

2 Gandhism in action

Later on, his actions would be famous. Admirers could eventually invoke a catechism of apparent victories: South Africa, Champaran, Vykon, Kotgarh, Kheda, Bardoli. There was a mill strike in Ahmedabad, and a battle for the right to parade in Nagpur. A national campaign of non-co-operation would be remembered as a humiliation for the Prince of Wales and a serious affront to the authority of the Raj. Gandhi's 1923 speech from the dock of the accused would ultimately be celebrated as a 'masterpiece'. His bodily experiments would be picked over by learned scholars, and his fasts would enjoy recognition as genuine victories for the spirit of love. Years after his passing, the Mahatma's march to make salt at Dandi would be hailed as one of the founding events of global media history.¹

But all of this was later, much deferred. Western recognition was horribly belated.

At first, there was incomprehension. While the eyes of the Westerner fixed intently on the strange person of Gandhi, his precise activities were long enveloped in a curtain of ignorance and misunderstanding. For years it remained difficult to establish exactly what Gandhi did, why he was so inspired, or what he aimed to achieve.

Why so hard? When Indians began to question imperial rule, the British state acted immediately to restrict their freedoms of assembly

¹ For the original victories from South Africa to Nagpur: Richard B. Gregg, *The Power of Nonviolence*, 2nd revised edn, London: James Clarke and Co., 1960, pp. 16–24. For memories of the national campaign: Bart de Ligt, *The Conquest of Violence: An Essay on War and Revolution*, London: Pluto, 1989, pp. 94–5 (first published 1937). For the 1923 speech: Henry Polak, *Mahatma Gandhi: The Man and His Mission*, 9th edn, Madras: G.A. Natesan and Co., n.d., p. 73. For later attention to his bodily experiences see, for example, Joseph S. Alter, *Gandhi's Body: Sex, Diet and the Politics of Nationalism*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000; Thomas Weber, *Gandhi as Disciple and Mentor*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004. For later recognition of his fasts: Kingsley Martin, 'The Tragedy in Delhi', *New Statesman and Nation*, 7 February 1948, p. 107. For the later hailing of his salt march: David Hardiman, *Gandhi: In His Time and Ours*, Delhi: Permanent Black, 2003, p. 253.

and expression. Official ordinances controlled the operation of all printing presses in the country. The offices of Gandhi's own newspapers were raided, and their publication repeatedly suspended. Foreign correspondents had their despatches delayed, and rewritten. Newsreels were censored, too.²

From London, the Secretary of State promised his Viceroy, 'I am doing everything that I can to prevent his [Gandhi's] getting undue advertisement in the press.' Some provincial governors forbade Gandhi from talking with any journalists. Others claimed to take 'infinite trouble' over the direct instruction of news-gatherers. Meanwhile, selected civil servants aimed to 'educate public opinion' as to the virtues of British rule. Measures were taken for 'the representation of the work of the various Indian Governments in a favourable light in the eyes of the publics of Great Britain, the United States, and Japan'.³ What could be done? Journalists sympathetic to the Raj were granted official assistance. Pressmen deemed 'extremely useful' were recommended for official honours.⁴ For the maintenance of the empire, no blandishment was deemed too vulgar.

But more direct intervention was also considered. The Secretary of State promised to 'enlighten the British and foreign press' as to 'the true

² For official ordinances controlling the press: E. Ashmead-Bartlett, 'Drastic Terms of New Press Law', *Daily Telegraph*, 29 April 1930. For the raiding of *Young India*: 'Police in India', *Manchester Guardian*, 5 February 1931; and the suspension of *Harijan*: 'PPU Letter to Gandhi', *Peace News*, 11 January 1946, p. 4. For the delay of despatches: editorial introduction to Negley Farson, 'The Terror in India', *Christian Century*, 2 July 1930, in Charles Chatfield (ed.), *The Americanization of Gandhi: Images of the Mahatma*, New York and London: Garland Publishing Co., 1976, p. 257. For their rewriting: Manoranjan Jha, *Civil Disobedience and After: The American Reactions to Political Developments in India during 1930-1935*, Meerut and Delhi: Meenaskshi Prakashan, 1973, p. 114. For the censorship of newsreels: Henry Noel Brailsford, *Rebel India*, London: Leonard Stein and Victor Gollancz, 1931, p. 85.

³ For the Secretary of State's promises: Secretary of State for India to Viceroy, 2 October 1931, India Office Library, MSS EUR E 240 1. For provincial governors: Roger Lumley, governor of Bombay, to Viceroy, 22 October 1942, India Office Library, R/3/1/295. For infinite trouble over news-gatherers: Sir George Lloyd, governor of Bombay, to Secretary of State for India, 25 November 1921, India Office Library, MSS EUR D 523 26. For the claims of selected civil servants: Appendix G, 'Memorandum on Publicity in India', L.F. Rushbrook William, 16 January 1920. Appendix to Conference of Heads of Provinces, 19 January 1920. Enclosed in letter, Lord Chelmsford (Viceroy) to Mr Montagu (Secretary of State for India), 22 January 1920, India Office Library, MSS EUR D 523 10. For the measures taken for representation: L.F. Rushbrook William, 'Memorandum on Publicity in India'.

⁴ For official assistance to journalists, see e.g. the cases of Katherine Mayo and Patricia Kendall: Leonard A. Gordon, 'Mahatma Gandhi's Dialogues with Americans', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 26 January 2002, pp. 344-5. For the recommendations concerning pressmen and honours: Secretary of State for India (Mr Montagu) to Viceroy (Lord Chelmsford), 16 June 1920, India Office Library, MSS EUR D 523 4.

character of the situation'. Episodes of anti-colonial violence were agreed to provide 'the best publicity material' for the British cause – 'There is nothing which Gandhi fears more than violence'. Junior bureaucrats therefore promised their seniors to catalogue and circulate an encyclopedia of such disturbances for wider distribution: 'all these cases of violence are being carefully listed for this purpose'.⁵

With British officialdom so prominently poised at the journalist's elbow, it was very hard for Westerners to follow the complicated eddies of anti-colonial resistance. Americans only discovered the massacre of several hundred Indians by British Indian Army troops at Amritsar some time after those terrible events. In 1922, the *New York Times* bewailed 'little news now gets out of India', and most American audiences were forced to rely on the British-owned Reuters news agency for slow, unsatisfactory and distorted information on Indian affairs.⁶

Moreover, the news reports of nearly all Western papers tended to rest very heavily on the authority and opinions of Anglo-Indian sources within the colony. This was rather like relying upon the *Belfast News-Letter* for an accurate knowledge of Irish affairs (as one caustic observer noted).⁷ That many Westerners misunderstood Gandhi's precise actions and motives could therefore be considered no matter for surprise.

The paucity of accurate news remained a familiar complaint on both sides of the Atlantic for many years. In 1929, British pacifists bemoaned that 'published reports are confusing and incomplete'. The Secretary of State for India, Wedgwood Benn, seemed to agree. Writing to the Viceroy in April 1930, Benn admitted that metropolitan opinion was currently 'ill-informed'. In the European winter of the next year, the celebrated British journalist H.N. Brailsford was still finding it difficult to keep up with the fate of the Indian struggle: 'that is not the kind of news which English dailies print'. And a year later, still, the *New Statesman and Nation* would now describe the passage of Indian news as 'meagre and distorted'.⁸

⁵ For the promises of the Secretary of State: Secretary of State for India to Viceroy, 4 January 1932, India Office Library, L/PO/6/59 (ii). For Gandhi's fears and junior bureaucratic promises: R.M. Maxwell, 2 December 1940, in India Office Library, R/3/1/339.

⁶ For the late discovery of Amritsar: Charles Chatfield, 'Introduction', Chatfield, *The Americanization of Gandhi*, p. 34. For the complaints on news: 'Leaderless India', *New York Times*, 11 June 1922. For the reliance on Reuters: B.R. Nanda, *In Search of Gandhi: Essays and Reflections*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002, p. 222.

⁷ Bernard Houghton, 'The Crisis in India', *Nation and Athenaeum*, 1 February 1922, p. 723.

⁸ For British pacifist complaints: Horace G. Alexander, 'Gandhi and the Burning of Foreign Cloth', *The Friend*, 10 May 1929, p. 410. For Benn's claims: Secretary of State for India (Wedgwood Benn) to Viceroy (Lord Irwin), 10 April 1930, India Office Library,

The pall of misinformation understandably frustrated the champions of Indian Home Rule. As early as 1922 the Mahatma himself appeared almost despairing:

In its very nature it [the struggle for self-rule] has to depend upon growing world opinion in its favour. When I see so much misrepresentation of things in general in the American and European press I despair of the message of the struggle ever reaching the Western world ...⁹

His despondency had little reason to lift over succeeding years. When a guest in London a decade later, Gandhi again alleged a ‘conspiracy of silence’ with regard to events in India. The ‘Indian side’ was ‘suppressed’, and Indian correspondents unpublished. ‘Here you get nothing from the newspapers except a paragraph suggesting that whatever was done was the right thing’, he objected.¹⁰ The flow of information was manipulated and slow. As Gandhi’s secretary, Mahadev Desai explained, ‘News, even when one can send it through, gets stale by the time it reaches at [*sic*] the other end and so one often wonders whether it is any use sending it.’¹¹ By the 1940s, sympathetic Britons were as frustrated by the spreading silences as their Indian comrades. In 1941, British Quaker Stephen Hobhouse complained to fellow pacifists of ‘insufficient information’ on the Gandhian crusade. And in a 1946 letter to Gandhi delivered by Unitarian minister and Labour MP Reginald Sorensen, the Peace Pledge Union again lamented the absence of hard news: ‘As you know it is not always easy for your friends in Britain to be as fully informed as they would wish on Indian affairs, particularly since the suspension of [Gandhi’s newspaper] *Harijan*.’¹²

With the censor installed as king, even those Westerners genuinely interested in the Indian struggle were sometimes unaware of its most important happenings. Into the vacuum of ignorance came speculation, supposition, and fabrication. The advance of untruths shocked Oxford’s Edward Thompson (father of the famous historian E.P.): ‘blunders and misunderstandings wholesale can be carried undetected past the whole battalion of us’, he warned. ‘It is difficult to be sure what is true and

L/PO.6/56 (iii). For Brailsford’s claims: H.N. Brailsford, ‘Towards a Peasant Rising’, *New Leader*, 27 February 1931. For the *New Statesman* claims: G.T. Garratt, ‘Terrorism and Repression’, *New Statesman and Nation*, 2 January 1932, pp. 5–6.

⁹ Gandhi, cited in Chatfield, ‘Introduction’, pp. 36–7.

¹⁰ ‘Gandhi as News Gatherer’, *Daily Herald*, 31 October 1931.

¹¹ Mahadev Desai to Horace Alexander, 2 November 1940, Horace Alexander Papers, DG 140, Swarthmore College Peace Collection, Jane Addams Memorial Peace Library, Swarthmore College.

¹² For Hobhouse’s complaints: Stephen Hobhouse, ‘Non-violent Resistance’, *Christian Pacifist*, June 1941, p. 114. The Sorensen-delivered letter is from ‘PPU Letter to Gandhi’, *Peace News*, 11 January 1946.

what is not true', agreed one liberal British weekly, while another correspondent was so distracted by contradictory reports from the colony as to doubt 'the coordinating faculty of the human mind'. Even the British Viceroy worried over 'the dissemination of false news and rumours' from the Subcontinent at one time.¹³

In this blinded context, what made it onto the page? True or untrue, how did the scribblers of Fleet Street and Times Square depict the detail of Gandhi's campaigns? When did they pay attention? What was he thought to do? And how accurately did their accounts mirror the complex history of Gandhism in action?

The following pages begin to answer these questions. I do not aim to provide a complete picture of Gandhi's political activities, still less of the complicated eddies of the Indian nationalist movement. This is rather a chronicle of misunderstandings, partial truths, and difficult attempts at clarification. It is a history of 'Gandhism' as it was received in the West, and not of Gandhi's actions in their full splendour, bewildering range, or subtle shades.

For this reason, when seeking to establish Gandhi's actions and views I invariably prefer contemporary sources and newspaper reports to the more accurate and comprehensive *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* (published in later years). The historian of 'Gandhism' within the Indian nation would usually favour the more authoritative source; for the historian of 'transnational Gandhism', however, it is precisely the uncertainty, selectivity, and limits of contemporary reportage that promise greater illumination. I seek to establish the Western image of Gandhism, not the extent of its accuracy, as such.

