prayer that there may be born on earth some great spirit, man or woman, fired with divine pity, who will deliver us from this heinous sin, save the lives of the innocent creatures, and purify the temple."³² (Autobiography, 190-191) He was surprised to see the Bengalis with all 'knowledge, intelligence, sacrifice and emotion' were tolerating the slaughter of animals. Gandhi could not forget this incident for long time. It is noticed that in the Wardha Ashram in 1928 Gandhi reminded of this sorrowful incident before a Khadi worker who was accompanying him:

"I cannot bear the sight of it. My soul rises in rebellion against the cold-blooded inhumanity that goes on there in the name of religion. If I had the strength I would plant myself before the gate of the temple and tell those in charge of it that before they sacrificed a single innocent animal they should have to cut my throat. But I know that for me to do so would be an unreal, a mechanical thing today because I have not yet completely overcome the will to live."³³

The goat slaughter incident haunted Gandhi even nearly fifteen years after when he returned from South Africa in 1915. While staying in Ravashankar-Bhai's 'Manibhavan' in Bombay, he got an attack of fever. Mahadev Desai was attending on him. One day Babu's fever rose so high that he became delirious. He got Mahadev Desai woken at mid night and said, "Mahadev, the Bengalis sacrifice animals in the temple at Kalighat in Calcutta, in the name of Kali. How are they to be taught that this is not religion, but the height of irreligion? Come, let us go and do Satyagraha there. Let us stop them. Then the infuriated Bengali Brahmans will fall upon us and tear us to pieces. But if in the process of putting an end to this animal-sacrifice we lose our lives, what does it matter?"³⁴

The Kalighat experience provoked Gandhi to know about the Bengali life. He was aware of the *Bramho Samaj* and met with great Bramho leaders like Shibnath Sastri, Pratap Chandra Majumdar. Even he attended some of the Bramho meetings addressed by Pratap Chandra Majumdar and read his book on Keshab Chandra Sen, the great Bramho reformer, with keen interest and realized the distinction between *Sadharan Bramho Samaj* and *Adi Bramho Samaj*. Gandhi went to meet with Maharshi Devendranath Tagore along with Prof. Kathavate but they were not allowed for any interview. However they were invited to a celebration of the Brahmo Samaj held at his residence where Gandhi listened to fine Bengali music which made him a lover of the Bengali music for ever.³⁵

Gandhi went to Belur with great enthusiasm to meet with Swami Vivekananda mostly or all the way on foot and loved the secluded site of the Math. But he could not see him as he was told that ailing Swamiji was then in his Calcutta residence and could not be seen. Then he went to meet with Sister Nivedita, an Irish disciple of Swamiji, in a Chowringhee mansion. Gandhi was perplexed to see the pomp around her. This meeting could not please him as 'there was not much meeting ground' in their discussion. Both differed from each other's view. When he discussed with Gokhale about this experience, Gokhale was not wondered as he considered her a 'volatile woman' with whom there could not be a point of contact. When Gandhi met with her, Nivedita was the guest of two American ladies named Ole Bull Josephine MacLeod at the American consulate. Her actual residence in Kolkata was at the Bose Para lane where she lived in a tumbledown house. Therefore, he was not responsible for the 'splendor that surrounded her.' This was argued by Ramananda Chatterjee in his *The Modern Review* in protest of Gandhi's use of the word 'Volatile' for Nivedita.³⁶ It drew Mahatma's attention and he corrected his fault in a note in the *Young India*. He expressed his inability to recall the term that was used by

Gokhale but pointed out that the word which was actually used in original writing in Gujarati was *Tej* which meant "of overbearing temper." While translating into English both Gandhi and Mahadev Desai were confused in choosing the exact synonym of the word *Tej*. They were to choose a word among *volatile*, *violent* and *fanatical*. Mahadev Desai chose 'volatile' and Gandhi approved it without consulting dictionary.³⁷

Gandhi accompanied by Professor Kathawate went to Rangoon on *S S Goa*, a steamer, on January 28, 1902. He liked the industrious Burmese women there but got disheartened to see the lazy Burmese men. He was pleased to see the sanitary condition of the city and the drainage system as well.³⁸ Gandhi got back to Kolkata again on February 20, 1902.

Epilogue

In the mean time Gandhi decided to make a trip throughout India by travelling in third class compartment of a train and thereby getting acquainted with the hardship of the common people. When he confessed his wish before Gokhale, he jeered at the plan. But when he knew the underlying object of this tour he encouraged Gandhi, not only that he went to the Howrah station along with Prafulla Chandra Roy to see off Gandhi. It was the February 21, 1902.³⁹ Next time when he would come to this city it would be noticed that people would be poured in the railway station to see him at a glance and he would be revered then as Mahatma.

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IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science (IOSR-JHSS) is UGC approved Journal with Sl. No. 5070, Journal no. 49323.

Dr.Raj Narayan Pal "Reporting Gandhi's Visits to Kolkata: Mahatma in Contemporary News (1896-1902)." IOSR Journal Of Humanities And Social Science (IOSR-JHSS). vol. 23 no. 07, 2018, pp. 18-36.