
UNIT 10 EMERGENCE OF GANDHI*

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10.1 INTRODUCTION

Emergence of Mahatma Gandhi in Indian politics marked the beginning of a new phase in the Indian national movement and this phase is described as the era of mass mobilisation. Before Gandhi's entry into Indian politics in 1915, and from 1893 to 1914, he was in South Africa where the racial arrogance shown by the colonial rulers and the exploitation of the local people made Gandhi to think seriously of taking up the battle against colonialism. In the course of his struggle in South Africa he developed his political philosophy based on non-violence and Satyagraha to give new direction to mass movement. His knowledge of India's rich cultural tradition and religious ideas and his reading of western thinkers like Leo Tolstoy, John Ruskin, Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau largely shaped his political ideas. Moving ahead from the early nationalist leaders Gandhi gave new meaning to nationalist politics through mass mobilisation. In this Unit, we will explain to you Gandhi's struggle in South Africa and the development of his political ideology. Then we will discuss Gandhi's intervention in the movements of peasants and workers at Champaran, Kheda and Ahmedabad. These three movements brought Gandhi closer to Indian national politics.

10.2 GANDHI AND HIS POLITICAL EXPERIMENT IN SOUTH AFRICA

'Truly speaking, it was after I went to South Africa that I became what I am now.' These words of Gandhi are of immense importance to understand his political philosophy and contribution to the Indian national movement. Gandhi was in South Africa from 1893 to 1914 and in between for brief interludes he came to India. In the course of his stay in South Africa he provided effective leadership to local Indians to fight against racial discrimination. It was in South Africa that he developed his philosophy of passive resistance and civil disobedience which was popularised later on as Satyagraha as an effective means of political mobilisation. After completing his degree in law from England, Gandhi reached Durban in 1893 as a young attorney to work for an Indian firm as a legal

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adviser to Indians living and working in South Africa. On his way to South Africa his painful personal experience of racial arrogance by the whites familiarised him with humiliations and sufferings that Indians were facing in South Africa.

Indians in South Africa at that time were primarily engaged in trading and many lacked not only education but also political sophistication. Gandhi tried to activate their political consciousness and to mobilise them for their rights and justice. Gandhi was instrumental in establishing the Natal Indian Congress in 1894. For creating public opinion in support of their grievances, he started a newspaper—the *Indian Opinion*. Through regular comments in the *Indian Opinion* and by drafting petitions to the Governments of Natal, India, and Britain Gandhi tried to create pressure on the local government against any form of discrimination. He represented the Indian merchants who questioned the applicability of Transvaal Law No. 3 of 1885 which restricted where they could trade and reside, and gave a petition to the Colonial Secretary signed by over 1,000 Indians. While visiting India in 1896 Gandhi was called back to South Africa to deal with a fresh problem of discriminatory legislation by the Natal Parliament which aimed at disfranchising Indians. When Gandhi returned to Durban in 1896 after a short visit to India, he decided to make a new experiment by moving away from urban comfort and settled at a communal settlement at Phoenix, north of Durban. In South Africa, Gandhi's reading of the writings of Leo Tolstoy, John Ruskin and Henry David Thoreau shaped his ideas on non-violent and civil disobedience movement. In 1906, the Transvaal government promulgated a new Act compelling registration of the colony's Indian population. Gandhi presiding over a mass protest meeting held in Johannesburg in that year adopted his new methodology of protest, Satyagraha, for the first time. He appealed to the gathered protesters to defy the new law and suffer the punishments for doing so, rather than going for any violent protest. The struggle continued for years and thousands of Indians, including Gandhi, were jailed. But still people refused to register. The public outcry finally forced South African General Jan Christiaan Smuts to negotiate a compromise with Gandhi and the government conceded to some of the demands. Gandhi's ideas of mass mobilisation, peaceful protest and the concept of Satyagraha matured during his struggle in South Africa and gave him the required confidence to provide leadership to the Indian national struggle. In the following section we will explain to you the political ideas of Gandhi and how he succeeded in integrating diverse sources in developing his political philosophy.

10.3 GANDHI'S POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

'Hind Swaraj', written by Gandhi in Gujarati in 1909, was proscribed by the Government of Bombay and then in 1910 it was published in an English translation in Johannesburg. The text written in the form of a dialogue gives a fair idea of Gandhi's political thought. Gandhi introduced the book in the following words: 'In my opinion it is a book which can be put into the hands of a child. It teaches the gospel of love in place of that of hate. It replaces violence with self-sacrifice. It pits soul force against brute force'.