Gandhi's actions: patterns of attention

When the curtains are pulled tight then only the very brightest of lights may be glimpsed. Gandhi was seen only in darting, inconstant profile; never in the round. Dietary experiment, sexual abstinence and social reform were among his most abiding interests. In his autobiography, the Mahatma emphasised their close connection with more dramatic episodes of non-violent protest. Speaking in August 1931 Gandhi even ranked the former more highly than the latter: 'the work of social reform

¹³ Thompson's claim is Edward Thompson, 'Mother India', *Nation and Athenaeum*, 10 September 1927, p. 744. The liberal weekly is 'The Indian Impasse', *New Statesman and Nation*, 7 May 1932, pp. 576–7. The later correspondent is R.E. Hawkins, 'The Indian Impasse', *New Statesman and Nation*, 25 June 1932, p. 823. The Viceroy's views are from Viceroy to Viscount Goschen of Hawkhurst, 3 May 1930, India Office Records, MSS EUR C 152/19.

or self-purification ... is a hundred times dearer to me than what is called purely political work'. However, Westerners generally thought these pre-occupations either boringly prosaic or shockingly private. Instead, newspapermen focused intently on the foreground of Gandhi's most theatrical and obviously political displays.¹⁴

Western press coverage of Gandhi is like a mountain shelf: a sudden and small peak in the early 1920s; a deep valley; a towering summit over 1929–32, perhaps double the size of its nearest neighbours; an incomplete fall; a plateau; and then a smaller peak in the early 1940s, lasting until Gandhi's death in 1948. Each peak relates to a period of popular struggle for Swaraj: the 'non-co-operation' movement from 1919, the salt satyagraha from 1930, and the 'Quit India' campaign launched in 1942.¹⁵

The Mahatma's march to make salt at Dandi formed the dominant episode in three decades of discontinuous attention. The Raj monopolised salt production and taxed it, too. Gandhi proposed in 1930 to challenge this monopoly: to march more than 240 miles to the Arabian Sea, to deliberately gather up grains of salt, and to thereby signal that others should begin its illegal manufacture across the land.

This seemed at first a rather quixotic endeavour. The Viceroy confessed some complaisance: 'the prospect of a salt campaign does not keep me awake at night', he wrote. Press reports originally depicted the march as a 'pretty flat affair'. The *Daily Telegraph* thought it 'dreary': a 'farce', a 'futility', and a 'fiasco'. The governor of the Punjab echoed these sentiments. In a letter to the editor of *The Times*, the Viceroy expressed a smug disdain: 'Gandhi is marching to make salt. I am glad to notice that the general attitude towards this venture seems to be that of rather grief or amused tolerance, according to fancy, of the vagaries of a light-headed old man.' The *Times of India* was even more scornful of the unfolding display: 'If one were not aware of the pathetic faith that lay behind it, one might have laughed.'¹⁶

¹⁴ For Gandhi's wider interests and their treatment in his autobiography: Alter, *Gandhi's Body*, p. 24. The Gandhi citation is from Weber, *Gandhi as Disciple and Mentor*, p. 122. On Western reactions, note the wish that Gandhi would have 'displayed more respect and consideration for his wife' in the 'broad-casting' of 'intimacies', evident in Anon., *Searchlight on Gandhi*, London: P.S. King and Son, 1931, p. 99. On the focus on newspapermen: Chatfield, 'Introduction', p. 27.

¹⁵ These statements are based on the close study of article accounts registered in the relevant databases for newspaper coverage in the *New York Times*, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, and *The Times*.

¹⁶ For the Viceroy's complaisance: Viceroy to Secretary of State for India, 2 February 1930, India Office Library, MSS EUR C 152 6. The notion of a 'flat affair' is drawn from a Swiss correspondent, as conveyed to the Viceroy; see Viceroy to Secretary of State for India, 26 March 1930, India Office Library, MSS EUR C 152 6. The *Telegraph's* views

The levity of the powerful soon dissipated, however. In setting out to Dandi the Mahatma had registered a challenge and had embarked upon a quest. John Bull's strength was being tried by a skinny brown vegetarian. The Raj would have to act, surely? Gandhi's arrest must come. But if so, then what could he be accused of? Had he breached any laws? And if he was indeed arrested, what then might follow? Would the masses rise in his defence? Did violence threaten?

This was an inherently dramatic situation. As the Mahatma marched towards the Arabian Sea, it seemed that almost every day could be his last. The tired fellow's sexagenarian limbs might collapse, the Viceroy could eventually clap him in chains, the masses of alleged support might simply melt away. Would he persist? What fresh twist awaited? On the road to the coast, each day was like a scene in a long-running drama; sunrise promised always the possibility of resolution, until now deferred.

In consequence, the apparent farce of early March was by early April something of a thriller. Smug tolerance was exchanged for fascination and sometimes alarm. The comic poem *The Saint and Satan* (1930) – a rather poisonous attack on Gandhi – captured this changing mood with malicious acuity:

I had resolved that I, Mahatma Gandhi,
On saintly toe would daintily tread to Dandi,
Where on the far shores of the Arabian ocean
I'd make poor salt and make a rich commotion.
At once the Press entire took up the chorus
And pestered every mile that lay before us;
The Press entire, becoming shrill and shriller,
Published each day some more exciting thriller;
They soon grew indiscreet and indiscreeter;
Sugar was sweet, but contraband salt was sweeter!¹⁷

As the poem disclosed, an increasing number of metropolitan correspondents joined their Indian *confrères* over March and April 1930. For the first time, American newspapers despatched their own representatives to the Subcontinent. Film companies recognised the spectacle. Photographers pictured the Mahatma in action. Briefly, the whole world

are from E. Ashmead-Bartlett, 'Expectations Not Fulfilled', *Daily Telegraph*, 15 March 1930; 'Gandhi's March to the Sea', *Daily Telegraph*, 22 March 1930; E. Ashmead-Bartlett, 'Gandhi's March to Complete Fiasco', *Daily Telegraph*, 19 March 1930. The other claims are Sir Geoffrey de Mountmorency, Governor of Punjab, to Viceroy, 14 April 1930, India Office Library, MSS EUR C 152 24; Viceroy to G. Dawon, 17 March 1930, India Office Library, MSS EUR C 152 19; and *Times of India*, cited in Thomas Weber, *On the Salt March: The Historiography of Gandhi's March to Dandi*, New Delhi: HarperCollins India, 1997, p. 396.

¹⁷ Melusa Moolson, *The Saint and Satan*, London: India Publications, 1930, pp. 34–5.

seemed to hang upon his footsteps. In Britain, the correspondent for the *New York Times* detected a 'bewilderment' and 'uneasiness' amongst the local public. Even the *Daily Telegraph* swapped mockery for alarm. In early April its decorated correspondent Ellis Ashmead-Bartlett now worried that matters had got out of hand: 'a crisis is rapidly arriving'. Three weeks later, the situation had apparently deteriorated: a 'great revolutionary movement' was now thought to be 'sweeping through India'.¹⁸

Even Gandhi's arrest did not deliver the expected subsidence. Now his supporters escalated their campaign, with daring raids on the Dharsana salt depot. When authorities struck out with unreturned fury at passive men and women, the Western press looked on with a horrified dismay. American correspondent Webb Miller's report of the beatings delivered to satyagrahis appeared in more than 1,300 newspapers around the world. It was also read into the *Congressional Record* in Washington and subsequently printed in pamphlet form. There were new headlines: '500 Hurt as Police Rush a Bombay Mob', 'Gandhi Men Sit in Road 4 Days; Beaten by Police', 'The Terror in India', "'Black Day" in Bombay City'. Some Europeans confessed that they had become 'physically ill' at the sight of 'this clubbing of non-resisting people'. Others wrote of 'European women turning away with averted eyes, obviously feeling faint'. The journalist attached to the *Manchester Guardian* admitted that the whole thing was 'a very disagreeable sight', especially for 'the squeamish, like myself'.¹⁹

¹⁸ On the despatch of correspondents: William J. Shirer, *Gandhi: A Memoir*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979, p. 94. On American correspondents: Stephen Murphy, 'Constructing the Mahatma: The Evolution of Gandhi's Image in His Western Biographies, 1909–1954', unpublished PhD thesis, Department of Politics, La Trobe University, Victoria, Australia, 1992, p. 134. On film companies: Dennis Dalton, *Mahatma Gandhi: Nonviolent Power in Action*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1993, p. 107. On photographers, e.g. *The Times*, 23 April 1930. The 'whole world' phrase is from Vincent Sheean, 'Foreword', in Madeleine Slade, *The Spirit's Pilgrimage*, New York: Coward-McCann, 1960, p. 3. For British bewilderment: 'Gandhi Puzzles the British Public', *New York Times*, 20 April 1930. For Ashmead-Bartlett's changing views: E. Ashmead-Bartlett, 'Approach Crisis in India', *Daily Telegraph*, 3 April 1930, and E. Ashmead-Bartlett, 'Revolutionary Plots in India', *Daily Telegraph*, 28 April 1930.

¹⁹ For the Dharsana raids: 'Police of India Block Poetess' Salt Pan Raid', *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 16 May 1930. On the circulation of Webb Miller's report: Jha, *Civil Disobedience and After*, p. 116. On its presence in Congress and pamphlets: Leonard A. Gordon, 'Mahatma Gandhi's Dialogues with Americans', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 26 January 2002, p. 345. The new headlines are, sequentially, '500 Hurt as Police Rush a Bombay Mob', *New York Times*, 22 June 1930; 'Gandhi Men Sit in Road 4 Days: Beaten by Police', *The Times*, 10 January 1932; Negley Farson, 'The Terror in India', *Christian Century*, 2 July 1930, reprinted in Chatfield, *The Americanization of Gandhi*, p. 257; "'Black Day" in Bombay City', *Daily Telegraph*, 23 June 1930. On being physically ill: editorial, 'The Terror in India', *Christian Century*, 2 July 1930, reprinted in Chatfield, *The Americanization of Gandhi*, p. 257. On averting eyes: "'Black Day" in Bombay City'. For the *Guardian* quotation: 'Indian Police Methods', *Manchester Guardian*, 21 February 1931.

It was these evocative accounts that fixed the Western image of Gandhism in action. The authorities censored initial reports of Indian protesters passively accepting the blows of police. When dexterous reporters circumvented the ban or when the officers of the Raj eventually let the stories pass, then this was therefore the cause of redoubled interest. The work of the censor ironically elevated that which was not completely suppressed. Finally, the truth was getting out. Rumours were confirmed and consciences pricked. Such scarce and delayed items were granted a privileged status. So the *Christian Century* suggested to its readers, upon receipt of Negley Farson's famous cables from the Indian frontline:

After a delay, the censors have permitted the accompanying news dispatch by Mr. Negley Farson, of the *Chicago Daily News*, to reach this country. Mr. Farson speaks of the effect which the sights he is witnessing in India are having on him. A veteran newspaper man, yet this clubbing of non-resisting people, whose wrongdoing it is that they desire national freedom, has, in his words, 'made me physically ill' and 'wrung my heart.' A reading of his report will have the same effect on many Christians of the west, thousands of miles though they may be from Bombay ... The thing that is happening in Bombay is so awful that words fail to describe it. Western civilization is beating itself to death with the clubs of the Bombay police.²⁰

Farson later claimed that his words were actually twisted by the liberal press. Editors sympathetic to the Indian cause had sharpened the contrast between satyagrahi and police, and had bleached the account of context, too: 'the American liberal weeklies took quick advantage ... one of them printed the Maidan dispatch of mine – carefully omitting all paragraphs where I showed that that ghastly affair was inevitable, deliberately invited by the Indians themselves'.²¹ But once Farson's prose was released to the world, it slipped completely from his grasp. Like the writings of his compatriot, Webb Miller, Farson's eyewitness view was cited and reproduced in countless later writings. It thereby became emblematic of an entire historical conflict, and of a method of non-violent action, too.

What was the precise career of these influential reports? The Yankee newsmen were directly cited in Krishanalal Shridharani's famous summation of Gandhi's techniques, *War without Violence: A Study of Gandhi's Method and Its Accomplishments* (1939). Here, Farson's report of a policeman unable to strike a brave Sikh who looked him in the face was given great prominence: "It's no use", he said, turning to me with half an

²⁰ Editorial introduction, 'The Terror in India' (Negley Farson), *Christian Century*, 2 July 1930, reprinted in Chatfield, *The Americanization of Gandhi*, p. 257.

