

# Before the Salt March

- Date** ■ March 11, 1930  
**Place** ■ Ahmedabad, Gujarat, British India  
**Type of Source** ■ Speech (originally given in Gujarati)  
**Author** ■ Mohandas K. Gandhi, the Mahatma  
**Historical Context** ■ Mohandas Gandhi introduced a radical new tactic to the struggle for Indian self-government, *satyagraha* (truth-force) or non-violent resistance. In 1930 the Indian National Congress, led by Gandhi, declared independence. Their first action against the British rule was the salt tax, which represented British control over the survival of everyone in India. Gandhi and seventy-eight followers marched 240 miles from Ahmedabad to Dandi on the ocean. There he began illegally making salt. Across India, hundreds of thousands joined the protests. The British leadership began negotiating with Gandhi in 1931, though a final agreement was not reached until 1948.

**I**n all probability this will be my **last speech** to you. Even if the Government allows me to march tomorrow morning, this will be my last speech on the sacred banks of the **Sabarmati**. Possibly these may be the last words of my life here.

I have already told you yesterday what I had to say. Today I shall confine myself to what you should do after my companions and I are arrested. The programme of the march to **Jalalpur** must be fulfilled as originally settled. The enlistment of the volunteers for this purpose should be confined to **Gujarat** only. From what I have been and heard during the last fortnight, I am inclined to believe that the stream of civil resisters will flow unbroken.

But let there be not a semblance of breach of peace even after all of us have been arrested. We have resolved to utilize all our resources in the pursuit of an exclusively nonviolent struggle. Let no one commit a wrong in anger. This is my hope and prayer. I wish these words of mine reached every nook and corner of the land. My task shall be done if I perish and so do my comrades. It will then be for the **Working Committee of the Congress** to show you the way and it will be up to you to follow its lead. So long as I have reached Jalalpur, let nothing be done in **contravention** to the authority vested in me by the Congress. But once I am arrested, the whole responsibility shifts to the Congress. No one who believes in non-violence, as a creed, need, therefore, sit still. My compact with the Congress ends as soon as I am arrested. In that case volunteers, wherever possible, civil disobedience of salt should be started. These laws can be violated in three ways. It is an offence to manufacture salt wherever there are facilities for doing so. The possession and sale of **contraband** salt, which includes natural salt or **salt earth**, is also an offence. The purchasers of such salt will be equally guilty. To carry away the natural salt deposits on the seashore is likewise violation of law. So is the **hawking** of such salt. In short, you may choose any one or all of these devices to break the salt monopoly.

## last speech

*Gandhi had earlier sworn that he would not return to his ashram (commune) until independence was won.*

## Sabarmati

*the major river in Gujarat province and the site of Gandhi's ashram*

## Jalalpur

*the coastal subdistrict where the village of Dandi is located*

## Gujarat

*an Indian province on the Arabian Sea on the present India-Pakistan boundary*

## Working Committee of the Congress

*the executive committee of the Indian National Congress*

**contravention**  
*opposition*

**contraband**  
*forbidden, illegal*

**salt earth**  
*salt mixed with dirt*

**hawking**  
*selling*

## Before the Salt March

We are, however, not to be content with this alone. There is no ban by the Congress and wherever the local workers have self-confidence other suitable measures may be adopted. I stress only one condition, namely, let our pledge of truth and nonviolence as the only means for the attainment of **Swaraj** be faithfully kept. For the rest, every one has a free hand. But, that does not give a **license** to **all and sundry** to carry on their own responsibility. Wherever there are local leaders, their orders should be obeyed by the people. Where there are no leaders and only a handful of men have faith in the programme, they may do what they can, if they have enough self-confidence. They have a right, nay it is their duty, to do so. The history of the [struggle] is full of instances of men who rose to leadership, by sheer force of self-confidence, bravery and tenacity. We too, if we sincerely aspire to Swaraj and are impatient to attain it, should have similar self-confidence. Our ranks will swell and our hearts strengthen, as the number of our arrests by the Government increases.

Much can be done in many other ways besides these. The **Liquor** and **foreign cloth** shops can be picketed. We can refuse to pay taxes if we have the requisite strength. The lawyers can give up practice. The public can boycott the law courts by refraining from litigation. Government servants can resign their posts. In the midst of the despair reigning all round people quake with fear of losing employment. Such men are unfit for Swaraj. But why this despair? The number of Government servants in the country does not exceed a few hundred thousands. What about the rest? Where are they to go? Even free India will not be able to accommodate a greater number of public servants. A Collector then will not need the number of servants he has got today. He will be his own servant. Our starving millions can by no means afford this enormous expenditure. If, therefore, we are sensible enough, let us bid good-bye to Government employment, no matter if it is the post of a judge or a **peon**. Let all who are co-operating with the Government in one way or another, be it by paying taxes, **keeping titles**, or sending children to official schools, etc. withdraw their co-operation in all or as many ways as possible. Then there are **women** who can stand shoulder to shoulder with men in this struggle.

You may take it as my will. It was the message that I desired to impart to you before starting on the march or for the jail. I wish that there should be no **suspension or abandonment** of the war that commences tomorrow morning or earlier, if I am arrested before that time. I shall eagerly await the news that ten batches are ready as soon as my batch is arrested. I believe there are men in India to complete the work our **[sic]** begun by me. I have faith in the righteousness of our cause and the purity of our weapons. And where the means are clean, there **God** is undoubtedly present with His blessings. And where these three combine, there defeat is an impossibility. A **Satyagrahi**, whether free or incarcerated, is ever victorious. He is vanquished only, when he forsakes truth and nonviolence and turns a deaf ear to the inner voice. If, therefore, there is such a thing as defeat for even a Satyagrahi, he alone is the cause of it. God bless you all and keep off all obstacles from the path in the struggle that begins tomorrow.

Herff Jones | Nystrom

**Swaraj**  
*"self-rule;" Indian independence*

**license**  
*permission*

**all and sundry**  
*everyone*

**Liquor, foreign cloth**  
*Both of these products had been targets of the earlier satyagraha campaign.*

**peon**  
*a low-ranking worker such as a janitor or messenger*

**keeping titles**  
*retaining honors given by the British government*

**women**  
*The 78 with Gandhi were all men for tactical reasons. Despite this women quickly became a major part of the campaign.*

**suspension or abandonment**  
*In 1922, Gandhi ended an earlier satyagraha campaign when he feared the campaign was turning to violence.*

**[sic]**  
*"[sic]" is used to identify words that were misspelled in the original document.*

**God**  
*Although Hindus have many gods and goddesses, these deities are seen as aspects of the same God. Gandhi believed that this God was the same as the one worshipped by other religions.*

**Satyagrahi**  
*Follower of non-violence belief*

## *Before the Salt March*

**Source:** Mohandas K. Gandhi, "Before the Dandi March," *Wikisource*, November 10, 2010, <[http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/On\\_The\\_Eve\\_of\\_Dandi\\_March](http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/On_The_Eve_of_Dandi_March)> (May 10, 2011).