In this book Gandhi held modern civilisation responsible for the growing urge for luxury and consumption resulting in inequality and poverty in society. Other issues addressed in 'Hind Swaraj' are the meaning of Swaraj, non-violent means

of achieving it, Satyagraha, importance of spirituality, etc. Passive resistance, which was used by Gandhi later on as the major weapon of his political movement, was explained by him in this text in the following words:

‘Passive resistance is a method of securing rights by personal suffering; it is the reverse of resistance by arms. When I refuse to do a thing that is repugnant to my conscience, I use soul-force. For instance, the Government of the day has passed a law which is applicable to me. I do not like it. If by using violence, I force the Government to repeal the law, I am employing what may be termed body force. If I do not obey the law and accept the penalty for its breach, I use soul-force. It involves sacrifice of self’.

Elaborating on non-violence Gandhi wrote: ‘Non-violence in its dynamic condition means conscious suffering. It does not mean meek submission to the will of the evil-doer, but it means the pitting of one’s whole soul against the will of the tyrant. Working under the law of our being, it is possible for a single individual to defy the whole might of an unjust empire to save his honour, his religion, his soul.’

Political ideas of Gandhi which one gets to know after reading this text were influenced both by Indian cultural tradition in which he was born and brought up and his readings of Western thinkers. He successfully integrated all diverse views in his philosophy to fight for India’s freedom and to make India self-reliant. A. L. Basham in an essay, ‘Traditional Influences on the Thought of Mahatma Gandhi’ has observed that the Western ideas mainly sharpened Gandhi’s concepts which he derived from Indian tradition. Explaining the three dominant concepts of Gandhian ideology, ‘Truth’, ‘Ahimsa’ and ‘Satyagraha’, Basham argues that classical Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, Bhakti movement stimulated Gandhi to make truth, ahimsa and Satyagraha as cardinal principles of his ideology. Basham concludes, ‘several of Gandhi’s concepts are fully in keeping with Indian tradition, and were probably developed from ideas which he absorbed in his childhood and youth, fertilized and brought to fruition by his contact with the West’. In his opinion compared to early Indian reformers greatness of Gandhian ideology lies in his skill of ‘harmonizing non-Indian ideas with the Hindu dharma, and giving them a thoroughly Indian character.’

Gandhi himself acknowledged the influences on his ideas of Western thinkers like Leo Tolstoy, John Ruskin. Gandhi read a number of other nineteenth century thinkers of Western civilisation which include Thomas Carlyle, Henry David Thoreau, Ralph Waldo Emerson and Robert Sherard. A list of such works forms appendix of ‘Hind Swaraj’. Tolstoy’s book ‘Kingdom of God is Within You’ and Ruskin’s ‘Unto This Last’ introduced him to the new meanings of society, state and politics. Being influenced by the teachings of Jesus in ‘The Sermon on the Mount’, Leo Tolstoy advocated for the acceptance of love as the core value of human life and rejected all forms and institutions of violence. He considered the State as the embodiment of coercion and force and stressed the value of peaceful resistance. Acknowledging the transformation brought by Tolstoy’s book Gandhi wrote: ‘It was forty years back when I was passing through a severe crisis of skepticism and doubt that I came across his book, ‘The Kingdom of God is Within You’, and was deeply impressed by it. I was at that time a believer in violence. Its reading cured me of my skepticism and made me a firm believer in ahimsa.’ Tolstoy’s view on society and the State had influenced Gandhi in deciding