²¹ Negley Farson, 'Indian Hate Lyric', in Eugene Lyons (ed.), *We Cover the World*, London: George G. Harrap and Co., 1937, p. 139.

apologetic grin. "You can't hit a bugger when he stands up to you like that".²² The journalist's words formed a central episode in Shridharani's championing of 'civil disobedience' to the metropolitan world.

Westerners interested in Gandhi invariably owned a copy of Shridharani, if they could get their hands upon it (it was 'unobtainable' in wartime England, much to the chagrin of locals). The Indian expatriate's work typically found its place on the pacifist bookshelf alongside another classic of the 1930s, Richard Gregg's *Power of Nonviolence*. Like Shridharani, Gregg was an intimate of Gandhi, and had stayed with him at the Sabarmati ashram. The American author also used the writings of Miller and Farson as 'objective' versions of non-violence in action. He directly cited their reports as proofs of the efficacy of the Gandhian method in situations of the most intense antagonism and threatened violence.²³

Lesser authors followed the trail of citation and authority. Webb Miller's account of police attacks on satyagrahis was directly referenced in Roy Walker's wartime biography of Gandhi, *Sword of Gold: A Life of Mahatma Gandhi*, then the first full account of the Mahatma's life published in the West for a decade. Bertrand Russell also cited Miller in his later portrait of Gandhi for Wallace Brockway's intriguing anthology *Moment of Destiny: Stories of Supreme Crisis in the Lives of Great Men*.²⁴

At this point, the trail goes faint. Within a few years, the details of the salt satyagraha had, of course, become matters of only dim remembrance. When Westerners pronounced upon Gandhi's actions and the 'Gandhi method', they now assumed a high degree of familiarity. Detail was unnecessary. Advocates of Gandhism therefore began to refer to the secondary literature composed by Gregg and Shridharani, in preference to eyewitness accounts. This was a procedure evident from the cusp of the Second World War in the advocacy of Aldous Huxley, for example, and in the discussions among British pacifists published in their weekly newspaper, *Peace News*.²⁵ By now, the 'salt satyagraha' had become

²² Krishnalal Shridharani, *War without Violence: A Study of Gandhi's Method and Its Accomplishments*, London: Victor Gollancz, 1939, pp. 54–5.

²³ On the difficulty of getting a copy of Shridharani: Roy Walker, 'Isn't It Time We Started?', *Peace News*, 24 October 1941. On Gregg's use of Miller and Farson: Gregg, *The Power of Nonviolence*. Webb Miller is cited at pp. 24–6; Negley Farson at pp. 26–8. The book was first published in 1935.

²⁴ The texts cited here are Roy Walker, *Sword of Gold: A Life of Mahatma Gandhi*, London: Indian Independence Union, 1945, see pp. 111–12; and Bertrand Russell, 'Mahatma Gandhi', in Wallace Brockway (ed.), *Moment of Destiny: Stories of Supreme Crises in the Lives of Great Men*, London: Alvin Redman, 1957. See p. 213.

²⁵ Aldous Huxley, *Ends and Means: An Enquiry into the Nature of Ideals and into the Methods Employed for Their Realization*, London: Chatto & Windus, 1969 (first published 1937),

famous. The idea of 'Gandhism in action' no longer sounded completely unfamiliar or irredeemably strange.

It was the salt satyagraha that triggered the most intense and enduring discussion of Gandhi and his methods in the metropolitan world. Its unfolding was therefore singular and its complicated legacies unrepeatable. Still, the dynamics of reportage and consumption were by no means unique. Across the decades, a clear pattern is evident. Violence, disobedience and tumult brought Gandhi into the news. Reporters took greater interest in India when the Mahatma fasted (or went on a 'hunger strike', as some Westerners preferred to put it), when pickets interfered with free commerce, when the streets were blocked by squatting satyagrahis, and when the symbols of British authority were openly challenged.²⁶

It was the disruption of political order that granted the spotlight, even if the darkness of censorship was soon to follow. Persistent reform and unblinking devotion were insufficient for journalistic attention. The boycott of foreign cloth only gained significant coverage when Gandhi organised a bonfire of English garments; the anti-liquor campaign provoked attention when women picketers caused a ruckus; the rejection of British authority became news when Gandhi exhorted followers to pull down a statue of General Lawrence, the vicious repressor of the so-called 'mutiny' of 1857.²⁷ A drama was required for the Indian campaigns

p. 138, refers to Gregg and directs readers to the American's text. The preponderance of 'generalised' references to 'the Gandhi method', detached from specific cases, is discussed in detail in Sean Scalmer, 'The Labor of Diffusion: The Peace Pledge Union and the Adaptation of the Gandhian Repertoire', *Mobilization*, vol. 7, no. 3, 2002, pp. 269–86.

²⁶ The interest in Gandhi's fast is noted by Krishnalal Shridharani, *The Mahatma and the World*, New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1946, p. 61. See e.g. *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 29 September 1924; 'End of Mr. Gandhi's Fast', *The Times*, 30 May 1933; 'New Fast by Mr. Gandhi', *The Times*, 13 January 1948; Richard B. Gregg, 'The Meaning of Gandhi's Fast', *World Tomorrow*, September 1932, in Chatfield, *The Americanization of Gandhi*, p. 273; 'Reactions to a Fast', *Peace News*, 17 March 1939. On the Western preference for the term 'hunger strike' even by admirers of Gandhi, such as George Lansbury, see, for example, George Lansbury and Wilfred Wellock, 'The Struggle of India against Imperialism, and Gandhi's Fast', *New World*, October 1932, p. 6. On attention to interference with commerce, see e.g. 'Huge Parades in Bombay', *The Times*, 6 June 1930; 'Women Picket Football Field', *New York Times*, 25 May 1930; 'Asks Women to Picket Shops', *New York Times*, 11 April 1930. On blocking, see e.g. *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 6 April 1930; 'Gandhi Day Riot, Clash with Police at Poona', *The Times*, 7 July 1930; *The Times*, 21 September 1930; 'Congress Defiance at Allahabad', *The Times*, 7 November 1930; 'In India Strikers Lie Down on the Job', *New York Times*, 1 June 1924. On challenges to British authority, see e.g. 'Boycott Week on Today', *New York Times*, 3 June 1930; 'The Boycott in India', *New York Times*, 9 January 1921.

²⁷ On the bonfire: 'Boycott of Imported Cloth', *New York Times*, 2 August 1921; 'Gandhi Sets Afire Foreign Made Clothes', *New York Times*, 11 October 1921. On the anti-liquor campaign, see e.g. *The Times*, 22 July 1930. On the exhortation: 'Gandhi Exhorts Hindus to Remove Lawrence Statue', *New York Times*, 12 November 1921.

to cross the threshold of newsworthiness. Otherwise, a silence mostly prevailed.

Such a pattern of journalistic coverage shaped not only public knowledge of Gandhi's campaigns, but also the prevailing assessment of his novel approach. 'Satyagraha' was first a local performance, and only later grasped as a modular technique. Descriptions of Gandhi's tremendous acts therefore bore a heavy political load. Their particular emphases inducted metropolitan readers into a still unfamiliar version of non-violent politics. Initial formulations could distort, as well as educate. And skewed interpretations could do much to sabotage the prospects not just of 'Home Rule', but of a transnational 'Gandhism', too.

Gandhi's actions: patterns of description

For those familiar only with the time-honoured image of the saintly Mahatma, a glance at the contemporary press can concentrate attention with the force of a rude and perplexing shock. For decades, the newspapermen of the West almost uniformly depicted Gandhi as a kind of agitator. He was explicitly labelled an 'agitator-saint', a 'dangerous agitator', a 'spell-binder', and a 'ringleader'. The more long-winded of scribes pictured him 'indulging in methods of agitation' or else accused the Mahatma of adopting the techniques 'employed by agitators all through history'.²⁸

When he addressed supporters, it was seldom presented as a lecture or talk, but invariably sketched as an 'exhortation', an 'inflammatory' utterance, a 'provocative challenge', or a 'harangue'. His chief endeavour was apparently 'to stir up trouble', not to educate or inform. His speeches were thought 'violent', sometimes 'very violent', and, occasionally, 'bitter and violent'.²⁹

²⁸ The sources for these epithets are, in sequence of citation: 'The Problem of Mr. Gandhi', *Nation and Athenaeum*, 18 February 1922, p. 746; 'Not Peace but a Sword', *Daily Telegraph*, 5 February 1921, in Anon. (ed.), *M.K. Gandhi: The Man of the Moment*, Calcutta: Manoranjan Gupta, 1921, p. 39; 'Gandhi's Betrayal of the Peasant', *Daily Worker*, 1 March 1931; 'The Delinquent on the Bench', *Morning Post*, 23 February 1931; European Association of India to Lloyd George, PM, 7 June 1920, India Office Library, LJ and P/6/1775; and *The Times*, cited in 'Gandhi, A Monk Who Imperils British Rule in India', *Literary Digest*, no. 69, 2 April 1921, in Chatfield, *The Americanization of Gandhi*, p. 84.

²⁹ On exhortation, see e.g. 'Picketing Excesses', *The Times*, 23 February 1931. On inflammatory utterance, see e.g. *Manchester Guardian*, cited in Chatfield, *The Americanization of Gandhi*, p. 89. On provocative challenge: 'Lord Reading and Mr. Gandhi', *The Times*, 10 February 1922. On harangue: 'Gandhi's Continued Defiance', *Daily Telegraph*, 9 April 1930. On stirring: Viceroy to Secretary of State for India, 19 October 1920, India Office Library, MSS EUR D 523 11. On violent speeches: 'Die before Yielding Is Gandhi's Appeal', *New York Times*, 9 April 1930. On very violent: Sir George Lloyd to Secretary of

It was not simply what Gandhi said, but the way that he said it. British correspondent Perceval Landon detected in Gandhi's voice a particular note of detachment that lent an 'uncanny force'. It was 'hypnotic', said Beatrice Barmby of the *New York Times*. George Slocombe of the *Daily Herald* agreed, and future Liberal MP Robert Bernays amplified this view with customary eloquence:

Though he speaks very quietly and without a trace of passion or bitterness his power is almost hypnotic. His words so grip and absorb the mind that half an hour's conversation with him produces real physical exhaustion. For he speaks not as other men do, but with the power of a prophet.³⁰

The author of *Inside India* (1937) shared this assessment of Gandhi's bewitching aptitude:

'... everyone who comes in touch with him loses all capacity for clear judgement – everyone who knows him becomes too emotional to be trusted to be objective ...' I was told that by several people, including some English.³¹

Gandhi was 'familiar with all the tunes to which men instinctively dance', averred *The Times*. And if Englishmen themselves admitted to such psychic disturbance in the Mahatma's cunning presence, then what of those cursed with weaker intellects, scrawnier constitutions, and flightier spirits? One report in the *New York Times* thought Gandhi capable of putting a 'sure finger' on the emotions of 'his Oriental people'. That 'pleading' voice, it continued, 'sets fire to the quick excitability of the Oriental temperament'. In the hands of such a manipulator, the 'masses' might be 'transformed' into an 'ugly temper'. The 'mob' could be incited 'to break the law'. Discontent might spread, like the casting of a spell.³²

Could this strange little brown man anticipate such happenings? Did he understand the consequences of his destructive acts? According to one view, Gandhi lacked the capacity for such clear foresight. The

State for India, 25 November 1921, India Office Library, MSS EUR D 523 26. On bitter and violent: 'Indian Leader's Threat', *Daily Telegraph*, 2 March 1930.

³⁰ For Landon: Perceval Landon, 'An Estimate of Mr. Gandhi' (originally printed in *Daily Telegraph*) in Anon., *M.K. Gandhi*, pp. 33–4. For Barmby: Beatrice Barmby, 'Again All India Awaits Gandhi's Word', *New York Times*, 8 February 1931. For Slocombe: George Slocombe, excerpt from *Daily Herald* (cabled 21 May 31), in appendix to Polak, *Mahatma Gandhi*, p. 28. For Bernays: Robert Bernays, 'Naked Fakir', London: Victor Gollancz, 1931, pp. 135–6.

³¹ Halidé Edib, *Inside India*, London: George Allen and Unwin, 1937, p. 57.