his course of action in political movements in India. After reading Ruskin's 'Unto This Last' in his long train journey in South Africa in 1904 Gandhi wrote, 'It gripped me. Johannesburg to Durban was a twenty four hours' journey. The train reached there in the evening. I could not get any sleep that night. I determined to change my life in accordance with the ideals of the book.' Ruskin's idea made Gandhi to think about community living and commitment to work by self which motivated him to set up his first Ashram—the Phoenix Settlement—for community living. Gandhi translated this book by Ruskin into Gujarati and titled it 'Sarvodaya'. Gandhi was impressed by the doctrine of social organisation that Ruskin defended in his book and his passion for justice. There was also condemnation of a competitive social order and unjust economic system. Henry David Thoreau's book 'Essay on the Duty of Civil Disobedience' advanced irrefutable arguments against the capacity of organised government for producing evil in man and society. He argued for civil disobedience to resist the wrong laws of the State. Gandhi found in Thoreau and his writings his own belief in the virtue of passive resistance. It may not be possible to determine the exact role of Thoreau in the evolution of the Gandhian technique of Satyagraha because in a letter on September 10, 1935 Gandhi wrote, 'The statement that I had derived my idea of Civil Disobedience from the writings of Thoreau is wrong. The resistance to authority in South Africa was well advanced before I got the essay of Thoreau on Civil Disobedience. But the movement was then known as passive resistance. As it was incomplete I had coined the word Satyagraha.... When I saw the title of Thoreau's great essay, I began to use his phrase to explain our struggle to the English readers. But I found that even "Civil Disobedience" failed to convey the full meaning of the struggle. I therefore adopted the phrase Civil Resistance'.

The point needs to be noted is that the concepts of truth, Ahimsa, Satyagraha which are synonymous with Gandhian political movements in India are rooted in Indian cultural tradition as well as his acquaintance with the intellectual tradition of the West. Gandhi tried to synthesize the diverse ideas keeping in view the necessity of developing a broad based national movement in India. His technique was based upon certain principles which were not used in political movement earlier. Gandhi was well aware of criticism about contradictions in his ideas and his reply was, 'In my search after Truth I have discarded many ideas and learnt many new things.... I have no feeling that I have ceased to grow inwardly ... when anybody finds any inconsistency between any two writings of mine, if he has still faith in my sanity, he would do well to choose the later of the two on the same subject.' To face the challenges of oppression, violence and injustice created by the colonial rule, Gandhi appealed for a movement based on selflessness, courage and moral force to establish a new political order. Gandhian method of civil resistance assumed significant importance in India's struggle against colonialism and Satyagraha became an effective means to voice political as well as social protest. Commenting on Gandhian politics Judith Brown has observed that 'His ideal of service to those in need made it likely that he would only participate in politics when he felt that by so doing he could right 'wrongs' which people were suffering; but he, if any one, had the potential for reaching out to those beyond the political camp, to make the new style of institutional politics burst out of its early limitations, and to create a large political nation. What was more, in Satyagraha he had a technique ideally suited to work among those who were unaccustomed to institutional politics.' The context and complexities in

which Gandhi tried to forge unity among Indians to challenge the colonial rule, his concern for common people and efforts to bring masses in the mainstream national politics marked the beginning of a new phase of national movement. In the following section we will discuss that after coming back to India from South Africa in 1915 how Gandhi engaged himself in the struggle of peasants and workers against exploitation and created a space for himself to give new direction to the Indian national movement.

10.4 CHAMPARAN SATYAGRAHA

Gandhi's success in his movement against racial discrimination in South Africa made him famous in India as a leader who fought for the common people against the colonial rule. After coming back from South Africa, he initially decided to set up a base in Gujarat and to work for the welfare of people. National movement in India at that juncture was divided into two groups, Moderates and Extremists, and there were also people who believed in revolutionary actions to fight for freedom. There were also some people within Muslims who formed the Muslim League to work for the interests of Muslims alone. Given this background Gandhi tried to develop a political base by interacting with cross section of people. Politics of the Moderates or the Extremists could not convince Gandhi for achieving Swaraj nor did he have any conviction in the politics of violence. His belief after his successful political movement in South Africa in the strength of Satyagraha encouraged him to wait for suitable opportunity to launch Satyagraha in India. The movement of peasants at Champaran in Bihar against indigo planters in 1917 provided Gandhi that desired opportunity.