³² On familiarity with tunes: 'Mr Gandhi, A Character Study', *The Times*, 24 May 1922. On a pleading voice: Barmby, 'Again All India Awaits Gandhi's Word'. On an ability to manipulate into ugly temper: 'Gandhi Sees Campaign Spread', *New York Times*, 20 April 1930. On inciting the mob to break the law: 'The Delinquent on the Bench', *Morning Post*, 23 February 1931. On the spreading of discontent: 'Gandhi to Spread His Gospel by Auto', *New York Times*, 10 April 1930.

agitator, to put it simply, was an irrational fool. Even a brief glance at Western reportage confirms that Gandhi was often presented as a 'man of instinct': sentimental, emotional, intuitive; contemptuous of facts (indeed, unable to 'face up' to them); beyond the power of argument, and the claims of reason, too.³³

So instinctive and contrary, Gandhi was considered to possess an 'unworldly mind' by many Westerners, and his principal works were therefore judged as little more than excursions into childishness. Though the Mahatma's speeches sometimes gave the 'illusion of logic', they were, so the argument ran, 'replete with inconsistencies and fallacies'. This was a persistent theme. Gandhi was 'not strong on the logical side', according to the *Daily Telegraph*. The 'Critic' of the *New Statesman* judged his statements 'extremely interesting, but not quite easy to understand'. And a 1937 survey of *The Controlling Minds of Asia* declared his teaching unable to bear the 'test of logic'. The Mahatma was repeatedly accused of gabbling 'inconsistent nonsense', and 'sheer nonsense'. Major-General J.F.C. Fuller, the theorist of mechanised war, called him 'consistently inconsistent'.³⁴

Whence did this apparent irrationality spring? Here the stereotype of the mystical Indian shaded into the related image of the cunning Oriental. Hostile Westerners repeatedly accused Gandhi of making subtle and 'over-subtle' distinctions. The doyen of the interwar British Left, Harold Laski, thought the Indian leader cursed with 'a power of refined

³³ For 'man of instinct': 'The Instinctive Rebel', *New Statesman and Nation*, 26 August 1933, p. 228. For sentimental: Bernays, *Naked Fakir*, p. 103. For emotional (or, specifically, 'sensitive to emotional appeal'): Viscount Templewood, *Nine Troubled Years*, London: Collins, 1954, p. 62. For intuitive: H.N. Brailsford, 'Books in General', *New Statesman and Nation*, 31 December 1949, p. 783. For contemptuous of facts: James O. Dolson, 'The Political Thought of Young India', *The Friend*, 4 March 1925, p. 283; 'The New India', *The Times*, 10 May 1924. For beyond the power of argument: Sir Valentine Chirol, 'India Old and New', *The Times*, 23 December 1920. For beyond the claims of reason: *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 7 November 1932.

³⁴ For an unworldly mind: H.N. Brailsford to Secretary of State for India (Wedgwood Benn), 2 November 1930, enclosed in letter from Wedgwood Benn, 21 November 1930, India Office Library, MSS EUR C 152 6. For excursions into childishness: 'A Wayfarer', 'London Diary', *Nation and Athenaeum*, 15 April 1922, p. 83. For the illusion of logic: Post Wheeler, *India against The Storm*, New York: E.P. Dutton and Co., 1944, p. 256. For replete: Anon., *A Searchlight on Gandhi*, London: P.S. King and Son, 1931, p. xi. For not logical: 'Not Peace but a Sword', p. 42. For not easy to understand: 'Critic', 'A London Diary', *New Statesman and Nation*, 1 October 1932, p. 367. For unable to bear logic: Sirdar Ikbal Ali Shah, *The Controlling Minds of Asia*, London: Herbert Jenkins, 1937, p. 49. For inconsistent nonsense: 'India and the Failure', *Morning Post*, 16 November 1931. For sheer nonsense: Secretary of State for India (Wedgwood Benn) to Viceroy (Lord Irwin), 13 February 1931, India Office Library, MSS EUR C 152 6. For consistently inconsistent: Major-General J.F.C. Fuller, *India in Revolt*, London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1931, pp. 153–4.

distinction', an 'elasticity of discussion', and a 'habit of paradoxical justification'. The old man 'could split hairs with any sophist', concurred *The Times*. The *Week-End Review* portrayed Gandhi as a 'confused thinker', while others also described him as 'unaccountable', mystifying, and baffling, on occasion. The *News-Chronicle* summed matters up in mid-1942 with grim finality: 'To our Western minds Mr. Gandhi's line of argument does not, and cannot, make sense. It is based upon a philosophy and a logic which are alien to our ways of thought.'³⁵

Why was this irrationality and oversubtlety important? It was widely held that a weak or dishonest intellect could not cope with the complex machinery of Western politics. Many considered Gandhi blind (whether wilfully or innocently) to the connections between cause and effect, incitement and commotion. As a result, when chaos threatened, he was thought to lack the insight or the decisiveness to intervene. The man could not or would not soothe the passions of the mob. On the contrary, his confused blunders were most likely to make matters worse:

Once the forces of disorder are unloosed, not only does this holiest of men become day by day increasingly unable to restrain them, but ... within his own mind the line between what is violent conduct and what is not becomes increasingly tenuous and vague.³⁶

This was one version of Gandhism in action: dangerous, deluded, and disastrous, but neither malicious nor wilfully destructive. But while some Westerners depicted Gandhi as a naive fool, others were unconvinced. His challenge to legal authority seemed deliberate, and his reasoning often clear. Surely this prideful little ascetic knew what he was doing? Who could not foresee the sequence of action and reaction, the inevitable passage from agitation to mobilisation, from mobilisation to repression?

Gandhi's campaign is 'designed to provoke disciplinary action on the part of the Government', thundered *The Times* in February 1922; 'he aims

³⁵ Subtlety noted in Maude Royden, 'An Englishwoman's Faith', in S. Radhakrishnan (ed.), *Mahatma Gandhi: Essays and Reflections on His Life and Work*, London: George Allen and Unwin, 1939, p. 255. For over-subtle: 'Salvation by a Thread', *Nation and Athenaeum*, 17 June 1922, p. 404. The Laski quote is from Harold Laski, 'Gandhi Has yet to Face His Real Test', *Daily Herald*, 12 September 1931. *The Times*: 'Mr Gandhi', *The Times*, 31 January 1948. The *Week-End Review*: J.S. Collis, 'Gandhi', *Week-End Review*, 31 October 1931. For unaccountable: Secretary of State for India (Samuel Hoare) to Viceroy (Lord Willingdon), 6 November 1931, India Office Library, MSS EUR E 240 1. For mystifying: Secretary of State for India (Samuel Hoare) to Viceroy (Lord Willingdon), 9 October 1931, India Office Library, MSS EUR E 240 1. For baffling: Woodrow Wyatt, 'Saint in Politics', *New Statesman and Nation*, 7 February 1948, p. 107. The *News-Chronicle* summation: *News-Chronicle*, 5 August 1942, cited in 'Observer', 'Crisis in India', *Peace News*, 14 August 1942.

³⁶ 'Suspense in India', *Nation and Athenaeum*, 10 May 1930, p. 162.

at creating such a condition of affairs as will compel the Government to adopt the sternest repressive measures'. The voice of the British establishment was echoed in the American republic. On the Eastern seaboard, the *New York Times* suggested that Gandhi 'professes delight at the Government's repressive measures, which he is convinced will disgust the moderates and close the ranks of his adherents'. Even in the more distant Mid-west, Negley Farson, correspondent for the *Chicago Daily News*, agreed that the most 'ghastly' cases of policing were 'inevitable, deliberately invited by the Indians themselves'.³⁷

Certainly, to those directly challenged by Gandhi's acts, there appeared to be a deliberate tactic at work. Like a tropical mosquito, the rebellious Indian seemed discontented until he had excited an angered slap. The aim appeared to be the summoning of violence from properly constituted governments. Though the language of Gandhi's movement was apparently pacific, his methods ultimately fostered militancy and antagonism. Wedgwood Benn, the Secretary of State for India, summarised the Gandhian method this way in August 1930:

they are deliberately attempting to present us with the alternative of using what they will represent to be unjustifiable and tyrannical repression or conceding their demands. If that is what they are aiming at, the real defeat for them is to prevent them creating such a state of feeling. Unfortunately, it is impossible to achieve this merely by leaving them alone. They won't let us leave them alone.³⁸

The agonised rationalisations of a conflicted disciplinarian drip from the minister's pen. Wedgwood Benn returned to this theme in early 1931. Now, he compared the actions of Gandhi's movement with those of the suffragettes, the Irish, and South Africans:

They all aimed at rallying public sympathy as an ally. They strove to present to the Government the alternative of giving way or appearing in the role of an oppressor ... they first deliberately provoked severity and then complained to the world of it. This occurred with the Black and Tans in Ireland, the farm burning in South Africa and the forcible feeding of the Suffragettes. But the Indian appeal to the public sympathy is stronger in so far as the movement can maintain a genuinely non-violent character.³⁹

³⁷ For the *The Times*: 'Lord Reading and Mr. Gandhi', *The Times*, 10 February 1922. The *New York Times* report is a citation from a *The Times* report – 'Predicts that Gandhi Will Become Dictator', *New York Times*, 28 December 1921. On the *Chicago Daily News*: Negley Farson, 'Indian Hate Lyric', p. 139.

³⁸ Secretary of State for India (Wedgwood Benn) to Viceroy (Lord Irwin), 28 August 1930, India Office Library, MSS EUR C 152 6.

³⁹ Secretary of State for India (Wedgwood Benn) to Viceroy (Lord Irwin), 4 February 1931, India Office Library, MSS EUR C 152 6.

Wedgwood Benn's honest conscience here acknowledged the apparent novelty of India's non-violent movement. But was Gandhi's campaign consistently pacific? How peaceful were its animating spirits? On this point, the Secretary of State was something of an anguished outlier. His term of office spanned only the brief period of minority Labour government, running from June 1929 until August 1931. When the 'non-violence' of Gandhi's movement was openly debated, many influential Westerners parted company from the tormented and thoughtful minister of state. For them, the Gandhians of India were agents of outright intimidation.

Certainly, those who set their watch by Times Square or Fleet Street could be forgiven for thinking the anti-colonialists of the Subcontinent little more than ruffians and bullies. To the typical journalist, the open hands of apparent satyagrahis seemed always on the verge of becoming closed fists. As *The Times* put it directly, 'Behind the doctrine of soul-force is always flourished the big stick'.⁴⁰

Departures from loving kindness were eagerly catalogued in the daily press. What did the Westerner confront, settling down at the breakfast table, toast buttered and eyes poised? A cascade of allegations: Congress volunteers in Bombay had yelled and shaken their fists at the passing motorcars of Europeans; in Shikarpur, a 'mob' had ransacked liquor bars and burnt account books; an English girl was stoned in Calcutta. Elsewhere, missiles were apparently hurled at police, houses were looted, windscreens were smashed and flowerpots were lobbed. Christians and Sikhs had their faces smeared with black shoe polish when they attempted to enter liquor shops. Imagine! And there were hints of more. One provincial governor alleged that there were 'grosser' acts of bullying in 'every back street' in the land. Electors were prevented from casting their votes in Lahore. Most terribly of all, loyal policemen were burnt alive in Chauri Chaura, and murdered in Sholapur. Viscount Rothermere, the press baron of Middle England, encapsulated these events in a desperate call to arms of January 1931:

British women have been murdered; British officials shot; the law has been openly flouted; the Union Jack trampled – without a sign of that vigorous reaction which in the more robust days of a generation ago would have stirred this country [Britain] to its depths.⁴¹

⁴⁰ 'A "Hartal" in Operation, Calcutta's Day of Gandhism, A Tyrannous Policy', *The Times*, 13 December 1921.

⁴¹ On shaking fists: 'Inflammatory Leaflets in Bombay', *The Times*, 10 April 1931. On a mob: 'Liquor Barrels Set on Fire', *The Times*, 24 July 1930. On a stoning: 'Gandhi Puzzles the British Public'. On hurling missiles: 'Gandhi Arrested in Riot', *New York Times*, 5 March 1929. On looting houses: Romain Rolland, *Mahatma Gandhi: The Man*

These undoubtedly dreadful happenings were spread out across several decades of fractured and sometimes desperate struggle for political rights. However, with news scarce or censored and sensibilities delicate, they lingered in the metropolitan mind. In consequence, violence was added to violence. The political arithmetic of leading British dailies was very clear on this point: Gandhi's movement was extended 'not by moral suasion merely, but by intimidation'.⁴² 'Non-violence', in other words, was something of a misnomer.