Champaran was in North Bihar having large villages and two major towns—Motihari and Bettiah. Being covered by the permanent settlement of 1793 three proprietors—Bettiah, Ramnagar and Madhuban Estates—controlled most of the lands of the district but the landlords instead of directly managing the lands leased out lands to temporary tenure-holders. The European tenure-holders got hold of a sizeable section of cultivable lands and because of big profit they started cultivating indigo. The European planters cultivated the lands either directly or through peasant tenants but the tenants were the worst victims of the planter raj. In 1917 with the declining demand of indigo in the world market the pressure on the tenants increased and made them the worst victims of the slump in market. An official report of the period states that 'Everything the cultivator had to sell, rice, oil-seeds or gur, had either fallen or at least not risen in price, while everything he had to buy, cloths, salt, kerosene, had become extremely expensive'. Besides the general economic hardship of the tenants, the 'tinkathia' system caused immediate unrest among the cultivators. The name 'tinkathia' came from the arrangement in which three kathas per bigha of a peasant land holding was fixed for cultivation of indigo. Planters also insisted that in best cultivable lands indigo should be cultivated so that the production of crop is more. The price paid to the ryots was fixed based on the area of land not on the volume of crop production. This was the reason for pressurising the cultivators to cultivate indigo in good lands to get maximum crop. The cultivators also faced other forms of economic and social exploitation which made them agitated against the existing planter raj. The situation in Champaran was not much different from other parts of India where cultivators were facing various forms of exploitation. But it was Gandhi's intervention and leadership which made Champaran movement exceptional.

On the invitation of local Congress leader Raj Kumar Shukla, Gandhi came to Champaran in 1917 to have first hand experience of the plight of Champaran peasants. Local administration was aware of Gandhi's concern for the abolition of indentured labour and was not comfortable with Gandhi's presence in Champaran. After meeting the commissioner of the division Gandhi expressed his intention to look into the grievances of indigo cultivators as reported by local people. But the commissioner was of the opinion that Gandhi may provoke disturbances and wrote to the Chief Secretary, Government of Bihar and Orissa, asking permission to intern Gandhi on grounds of public safety under the Defence of India Rules. Gandhi was asked by the district magistrate of Champaran to quit Champaran as his presence might create a problem for public peace. Government action to Gandhi's presence in Champaran evoked protest from the Indian press and the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* wrote, 'So Mr. Gandhi has gained his point. The part which he has played in this sensational matter is no less important than what he did when he started his passive resistance campaign in South Africa. There he braved jail and the displeasure of the authorities in the cause of suffering humanity; here also he did the same.' Gandhi's simplicity and ability to reach common people in their language and his visit to the villages virtually made him the saviour in the eyes of masses. Gandhi demanded an enquiry by the government of the grievances of cultivators and asked the government to stop illegal exactions from cultivators. The Bihar government, under the pressure from the central government and much against its wish, agreed to appoint a commission which included Gandhi to look into the condition of Champaran peasants. The central government explained the rationale for agreeing to Gandhi's demand in a letter to the Bihar government: 'In appointing a Commission, to use your phrase, we are "heading off" Gandhi, but in doing so we avoid giving the appearance of shirking our responsibilities. We feel that it is more expedient to head him off than to lay him by the heels and thus give a handle to the suggestion that we are burking the whole enquiry'. Whatever be the logic behind the government action as a result of the Committee of Enquiry appointed by the government and the recommendations of this Enquiry Committee the Champaran Agrarian Act was made in 1917. The Act abolished the 'tinkathia' system and also partly addressed the grievances of the tenants. Although neither the planters nor the tenants were happy with this arrangement but definitely by his intervention Gandhi succeeded in making the struggle of Champaran peasants the first successful experiment of Satyagraha in Indian political movement.

Analysing Gandhi's style of leadership in Champaran movement Judith Brown has observed that 'Leaving aside the recognised politicians, he went into the villages dressed in the sort of clothes villagers wore, speaking the vernacular, espousing causes which concerned his rustic audience: while doing so he drew in the local business and educated men who had had little interest or influence in the Congress style of politics. He acted as go-between for these different groups, mediating between two tiers of public life, and in return secured a powerful provincial following. He succeeded where earlier politicians had failed or had not even attempted to mobilise support.' In the course of Champaran movement a group of local intelligentsia like Rajendra Prasad, Rajkumar Shukla, J. B. Kripalani, Indulal Yajnik, etc. came in close contact with Gandhi and worked as his emissaries among masses in organising movement. Till Champaran people in India knew Gandhi for his heroic struggle in South Africa and Gandhi

maintained a distance from the Congress-led national movement. Gandhi's participation in the movement of Champaran peasants and whatever success he achieved in compelling the government to redress the grievances of peasants created an image of Gandhi's leadership quality across different groups and different regions. The Champaran Agrarian Act of 1918 which was the immediate outcome of the movement brought some respite for the peasants and put certain restrictions on the planters.

10.5 KHEDA SATYAGRAHA

When Gandhi was engaged in leading the movement of peasants in Champaran, in his home state, Gujarat, peasants of Kheda mobilised themselves demanding revenue relief from the government. Hardship of the peasants was caused by crop failure and rise in prices. When the peasants were in debt trap the government was not ready to relieve them from revenue burden. The condition of peasants narrated by a peasant of Kheda in 1918 was as follows:

'The scourge of plague is upon us. Bajri which was sold at Rs.2 a maund in Sanvat 1916 (this should be A.D. 1916) is now selling at Rs.3 and ¼ a maund. Rice is at Rs.4 to 6 a maund. And under the law we may not keep Mowhra flowers. What shall the poor eat as they are thus placed and wherefrom shall they procure the money they pay you with? The prices of iron having gone up our plough shares and our implements have become very dear. Things that cost two or three rupees before are costing Rs.12 today. Labour also has become very expensive.'

In 1918 Gujarat suffered a lot because of severe plague and in Kheda alone the number of death was 16,740. Although there was a perception that the sympathizers of the Home Rule movement and the members of the Gujarat Sabha were behind the instigation of Kheda peasants but Gandhi made it clear in a public meeting in Bombay in 1918 that outsiders had no role in starting the agitation at Kheda. He said:

'This struggle was not started by outsiders. Nobody instigated the Kheda public to launch it. There is no political motive behind it. It did not originate with the Home Rulers or with any barristers or lawyers as some people allege.... It was started by the tillers themselves. After the political Conference at Godhra, some agriculturists in Kheda decided to request the Government for relief in view of the excessive rains. They wrote to me, informing me that they were legally entitled to relief and asking me whether I could help'.

Let us see how the movement started at Kheda and what Gandhi's intervention was. Mohanlal Kameshwar Pandya and Shankarlal Parikh, two local leaders of Kheda, seeing the discontent of local peasants, made appeal to the Bombay government not to force the peasants to pay revenues. They also sought help from outside leaders, particularly from the members of the Gujarat Sabha in Ahmedabad, in favour of the peasants. They also sent telegram to Gandhi for help who at that time was in Champaran. Gandhi advised them to be firm on their demands but could not personally come. The Gujarat Sabha in which Gandhi was president urged the Bombay government for exemption in some cases and also postponement of revenue demands. But not getting favourable response the Sabha asked the peasants not to pay land revenues. The government on its part

after an enquiry found no justification for suspension of revenues. Local press gave publicity to peasant discontent and their agitation for suspension of revenue demands. Gandhi reached Bombay on February 1918 and decided to make an inquiry personally of the hardship of peasants. Gandhi along with other members of the Gujarat Sabha visited the villages in Kheda and found justification in peasants demand for suspension of revenues. Getting no assurance from the government on the demands of peasants Gandhi decided at a meeting of the Gujarat Sabha to resort to Satyagraha. In a meeting at Nadiad on 22 March 1918 Gandhi urged the volunteers to take a sacred pledge which was as follows:

‘We the undersigned...solemnly declare that we shall not pay the assessment for the year whether it be wholly or in part; we shall leave it to the Government to take any legal steps they choose to enforce recovery of the same and we shall undergo all the sufferings that this may involve. We shall also allow our lands to be confiscated should they do so. But we shall not by voluntary payment allow ourselves to be regarded as liars and thus lose our self-respect’.

Gandhi personally toured villages of Kheda and encouraged Satyagrahis to stand by the pledge. Pandya and other local leaders were arrested for defying the government but they aroused lot of local support. Government was confident that Gandhi would not resort to violence by giving his professed faith in passive resistance. Government was also equally concerned for the needed support of Indians in the British war effort. Therefore the government ordered its local officials to be restrained in collection of revenues and not to confiscate lands. Gandhi decided to call off the Satyagraha without getting much concrete assurance from the government. It is viewed by some that Gandhi was not very happy with the developments in Kheda and there were also reports of violence in some areas disobeying Gandhi’s appeal to passive resistance. Judith Brown has commented that in Gandhi’s assessment ‘this satyagraha gave him no happiness, and lacked the essentials of a complete satyagraha triumph, since it did not leave the satyagrahis “stronger and more spirited” than they were before’. Gandhi’s assessment may not be completely true as one finds that this Satyagraha created ‘a place for him in the ranks of the politicians’. Satyagraha in Kheda failed in achieving its objectives but the effectiveness of Satyagraha was proved. Judith Brown has observed that ‘Kaira (Kheda) hammered home the lesson of Champaran that satyagraha could be used in virtually any situation of conflict, by literate and illiterate. It was a weapon for all seasons, and in Gandhi’s hands, directed by his personal ideology, it gave him the edge over conventional politicians with their techniques of petitions, public speeches and debates, which were more suitable for the educated’. David Hardiman has argued that neither peasants nor the government gained visible victory from Kheda Satyagraha. But ‘the real victory lay with Gandhi who had built for himself a powerful political base in the villages of Kheda district’. In future course of nationalist movement villages of Kheda became the strong support base of the nationalist movement.