In *Gandhi and the Indianisation of the Empire*, author J.F. Bryant thought the Indian claim to non-violence 'a hollow mockery'. The governor of Bombay agreed it was 'merely camouflage'. Likewise, for *The Times*, it was 'lip service', and Sir Richard Tottenham, at one time the Secretary of State for India, thought Gandhi's 'protestations' of non-violence 'not worth the paper they are written on'. Even Gandhi's dearest allies admitted that his campaigns could become warlike, on occasion. 'The appeal is frankly fear', conceded C.F. Andrews, perhaps Gandhi's closest European friend, in October 1930. 'This economic boycott, even though outwardly "non-violent", has an aspect of "war" about it'.⁴³

Why had Gandhi's soothing promises apparently failed? What was the cause of the murder and the mayhem? Here, too, competing explanations were ventured. One group of Westerners largely excused the Mahatma of direct responsibility. They instead blamed the newest entrants to the anti-colonial struggle. Henry Polak, another of Gandhi's European friends, thought that as the campaign for Indian independence drew broader support, so 'all and sundry' had been swept from

Who Became One with the Universal Being, London: The Swarthmore Press, 1924, p. 123. On smashing windscreens and lobbing flowerpots: 'Gandhi Day Riot, Clash with Police at Poona', *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 7 July 1930. On smearing polish: 'Cloth Trade Hurt in Boycott in India', *New York Times*, 26 June 1930. On grosser acts: Sir George Lloyd to Samuel Montagu, 1 July 1921, India Office Library, MSS EUR D 523 26. On preventing electors: 'Disorder Rampant in Delhi ... Evil Fruits of Mr. Gandhi's Campaign', *The Times*, 13 December 1920. On loyal policemen burnt: 'Events of the Week', *Nation and Athenaeum*, 11 February 1922, p. 712. On murder in Sholapur: 'Heavy Street Fighting in India', *Daily Worker*, 13 January 1931. For Viscount Rothermere: Viscount Rothermere, 'Shall We Lose India?', *Daily Mail*, 19 January 1931.

⁴² 'Lord Reading and Mr. Gandhi'.

⁴³ On hollow mockery: J.F. Bryant, *Gandhi and the Indianisation of the Empire*, London: J. Hall and Son, 1924, p. 89. On camouflage: H.E. the Rt Hon. Major-General Sir Frederick Sykes to Viceroy (Lord Irwin), 21 May 1930, India Office Library, MSS EUR C 152 24. On lip service: 'Mr Gandhi's March', *The Times*, 24 March 1930. On 'not worth': Sir Richard Tottenham, note for internal circulation, 26 February 1943, India Office Library, R/3/1/298. For Andrews' view: C.F. Andrews, 'Soul Force and the Boycott', *Nation and Athenaeum*, 4 October 1930.

the villages and into the city streets. With Gandhi's most devoted disciples now only a minority, 'rowdies' had new opportunities for 'sporadic outbursts of violence', under the cover of the Mahatma's shawl.⁴⁴

The rhythms of the Indian struggle suggested as much. Over time, the most bloodthirsty and violent of rebels were propelled to the centre of events. Certainly, they attracted the attention of Western observers. When the Indian uprising reached a crescendo in 1931, diehards at the *Daily Mail* detected a 'drift' of 'Gandhi's movement' to the embrace of new and fearsome methods: 'One of the latest developments of that movement is to engineer the training of Indian villagers in the use of firearms, so that they may be able to murder police officers and British officials.'⁴⁵ This was not an unrepresentative view. Those on the extreme left of politics concurred with the diehards on the efficacy and the inevitability of a violent turn in imperial affairs. They differed only on the sides they might take. Also in 1931, the Communists of Britain's famous *Labour Monthly* detected 'all the potentialities of Red Army girls' in the marksmanship of the local 'Hindu girls' of India. According to Communist scribes, young men with 'Gandhi caps' were also 'handling and firing their rifles' with some dexterity. And with the development of such capacities, it could be argued that the future of non-violent 'discipline' was 'problematic', at best.⁴⁶ This was a proposition to which even Wedgwood Benn assented. At his most desperate in the early 1930s, the pained Secretary predicted that Gandhi would soon 'pass out of the picture', supplanted by a 'more serious and active' resistance. He concluded, almost hopefully, 'The Congress civil disobedience campaign will disappear and ... it will be a straight fight with the revolver people, which is a much simpler and much more satisfactory job to undertake.'⁴⁷ However, not all observers agreed that Gandhi could be so easily separated from these 'revolver people'. Many connected him directly with the outbreak of violence. The *Nation and Athenaeum* described his movement as 'an Oriental version of Sinn Fein'. Lord Reading, the Viceroy in the early 1920s, assayed the opinion that Gandhi was 'preparing for revolution by violence'. Gandhi's name was 'on the lips of the assassins of British officials', argued the *Daily Mail*. In the early 1920s, the *Daily Telegraph* claimed that the Mahatma was contemplating nothing less than 'open and bloody insurrection'. In the early 1930s

⁴⁴ Polak, *Mahatma Gandhi*, pp. 118–19.

⁴⁵ 'Mr Gandhi and the Answer', *Daily Mail*, 19 September 1931.

⁴⁶ Shapurji Saklatvala, 'The Indian Round-Table Conference: A Danger to World Peace and Socialism', *Labour Monthly*, February 1931, p. 91.

⁴⁷ Wedgwood Benn to Lord Irwin, 22 April 1930, India Office Library, MSS EUR C 152 6.

it described him as ‘the direct cause of murderous outrage on an appalling scale.’⁴⁸

How was Gandhi responsible? As Arthur Moore (one-time correspondent with Gandhi) pointed out, the campaign for non-co-operation with the Raj required the Indian leader to ‘denounce the British’. It could thereby be considered an encouragement to ‘violent thinking’. And Gandhi’s reported addresses seemed to many Westerners to convey clear evidence of such troubling dispositions. The Mahatma spoke of ‘war’ (even if this was a ‘war of love’). He asked his followers to resist ‘till blood is spilt’ (even if that blood was their own). Gandhi begged his supporters to ‘lay down their lives’ (and, according to the *New York Times* ‘did not explain ... how this advice could be carried out without offending his creed of non-violence’). He spoke of a coming tide of blood as a purifying, noble force: ‘When blood flows from heads not only will the salt tax go but many more things will also be washed away into the sea. And then our numerous sins will disappear’.⁴⁹ His challenges to Indians could sometimes be read as celebrations of incendiary fervour:

Let us see whether the police dare touch our women. If they do, and if the sons and daughters of India are not so emasculated as to take such an insult lying down, the whole country will be ablaze.⁵⁰

The language of war and sacrifice, blood and fire was familiar to Westerners by the early 1920s. It had never before been connected with the expression of love or the spirit of the peacemaker. At first, these associations seemed preposterous, risible. When the Mahatma tried to insist that sacrifice did not mean aggression and that wounds could be borne, not inflicted, then this was presented by the Western press as ‘an astonishing refutation’, and a ‘backing down’. The American Consul in Bombay, William H. Bench, was convinced that Gandhi’s statements on these matters were consistently misrepresented.⁵¹

⁴⁸ On an Oriental Sinn Fein: n.a., ‘The Confusion in the Near East’, *Nation and Athenaeum*, 11 February 1922. For Lord Reading: Lord Reading to Secretary of State for India, 5 January 1922, India Office Library, MSS EUR E 238 4. For *Daily Mail*: ‘Mr Gandhi and the Answer’, *Daily Mail*, 19 September 1931. For *Telegraph*: Perceval Landon, ‘Lord Ronaldshay on India’s Danger’, *Daily Telegraph*, 13 February 1922; and ‘Mr Gandhi’s Demands’, *Daily Telegraph*, 31 January 1930.

⁴⁹ For encouragement to violent thinking: Arthur Moore, in Radhakrishnan, *Mahatma Gandhi: Essays and Reflections*, pp. 192–3. For a war of love: ‘Events of the Week’, *Nation and Athenaeum*, 12 April 1930, p. 37. For resistance until blood is spilt: ‘Events of the Week’, *Nation and Athenaeum*, 12 April 30, p. 37. For laying down their lives: ‘Die before Yielding Is Gandhi’s Appeal’. For blood washing away: Gandhi, cited in Weber, *On the Salt March*, pp. 393–3.

⁵⁰ Gandhi, cited in ‘Mr. Gandhi’s Outburst’, *The Times*, 9 April 1930.

⁵¹ For an astonishing refutation: ‘Mr Gandhi Tired, a Corrected Speech’, *The Times*, 11 April 1930. For backing down: ‘Denies He Urged Violence’, *New York Times*, 11 April 1930. For the American consul: Jha, *Civil Disobedience and After*, p. 76.

And the Mahatma was misquoted. The *Daily Mail* argued that ‘bloodshed is a minor matter to Gandhi, as his utterances show’. The *New York World* reported Gandhi as a bloodthirsty cur, urging his followers to greater outrages: ‘The prisons are no longer an attraction to us. Let us have more shooting and head-breaking please.’⁵² False reports of Gandhi’s views were, indeed, often in circulation, and seldom corrected. Quotes were ‘so wrenched out of context as to be misleading’, judged the *Christian Pacifist*. One of Gandhi’s Western intimates complained of ‘an endless cataract of misquotation, misrepresentation, and crude falsehood’. And other pacifists noted the explicit removal of Gandhi’s more pacific phrases in *The Times* of London’s reports on Indian affairs.⁵³

In this context, the actions of British troops appeared nearly always proportionate and judicious. After all, what were the authorities expected to do? If mobs of darkies proceeded to ‘obstruct traffic’ and ‘overawe’ individual rights, then the beneficent state could not stand idly by. If the peace of the country was menaced, then it need be defended. And if the house of India was on fire, then the Raj had better put out those flames. So the Viceroy reasoned in May 1930, anyway:

When [the] fire brigade has to be called in to extinguish a fire, it frequently does serious damage by water to the contents of the house – but though the fire brigade does the damage, no one would suggest that it was to blame for the fire which was the originating cause of it being called in at all – least of all when the fire has been caused by direct incendiarism.⁵⁴

The logic was impeccable, and Western journalists generally shared this view. For the *Manchester Guardian*, there seemed only one option: ‘dispersing civilly disobedient pickets and crowds by dint of painful blows’, or, to put it another way, ‘ruthlessness for an hour or two’.⁵⁵

In the face of these relentless contentions, what could sincere Gandhians do? The Mahatma’s Western allies often pleaded for a ‘right of reply’.

⁵² For the *Daily Mail*: J.E. Woolacott, ‘The Gandhi Imposture’, *Daily Mail*, 4 September 1931. For the *New York World* claim: Gandhi, cited in Jha, *Civil Disobedience and After*, p. 111.

⁵³ On false reports: ‘What Gandhiji Said to the Italian Journalist’, *Hindustan Times*, 6 November 1934. A rare example of correction is ‘Gandhi Misquoted’ *Asia*, no. 36, November 1936, in Chatfield, *The Americanization of Gandhi*, p. 295. For the claims of Western intimates: Reginald Reynolds, *To Live in Mankind: A Quest for Gandhi*, London: André Deutsch, 1951, p. 50. For other pacifists: ‘Mr Gandhi’s Alternatives’, *Peace News*, 28 July 1939.

⁵⁴ On obstructing traffic and overawing: ‘Mr Gandhi’s Strategy’, *Manchester Guardian*, 9 March 1931. On the menacing of the peace of the country: ‘A “Hartal” in Operation’. For the Viceroy: Viceroy (Lord Irwin), ‘Some Reflections. May 1930’, enclosed in a letter to Secretary of State for India (Wedgwood Benn), 22 May 1930, India Office Library, MSS EUR C 152 6.

⁵⁵ On painful blows: ‘Mr Gandhi’s Strategy’. On ruthlessness: ‘Indian Police Methods’.

They questioned headlines that seemed ‘shockingly misleading’. Some tried to become correspondents. Others reproduced Gandhi’s speeches, in an effort at clarification. The meaning of the Mahatma’s utterances could be explained, patiently. Some of Gandhi’s closest friends went on lecture tours of Britain and the USA, in an effort to combat misrepresentation of Bapu. And Gandhi himself offered to act as a journalist, gratis.⁵⁶ Through these devices, the Western caricature of ‘Gandhism in action’ could be challenged and clarified.

There were other responses, less obvious. Gandhi’s modes of address and characteristic forms of prose can also be considered attempts to combat metropolitan misreporting and to establish the truth of satyagraha. In his particular ways of speaking and writing, the Mahatma developed especially subtle tools of anti-colonial resistance. For Gandhi, the medium of public address sometimes became the message. Even when Westerners distorted what he said, they could not entirely erase the way that he said it.

These efforts at public communication shaped the context in which his activities were appraised and assessed. They thereby moulded the public image of ‘satyagraha’, and helped to promote metropolitan interest, understanding, and enthusiasm. It is to Gandhi’s vigorous efforts with pen and voice that this chapter now turns.

Gandhi speaks, Gandhi writes

Gandhi was not a natural politician. As a cleanskin in the dirtiest of professions, he avoided making speeches whenever possible. He had a habit of hesitation and of drawing breath that could distract. Nothing came easily. ‘Writing, making speeches and even talking are painful processes for me’, the Mahatma conceded to his friend and biographer, Henry Polak, in 1918.⁵⁷ His methods of public address were therefore neither

⁵⁶ On pleading for right of reply, see e.g. ‘Lieutenant of Gandhi Predicts War in India’, *New York Times*, 2 March 1930; ‘India’s Non Co-operation’, *New York Times*, 12 March 1922; V.S. Krishna Menon, ‘The Indian Conference’, *New Leader*, 25 September 1931. On questioning headlines: Sudhir Ghosh, ‘Mr Gandhi and Pakistan’, *The Times*, 29 September 1947. Becoming a correspondent was the plan of C.F. Andrews. See Mahadev H. Desai, *Day-to-Day with Gandhi*, volume 4, Rajghat: Sarva Seva Sangh Prakashan, n.d., p. 23. For reproducing speeches: Horace G. Alexander, ‘Gandhi and the Burning of Foreign Cloth’, *The Friend*, 10 May 1929, p. 410. For an attempt to explain ‘till blood is spilt’, see e.g. George Joseph, ‘Gandhi’s Creed’, *Nation and Athenaeum*, 4 June 1930, pp. 344–5. For lecture tours: Slade, *The Spirit’s Pilgrimage*, p. 183. Gandhi offered his services in ‘Gandhi as News Gatherer’.

⁵⁷ On avoiding speeches: M.K. Gandhi, *An Autobiography or the Story of My Experiments with Truth*, Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1927, p. 46. For habit of hesitation and drawing breath: Weber, *Gandhi as Disciple and Mentor*, p. 64. Gandhi’s concession to

spontaneous nor unselfconscious. The Indian leader's quite particular style of speaking and writing was cultivated after some deliberation and not a little effort.

How did he sound? Gandhi's voice was thought 'light' and 'soft'. At times it could become 'dry', almost a whisper. The modulations were even, and unvarying, suggesting a 'strangely attractive ... monotony'. It was an 'undistinguished' instrument,⁵⁸ even friends had to admit, certainly not the tool of a tub-thumper.

Moreover, the Indian leader abjured the common arts of rhetoric. His public speech was 'conversational' in tone. When he spoke, it was with a slow and deliberate rhythm: 'passionless, quiet and measured'. One correspondent likened his public performance to a 'mournful chat'. Professor and aspiring politician George Catlin thought him (rather kindly) 'no demagogue', *The Times* (more cruelly) 'no orator'.⁵⁹

But it was precisely Gandhi's distance from the rabble-rouser that made him effective. Otherwise hostile observers consistently praised Gandhi's speechmaking. His English was 'accurate', 'precise', 'exact', 'perfect', and 'gracious'. The Indian leader addressed others 'slowly and deliberately', thought politician and jurist Viscount Sankey. Indeed, he calculated no more than fifty-seven words a minute. The language was 'simple' and 'direct', avowed the *Yorkshire Post*, and the *Manchester Guardian* thought every word of Gandhi's carefully chosen. Methodist bishop Frederick Fisher, writing from America, and Lord Reading, India's Viceroy, both agreed. Moreover, the words of the 'great soul' were fitted into sentences, as if links in a chain. And the sentences themselves were unfolded with

Polak is noted in Mahadev H. Desai, *Day-to-Day with Gandhi*, volume 1, Rajghat: Sarva Seva Sangh Prakashan, n.d., p. 82.

⁵⁸ For voice – on light: John Haynes Holmes, 'Gandhi', *World Tomorrow*, no. 7, December 1924, in Chatfield, *The Americanization of Gandhi*, pp. 643–4; soft: Newtown Phelps Stokes II, cited in Weber, *On the Salt March*, pp. 297–8; dry: Mahadev H. Desai, *Day-to-Day with Gandhi*, volume 3, Rajghat: Sarva Seva Sangh Prakashan, n.d., p. 232; whisper: Horace Alexander, *Gandhi through Western Eyes*, London: Asia Publishing House, 1969, p. 297. On even modulations: Rene Fulop-Miller, *Lenin and Gandhi*, London and New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1927, p. 168; 'Mr Gandhi Speaks', *News Chronicle*, 16 September 1931; unvarying: Joseph J. Doke, *M.K. Gandhi: An Indian Patriot in South Africa*, London: The London Indian Chronicle, 1909, p. 41; monotony: 'Mr Gandhi "Open to Conviction"', *Daily Herald*, 16 September 1931. On undistinguished: Louis Fischer, *The Life of Mahatma Gandhi*, London: Jonathan Cape, 1951, p. 396.

⁵⁹ For avoiding rhetorical arts: 'Mr Gandhi Speaks', *Manchester Guardian*, 16 September 1931. Conversational tone: *ibid.* Slow rhythm: William J. Shirer, *Gandhi: A Memoir*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979, p. 29. Passionless: Rene Fulop-Miller, *Lenin and Gandhi*, London and New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1927, p. 168. Mournful: Robert Bernays, 'Naked Fakir', p. 252. No demagogue: George Catlin, *In the Path of Mahatma Gandhi*, London: Macdonald and Co., 1948, p. 276. No orator: *The Times*, cited in James D. Hunt, *Gandhi in London*, New Delhi: Promilla and Co., 1978, p. 201. See also Doke, *M.K. Gandhi*, p. 41.

clarity and logic. As Italian-born pacifist Lanza Del Vasto put it in *Return to the Source*, 'his sentences are carefully linked and introduced by "that is why" and "so". He avoids ellipses, which can ... [do] violence ... to logic and [are] a form of self-conceit'.⁶⁰ In consequence, Gandhi's verbal order jarred with the stereotype of the crazy Oriental. His words were more disciplined than mystical, exacting rather than allusive. The *New York Call* labelled one of Gandhi's most famous speeches 'calmly reasoned and passionless'. The English liberal J.A. Spender suggested that he was almost Occidental in deportment: 'He spoke perfect English without a trace of accent and in an absolutely English political way. Shutting one's eyes one could suppose oneself listening to an extremely accomplished English politician'. Likewise, Gandhi's writings also suggested self-possession and personal control. Horace Alexander, the noted Quaker, bird-watcher, and writer, assured his own readers that 'Mr Gandhi' would never 'indulge in hysterical or exaggerated language' when he took up the pen. The Mahatma's prose was 'lucidity itself', agreed the more critical Arthur Moore – apparently distinguished by the same clarity as his limpid spoken English.⁶¹

As at the lectern, so at the desk: Gandhi's simplicity was the product of complicated and unceasing effort. Although the Mahatma sometimes downplayed the importance of his own writings, it is beyond doubt that he considered the written word of the highest importance. Gandhi's earliest campaigns in Natal were launched with the publication of self-penned pamphlets. He established newspapers early and often. The shelves filled with his *Collected Works* attest to his continuing belief in the power of the pen. And so do some of his surviving words: 'I flatter myself

⁶⁰ Accurate: Sir Valentine Chirol, 'India Old and New', in Anon., *M.K. Gandhi*, p. 91. Precise: B. Pattabhisitaramayya, 'Gandhi in His Many Aspects', in Radhakrishnan, *Mahatma Gandhi: Essays and Reflections*, p. 204. Exact: Muriel Lester, cited in Walker, *Sword of Gold*, p. 127. Perfect: J.A. Spender, *The Changing East*, London: Cassell and Company, 1926, p. 211. Gracious: Arthur J. Todd, *Three Wise Men of the East and Other Lectures*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1927, p. 6. Sankey's estimate: Rt Hon. Viscount Sankey, 'Impressions from the Round Table Conference', in Radhakrishnan, *Mahatma Gandhi: Essays and Reflections*, pp. 263–4. For the *Post*: 'Mr Gandhi and the Crowd', *Yorkshire Post*, 14 September 1931. For the *Guardian*: 'Gandhi's Life in Prison', *Manchester Guardian*, 29 January 1931. For Fisher: Frederick B. Fisher, *That Strange Little Brown Man Gandhi*, New York: Ray Long and Richard R. Smith, 1932, p. 4. For Reading: Viceroy (Lord Reading) to Secretary of State for India, 19 May 1921, India Office Library, MSS EUR E 238 3. For Vasto: Lanza Del Vasto, *Return to the Source*, London: Rider, 1971, pp. 101–2.

⁶¹ For the *Call*: *New York Call*, 28 April 1922, reprinted in Bimalananda Das Gupta (ed.), *Our Gandhi-Day Souvenir*, Dacca, self-published, 1922, p. 8. For Spender: Spender, *The Changing East*, p. 211. For Alexander: Horace Alexander, 'India's Tragedy', *New World*, June 1930, pp. 1–2. For Moore: Arthur Moore, 'The Evolution of Mr. Gandhi', in Radhakrishnan, *Mahatma Gandhi: Essays and Reflections*, p. 190.

that some of my writings will survive me and will be of service to the causes for which they have been written.’⁶² Moreover, the Indian leader undertook this work with the careful eye of the craftsman. When writing for metropolitan audiences, he ‘drew a purposely subdued picture’, remembering that ‘things heard of from a distance appear bigger than they are’. Phrases and words were weighed and considered. Past efforts were regarded with a critical eye. ‘The word “use” occurs four times in four lines’, he complained of one of his own articles in 1920, ‘I should never pass such a tenth rate sentence’.⁶³

Gandhi’s words offered a mixture of information, explanation, entreaty, and discipline. In each of these four ways they helped to combat common misconceptions among Westerners, thereby to hasten the self-government of Indians and to promote the capacity of non-violent methods.

First, they provided information. Gandhi believed that readers sought out his own newspapers for a ‘trustworthy account’ of his campaigns and of the conditions that inspired them. He composed press releases especially for inquiring journalists, and for news agencies themselves. Gandhi sent informative cables to expatriate Indians in the metropole. When marching and protesting he employed early forms of the sound bite. And he eagerly embraced any opportunity to use the radio, or directly to answer his critics in hostile newspapers.⁶⁴

In consequence, Gandhi’s own words echoed across the expanse that separated East from West. Alongside the photographs and the mocking caricatures of the Mahatma, small phrases and oracular insights from his lips were carried, too. Even if stale or suppressed, Swarajist perspectives on the Indian struggle did eventually escape the Raj. And with the

⁶² The Mahatma downplaying his writing is noted in Weber, *Gandhi as Disciple and Mentor*, p. 248. On writing in Natal campaign: Gandhi, *An Autobiography or the Story of My Experiments with Truth*, p. 126. For newspapers – his first newspaper, *Indian Opinion*, was established in 1903 – see Doke, *M.K. Gandhi*, p. 66. For Gandhi flattering himself: Gandhi, cited in Weber, *Gandhi as Disciple and Mentor*, p. 248.

⁶³ For Gandhi on writing for metropolitan audiences: M.K. Gandhi, *An Autobiography or the Story of My Experiments with Truth*, p. 126. For his self-criticism: Mahadev H. Desai, *Day-to-Day with Gandhi*, volume 2, Rajghat: Sarva Seva Sangh Prakashan, n.d., p. 150.

⁶⁴ On seeking a trustworthy account: M.K. Gandhi, *An Autobiography or the Story of My Experiments with Truth*, p. 214. On composing press releases for journalists, see the example cited in Pyarelal and Sushila Nayar, *In Gandhiji’s Mirror*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1991, p. 15; for news agencies, see, for example, ‘Gandhi Attributes Success to Prayer’, *New York Times*, 1 November 1931. On sending cables: Jha, *Civil Disobedience and After*, p. 94. On the use of the soundbite, see the argument in David Hardiman, *Gandhi: In His Time and Ours*, p. 253. For his use of radio: ‘Gandhi to Talk to USA’, *Daily Herald*, 5 September 1931. For answering critics in newspapers, see, for example, M.K. Gandhi, ‘What I Want’, *Daily Mail*, 19 September 1931.

Mahatma so consistently loquacious and artful, his message could not be perpetually contained.

Over time, many Westerners began to meet Gandhi through the agency of his own words. This was the experience of Labour MP Wilfred Wellock, for example:

Every few weeks I sent to Indian publishers for parcels of books. In one of these parcels was a badly-printed pamphlet on very cheap paper, entitled 'Indian Home Rule', by Gandhi. The cost was a few coppers. I read it greedily. I still have it, marked on almost every page. I knew at once that I had discovered a seer and a prophet, and set out to learn all I could about him. From that time, I have followed Gandhi's comings and goings.⁶⁵

Similarly, Madeleine Slade, the famous daughter of a British admiral, remembered first discovering Gandhi in a small shop located near the British Museum, where she could consult and buy Indian books. She also subscribed to Gandhi's weekly, *Young India*. American preacher John Haynes Holmes found Gandhi's name 'by chance' in a magazine article early in the 1920s. Shortly afterward he was corresponding with the Mahatma, and reading his journals, too: 'Soon I was receiving the weekly copies of *Young India*. How excited I was when the chapters of his autobiography began to appear in the columns of his paper.'⁶⁶

Of course, none of Gandhi's publications reached an immediately large audience in the West. However, pacifists read them, when they could. Gandhi's newspapers were also cited in a number of metropolitan reports. And his autobiography was reprinted in the American weekly, *Unity*. C.F. Andrews edited Gandhi's writings for Western readers in the early 1930s. Unitarian minister Homer Jack repeated the task, more comprehensively, in the mid-1950s. Gandhi's *Collected Works* would not be published until the years beginning in the late 1950s, and this mammoth undertaking (around a hundred volumes) would take several decades to complete. Consequently, Westerners engaged with only a fraction of the Mahatma's many writings. Nonetheless, sympathetic Westerners used those sources that were available to contest the claims of Gandhi's opponents, on occasion. By the late 1930s, some of them began to claim that the great soul's writings had changed 'the hearts and minds of men'. And they quoted his aphorisms repeatedly.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Wilfred Wellock, 'The Key to Peace', *Peace News*, 13 February 1948, p. 2.

⁶⁶ For Slade, see Slade, *The Spirit's Pilgrimage*, p. 61 (she had corresponded with Rolland, and was eagerly awaiting his biography of Gandhi). For Holmes: John Haynes Holmes, 'In London and Delhi', in Chandrashanker Shukla (ed.), *Reminiscences of Gandhiji*, Bombay: Vora and Co. Publishers, 1951, p. 119.

⁶⁷ For pacifist disappointment on delays in arrival: n.a., 'The Current of Affairs', *Christian Pacifist*, March 1942, p. 43. For citing Gandhi's newspapers: 'India's Struggle for Home

But Gandhi wanted to do more than inform. His words were also designed to explain events that must have seemed bewildering and alien and motives that were unfamiliar to the people of the Occident. When his comments were misinterpreted, Gandhi attempted immediately to clarify. The Mahatma tried to explain to Westerners that he harboured no ill will towards them. He emphasised that the aim of Indian protesters was not to embarrass, still less to wound. Gandhi further aimed to differentiate his own actions from the methods of 'ordinary political agitation', and to outline the importance of some of his less-dramatic activities, such as the education of children and the practice of spinning.⁶⁸

Mostly, Gandhi sought a dialogue. The Mahatma welcomed any opportunity to explain his acts to Westerners. For the Indian leader, this necessarily involved the prospect of criticism and debate. As he wrote to correspondent Dorothy E. Newman in London, in April 1933,

I am glad that [Gandhi's newspaper] *Harijan* is proving useful to so many foreign friends. If you are not a blind reader, as you say you are not, you will sometimes tell me as gently as you like, or as bluntly as you can, wherein you differ. For, it is the criticism of friends which I treasure and by which I profit most.⁶⁹

Rule' *Literary Digest*, 25 December 1920, in Chatfield, *The Americanization of Gandhi*, p. 81, cites *Young India*; W.W. Pearson, 'Gandhi: An Indian Saint – A Personal Study', *New Republic*, 27 July 1921, in Chatfield, *The Americanization of Gandhi*, p. 104, also cites *Young India*. On reprinting the autobiography: John Haynes Holmes, 'In London and Delhi', in Shukla, *Reminiscences of Gandhiji*, p. 119. Roy Walker calls Andrews's editing effort 'slightly muddled and occasionally diluted'; see Roy Walker, 'Reflections on Non-violence (1)', *Christian Pacifist*, January 1946, p. 748. Homer Jack's effort is Homer Jack (ed.), *The Gandhi Reader*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1956. For an example of using Gandhi's writings see e.g. Horace Alexander, 'India's Tragedy', *New World*, June 1930, pp. 1–2. For claims on Gandhi's writings as changing others: J. Middleton Murry, 'Thoughts on Nonviolence', *Peace News*, 7 May 1938, p. 7. For quoting aphorism, for example, 'Gandhi's Lesson', *Peace News*, 8 August 1947, p. 2; Kathleen Rawlins, 'Invincible Nonviolence', *Peace News*, 21 November 1952, p. 5.

⁶⁸ For Gandhi's attempted clarification: Jha, *Civil Disobedience and After*, p. 111. For attempts to explain to Westerners, see e.g. 'The Swadeshi Vow – I', *New India*, 19 April 1919, pp. 338–41, in Raghavan Iyer (ed.), *The Moral and Political Writings of Mahatma Gandhi*, volume 3: *Non-violent Resistance and Social Transformation*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987. On emphasising aim not to embarrass, see Gandhi's evidence before the Hunter Inquiry, 1920, as relayed in Desai, *Day-to-Day with Gandhi*, volume 2, p. 120. On aiming not to wound, see Gandhi's emphasis on non-violence in cable sent: Jha, *Civil Disobedience and After*, p. 94. For Gandhi's attempt to differentiate his actions from conventional political agitation, see again Gandhi's evidence before the Hunter Inquiry, 1920, as relayed in Desai, *Day-to-Day with Gandhi*, volume 2, p. 120. For reference to less dramatic activities: 'The Mahatma Talks', *Daily Herald*, 7 November 1931.

⁶⁹ Gandhi to Dorothy E. Newman (London), 13 April 1933, Swarthmore College Peace Collection, Jane Addams Peace Library, Swarthmore College, CDGB India, Gandhi, MK, Box 1 of 6., Folder: Gandhi letters: Miscellaneous.

The Indian leader was as good as his word. Such contentious exchanges often structured the pages of his own newspapers. Westerners would write in with questions, and Gandhi would attempt to explain. The ‘freer and fuller the criticism’, Gandhi argued, ‘the lighter and better will my work be’. In the absence of such questions, opposing positions could be imagined and debated. Like a Socratic dialogue, Gandhi’s prose was animated by persistent, critical interaction.⁷⁰

Such deliberative openness could be disconcerting to those more familiar with the hard certainties of institutional realpolitik. British readers such as the pioneering feminist Maude Royden sometimes took a while to adjust:

I can only say that, at first, I used to read with some anxiety the questions put to the Mahatma and the answers given by him, as reported in *Harijan*; but now do so in the joyful confidence that he will never shirk or evade any difficulty at all. Questions put by Dr. J.R. Mott or by Kagawa or by Pierre Cerésole – all will be met with absolute sincerity.⁷¹

Gandhi’s love of dialogue was evident elsewhere. He embraced the chance to debate with Western journalists. He bravely ventured to Lancashire to talk with the mill-hands made workless by his boycott of Western cloth:

‘I shall talk to everybody who desires to talk to me,’ he [Gandhi] said, ‘I should be extremely glad to go to Lancashire if Lancashire wants to see me. People say I should be lynched. Well, if people in Lancashire believe I am responsible for their troubles, perhaps they will lynch me.’⁷²

The Mahatma also answered the questions of ashram schoolgirls for hours at a time. He responded to newspaper criticisms with quick-fire letters, even if it was pacific friends who had been mocked, and not Gandhi himself. And he explained his meaning to Western interpreters, repeatedly. This was a practice that Horace Alexander remembered, somewhat wistfully, in the later 1960s:

During his lifetime I recall that I would sometimes say to him: ‘You mean this, don’t you?’ And he would reply: ‘No, you have misunderstood me.’ Now he

⁷⁰ Gandhi on criticism: Gandhi to Horace Alexander, 31 March 1933, Horace Alexander Papers, DG 140, Swarthmore College Peace Collection, Jane Addams Memorial Peace Library, Swarthmore College. For an argument concerning ‘Socratic dialogue’, see Hardiman, *Gandhi: In His Time and Ours*, p. 7.

⁷¹ Maude Royden, ‘An Englishwoman’s Faith’, in Radhakrishnan, *Mahatma Gandhi: Essays and Reflections*, p. 255.

⁷² For Gandhi debating with Western journalists, see, for example, Claire Sheridan, ‘The Great Little Mahatma’, in Radhakrishnan, *Mahatma Gandhi: Essays and Reflections*, p. 272. For Gandhi on Lancashire: H.J. Greenwall, ‘Gandhi Arrives To-day’, *Daily Express*, 12 September 1931.

is not here to check what I have written, so I can only warn the reader not to assume that I have always got it right.⁷³

Of course, not everyone was convinced by Gandhi's words. But as portraitist Margaret Bourke-White admitted, 'While frequently I did not agree with Gandhi's point of view, talking with him helped me understand it.'⁷⁴

The aim was emphatically not instruction, but mutual understanding. When Westerners directly requested tutelage from Gandhi, he invariably parried such appeals. As the Mahatma put it to the Peace Pledge Union of Britain in the dark days of June 1939, 'I cannot go beyond saying that you should act in accordance with your own lights.'⁷⁵

In contrast, when Westerners raised problems or pointed to ambiguities, then Gandhi embraced the opportunity to deepen the exchange. As the *Yorkshire Post* argued, 'In discussion he is perfectly frank, and the more frank and outspoken his interlocutors happen to be the more he likes them and the more able his dialectics become.'⁷⁶ Chances to learn from Westerners were even more treasured. This was most evident when English social reformer Muriel Lester, a long-term visitor to Gandhi's Sabarmati ashram, proffered an invitation to the great Indian:

I blurted out the question: 'Bapu, please will you come to England?'

'What would be the good?' he replied. 'We here in India have not yet experienced such success with our non-resistance methods as to justify my coming to England to tell you good people there anything that would be of use to you.'

I rocked back on my heels, the better to regard his face. 'But I don't want you to come to England to teach us,' I assured him.

'No?' he queried tentatively. 'And what is it you want me to come for?'

'I want you to come over to England to learn from us,' I announced. His face glowed with delight. 'Quite right, quite right,' he ejaculated. 'It would give me great joy to meet your people, to talk with your stalwarts, and to exchange experiences ...'⁷⁷

Far from direction, Gandhi most often addressed Westerners in a mood of entreaty or supplication. Before commencing direct action, the Mahatma

⁷³ On responding to newspaper criticism note, for example, that Gandhi answered criticisms of English pacifists made in the *Statesman* (Delhi) with an article later printed in *Peace News*, 3 October 1936. The Alexander quote is from Alexander, *Gandhi through Western Eyes*, p.x.

⁷⁴ Margaret Bourke-White, *Portrait of Myself*, London: Collins, 1964, p. 295.

⁷⁵ Gandhi to Stuart Morris of the PPU, 17 June 1939, cited in Stuart Morris, 'Gandhi's Challenge', *Bulletin of the Non-violence Commission of the Peace Pledge Union*, no. 1, 1957, p. 2.

⁷⁶ 'Calling on London', *Yorkshire Post*, 8 September 1931.

⁷⁷ See Muriel Lester, *My Host the Hindu*, London: Williams and Norgate, 1931, pp. 53–4.

always thought it 'proper' to 'wait upon' the directors of the Raj.⁷⁸ Often this was in person, but sometimes it was by letter, too. Muriel Lester outlined the procedure with enthusiastic brevity in some of her correspondence from the Sabarmati ashram in October 1926: 'He never takes up a course unless he's studied it thro[ugh] and sees it is utterly right. Then he goes to the opposition and lets them know what he's doing.'⁷⁹ Such approaches were artfully calculated to foster amity and to banish belligerence. Gandhi began his most famous letter to the Viceroy, of 2 March 1930, with a promise of harmlessness:

My personal faith is absolutely clear. I cannot intentionally hurt anything that lives, much less fellow human beings, even though they may do the greatest wrong to me and mine. Whilst, therefore, I hold the British rule to be a curse, I do not intend harm to a single Englishman or to any legitimate interest he may have in India.⁸⁰

Moreover, Reginald Reynolds, another Western guest at Gandhi's ashram, specially delivered this letter. The Mahatma described Reynolds as 'a young English friend who believes in the Indian cause and is a full believer in non-violence'. As Reynolds later remembered:

My taking this letter was, in fact, intended to be symbolic of the fact that this was not merely a struggle between the Indians and the British. By using an English courier instead of a postage stamp Bapu had deliberately dramatised this fact for all the world to know.⁸¹

A closer inspection of Gandhi's peremptory addresses confirms that he mostly sought to persuade and to beseech, certainly not to threaten or cajole. At these moments, the Indian leader's favourite words were 'conversion' and 'appeal'. Peaceful and pleading dispositions echo from speech to letter, from interview to statement. 'I shall bend before the Englishmen ... if only they show a change of heart', Gandhi promised in 1924, evoking the prospect of future supplication. 'By self-suffering I seek to convert, never to destroy', the *New York Times* quoted Gandhi, in April 1930. 'We are out to convert the administrators', he repeated in 1937. Later, he would appeal to 'every Briton, wherever he may be', in

⁷⁸ Gandhi, *An Autobiography or the Story of My Experiments with Truth*, p. 302.

⁷⁹ Muriel Lester, 'Letter 3' (Form letter) 7–14 October 1926, Sabarmati, Folder: 'Correspondence and form letters written from India, ca. 1926–27', Muriel Lester Papers, CDGB Muriel Lester, Box 1, Swarthmore College Peace Collection, Jane Addams Memorial Peace Library, Swarthmore College.

⁸⁰ M.K. Gandhi to Viceroy (Lord Irwin), 2 March 1930, India Office Library, MSS EUR C 152 24.

⁸¹ For Gandhi on Reynolds: M.K. Gandhi to Viceroy (Lord Irwin), 2 March 1930, India Office Library, MSS EUR C 152 24. For Reynolds's reminiscence: Reginald Reynolds, *To Live in Mankind*, p. 51.

an effort to promote the power of non-violence. As Gandhi put it more fully, 'My non-violence demands universal love and you are no small part of it. It is that love which prompted my appeal to you.'⁸²

But if Gandhi's words to Europeans were most often conciliatory and even pleading, then his tone changed markedly when addressing the men and women of India themselves. As Partha Chatterjee has argued, Gandhi's politics aimed at involving the peasantry in a struggle 'wholly conceived and directed by others'.⁸³ Here, he spoke as a master, not a suppliant: his words invariably invoked the necessity of discipline and the prospect of sacrifice and control.

From the Rowlatt satyagraha of the early 1920s, Gandhi became increasingly fearful of the violence of 'mobs' and 'half-educated' masses.⁸⁴ After the murders of Chauri Chaura, he announced a 'Himalayan' error and a pained discovery to the world:

he only is able and attains the right to offer civil disobedience who has known how to offer voluntary and deliberate obedience to the laws of the state in which he is living.⁸⁵

In consequence, discipline became his enduring preoccupation. The Mahatma henceforth imposed arduous tests and controls upon those who aspired to be his most loyal followers. Indeed, as Joseph S. Alter outlined in *Gandhi's Body*, the Indian leader's repeated experiments with sexual self-control, health and diet were not simply undertaken for his own perfection. They were also organised so that 'others might learn from them', and might be inspired to embrace 'a regimen of self-discipline' themselves.⁸⁶

⁸² On Gandhi bending: 'Gandhi Admits Loss of His Power in India', *New York Times*, 24 November 1924. On self-suffering: Gandhi in *Young India*, cited in 'Gandhi's Mystic Aims in His Indian March', *New York Times*, 6 April 1930. On seeking conversion: extract from *Harijan*, reproduced in 'Nonviolence', *Peace News*, 9 October 1937. On an appeal to 'every Briton': "'Non-violence" against Hitler, Mr. Gandhi's Strange Advice', *The Times*, 4 July 1940. For Gandhi on universal love: Gandhi, cited in 'Resist Aggression without Arms', *Peace News*, 19 July 1940.

⁸³ Partha Chatterjee, 'The Moment of Manoeuvre: Gandhi and the Critique of Civil Society', in *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse*, London: Zed Books for the United Nations University, 1986, p. 124.

⁸⁴ Chatterjee, 'The Moment of Manoeuvre', p. 107. For example, note Gandhi's criticism of mobs in Bombay in his leaflet 'A Deep Stain', issued 13 November 1921, and published in *Young India*, 24 November 1921, in *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* (CWMG), available at www.gandhiserve.org/cwmg/cwmg.html, volume 25, no. 52, pp. 125–30; criticism of 'mob frenzy' and 'mob violence' in 'To Co-Workers', CWMG, volume 25, no. 61, pp. 140–4; and mourning that a crowd 'lost self-control' in 'A Mock Trial', from *Young India*, 25 August 1921, CWMG, volume 24, no. 79, pp. 131–3.

⁸⁵ See 'The Duty of Satyagrahis', in *Young India*, 9 July 1919, CWMG, volume 18, no. 157, pp. 183–4. As discussed in Chatterjee, 'The Moment of Manoeuvre', p. 105.

⁸⁶ Alter, *Gandhi's Body*, p. 8.

Inmates of Gandhi's ashram were greeted with eleven ashram vows: adherence to truth, non-violence, celibacy, equal respect for all religions, control of the palate, fearlessness, manual labour, locally produced goods, and the removal of untouchability, and rejection of stealing and possession. These controls were designed to create a 'band of pure-hearted volunteers'. Gandhi began his salt satyagraha with only these hardened leaders, and this was true of his wartime civil disobedience, too.⁸⁷

Looser recruits to Gandhi's cause were also subject to stern directives. The programme of 'constructive work' – comprising the boycott of foreign cloth, schools, law courts and governmental service, the use of the spinning-wheel and the removal of untouchability – was also calculated as a form of discipline. In interviews, Gandhi repeatedly advanced these campaigns as an antidote to violence. Indeed, this was the Mahatma's explanation for the comparative absence of 'mobocracy' in the popular involvement of the early 1930s:

My friends were nervous when we finished at Bardoli in 1922 and then renewed the struggle in 1931. But it was just the right time. And the suspension proved to be good. During the intervening years we were not idle. The people were imbibing our ideas. Our constructive work went on, and it told. The masses assimilated the meaning and spirit of the movement ...⁸⁸

Gandhi's words celebrated the arts of discipline and submission to the cause. Such advocacy redoubled after the launch of civil disobedience. Participants in Swarajist campaigns were repeatedly ordered to maintain nonviolence:

[I]f sent to prison ... go piously, if assaulted ... bear it cheerfully, if shot ... die peacefully.

[I]f you have the slightest apprehension in your mind that picketing cannot be done without resorting to excess, you had better be done with it.

[I]t is a serious delusion to think that violence can help non-violence.⁸⁹

And if Gandhi's words were denied? What if his orders were not fully respected? Then the Mahatma's will would be enforced by more desperate devices, and even by non-violent sacrifice itself.

⁸⁷ For a discussion of Gandhi's vows, see Weber, *Gandhi as Disciple and Mentor*, p. 123. On the aim to create pure volunteers: Gandhi, cited in Chatterjee, 'The Moment of Manoeuvre', p. 105. On the salt satyagraha and ashram inmates, see Weber, *On the Salt March*, p. 105.

⁸⁸ For a definition of constructive work: 'Mr Gandhi's Campaign', *The Times*, 22 March 1930. For an example of Gandhi seeking an antidote to violence in interviews: Desai, *Day-to-Day with Gandhi*, volume 4, p. 263. The quote on constructive work is Gandhi, cited in 'India's Next Step: An Interview with Mahatma Gandhi', *New Leader*, 27 November 1931.

⁸⁹ The citations are, in sequence: *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 29 September 1924; 'Picketing Excesses', *The Times*, 23 February 1931; 'Political Violence', *The Times*, 7 August 1931.

When Gandhi's followers misbehaved, then he fasted in penance. The length and seriousness of the fast was proportionate to the apparent willfulness of the populace. When the crowd 'lost its head', Gandhi fasted for twenty-four hours in every week. The Chauri Chaura tragedy solicited a five-day fast of penance. When more serious lapses loomed, he fasted for a week, three weeks, and even threatened an 'eternal fast'. Such measures were open to easy mockery. The comic poem *The Saint and Satan* (1930) parodied Gandhi's efforts in a vicious rhyming couplet:

It was a shocking orgy of non-vi'lence! –
I simply had to keep a three weeks' silence.⁹⁰

But beyond denials of speech and appetite, Gandhi possessed still deeper disciplines. If the masses refused to respond to his will, then he could simply call the whole thing off. The Mahatma's words could suspend civil disobedience. He exercised this prerogative twice in the early 1920s, and again a decade later. On these occasions, the Indian leader claimed the authority of the scientist, as well as the clout of a popular tribune. Witness his words in 1934:

I claim to be a Satyagraha expert in the making. I have need to be far more careful than the expert surgeon, who is complete master of his science ... Introspection prompted by conversations with Ashram inmates has led me to the conclusion that I must advise all Congressmen to suspend civil resistance for Swaraj ... They should leave it to me alone. It should be resumed by others in my lifetime only under my direction, unless one arises claiming to know the science better than I do.⁹¹

What to make of such a man, and of such a movement? As the decades passed, it became harder to insist upon Gandhi's resemblance to the firebrand or the insurgent. An agitator whose sentences were clipped and slow? A rebel who cordially announced his plans in advance? What kind of revolutionary would rather quieten the mob than risk the suffering of an enemy? Was a man who sought the friendship of his apparent oppressors really a demagogue? These were not the familiar postures of the Leninists of Russia or the Sinn Feiners of Dublin. At first, such discrepancies might be suppressed. Eventually, they undermined the most obvious correspondences between the Mahatma of Ahmedabad and the

⁹⁰ For Gandhi's twenty-four-hour fast: Rolland, *Mahatma Gandhi*, p. 124. On Chauri Chaura fast: 'Mr. Gandhi Does Penance', *The Times*, 15 February 1922. For one-week, three-week and eternal fasts: 'Mr. Gandhi to Fast for a Week, Expiation of Violence', *The Times*, 7 August 1934; *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 29 September 1924; *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 14 April 1930. The poem is Moolson, *The Saint and Satan*, 15.

⁹¹ Gandhi's actions in the 1920s were celebrated in contemporary Western accounts, such as: Rolland, *Mahatma Gandhi*, pp. 124–8. The citation is 'Disobedience in India, Mr. Gandhi's Change of Tactics, Suspension Advised', *The Times*, 9 April 1934.

dictator of Moscow. Gandhism, it became clear, was a different breed: a singular and perplexing form of political action.

Of course, for the beleaguered Swarajist of the early 1930s, the prospect of eventual vindication was rather cold comfort. In the unruliness of the campaign, every misunderstanding counts. Sacrifices unreported seem in vain; stories censored and delayed bitterly disappoint. When Gandhi was misquoted and his campaigns distorted, then many Indians teetered on the edge of despair. The iron heel of the British seemed often stronger than the turning cheek of the non-resisting colonial.

Taking a longer view, however, the truth of Gandhi's actions could not be permanently contained. The Mahatma's own voice always rose to contest distortion or dishonesty. When his corrections were ignored, he repeated them; if his motives were impugned, he carried on in his principled and indefatigable way. Finally, the truth of his particular form of non-violence won out. Not everyone agreed with Gandhi's conduct, still less his cause. Eventually, however, no Westerner could doubt that his actions were original; many confessed that they might even be important, too.

Even so enlightened, Westerners were still far from fully apprised of the ways of the Mahatma. They largely remained imprisoned in that version of Gandhism propagated by Western newspapers, expressed in hastily compiled monographs, or, more rarely, disclosed in more sincere studies of the satyagraha form. When Gandhi was quoted, it was invariably partial; when he was read, it was selectively. The Mahatma's *Collected Works* would not be compiled until the years beginning in the later 1950s. Necessarily, therefore, the portrait of Gandhism was incomplete.

As the European powers plunged into a second world war, it became obvious that Gandhi offered a different way. But what was it, exactly? How did these confusing acts concatenate into a coherent world view? If Gandhi claimed to be 'non-violent' or 'non-resisting', then what did these terms mean? What about this strange word, 'satyagraha'? Why did some Swarajists use this term? And was it the same as the familiar language of 'passive resistance'? What, in short, made 'Gandhism' an '-ism'?

Those Westerners most intrigued by the Mahatma were forced to grapple with these questions against a background of misinformation, limited sources, and sometimes frightening political events. It is to their difficult and fascinating struggles that the succeeding chapter turns.