10.6 AHMEDABAD SATYAGRAHA

In 1918 Gandhi organised another Satyagraha movement in Ahmedabad in support of mill workers. Ahmedabad was known for its textile industry and the textile mills in Ahmedabad witnessed steady growth in cloth production from 250 million yards in 1913-14 to 392 million yards in 1916-17 although the production declined in 1918-19. Labour was in demand to keep pace with rise in production. But the

outbreak of plague in Ahmedabad in 1917 forced many labours to leave Ahmedabad to save them from plague. The mill owners in order to retain workers paid bonus to them as high as 75% of their pay. But when the threat of plague was over, the mill owners decided to stop the plague bonus from February 1918. This created resentment among workers who were facing hardship because of rise in prices caused by the war. Gandhi was approached by one of the secretaries of the Gujarat Sabha about the discontent among Ahmedabad mill workers. Ambalal Sarabhai who was one of the owners of textile mills in Ahmedabad was known to Gandhi. Gandhi requested to Ambalal for enhancement of wages and decided to help in finding solution to workers problems. Presiding a meeting of workers Gandhi argued for amicable solution of workers grievances. Gandhi represented the workers in a board of arbitration formed by the local government. However many workers, defying the arbitration process, went for strike and the owners on their part declared lockout. Gandhi on his part after a careful study of the situation suggested for a reasonable increase of wages and prepared a pledge to be signed by the Satyagrahis. Through leaflets written during this period Gandhi wanted to educate the Satyagrahis about the principles of Satyagraha. Coming under the pressure of the mill owners when some workers started to join the mills Gandhi announced his decision of fasting to create moral pressure. What prompted the mill owners to settlement has different interpretations but a settlement was made in which 35% increase in wages was agreed. Fasting was conceived as a means of self-suffering to create moral pressure over the opponent and this was Gandhi's first use of fasting as a political weapon in India. Gandhi's intervention in Kheda and Ahmedabad in support of the demands of peasants and workers helped him in creating a political base in rural and urban areas of Gujarat. Judith Brown has observed that 'As Kaira (Kheda) drew Gandhi into the villages and fields of Gujarat, so Ahmedabad drew him into the towns and factories, distinguishing him even more clearly from the older political leaders in the scope of his interests and the character of his following.'

10.7 SIGNIFICANCE

Issues in Champaran, Kheda and Ahmedabad were different. The social and political context was also different. But in all three places Gandhi made use of Satyagraha as the mode of political mobilisation. Political climate in India at that time was definitely conducive for an effective political mobilisation against the British rule due to the Home Rule movement and the Lucknow Pact. But still a broader political mobilisation involving people of different interests was not visible. The movements in Champaran, Kheda and Ahmedabad were organized around local issues but Gandhi's intervention paved the ground for bringing masses into broader political movement. Gandhi's charisma no doubt helped in acceptance of his leadership by the local people for their movement against oppression, but Gandhi also brought with him a new language of protest. Rejecting violence as a form of protest and focusing on passive resistance, and moral force rather than physical force, as his political weapon Gandhi succeeded in giving a new direction to political mobilisation. There are different interpretations of Gandhi's leadership in the movements at Champaran, Kheda and Ahmedabad. Judith Brown has made the following observation:

'He worked in two regions notoriously backward according to the standards of the political leaders, and attracted large followings precisely because he took up issues which were outside their range of interests, and provided his adherents

with a technique of action appropriate to their needs but which the politicians feared to use. Though much has been made of Gandhi's charismatic appeal, it becomes clear that in Gujarat and Bihar his public image was no simple or single one. He appealed to different groups for different reasons and different ways, and the pattern of his leadership was far more complicated than the manipulation of an adulatory audience. In certain areas where he was personally known, his appeal to the lowest groups in society was temporarily charismatic, as he became virtually a local messiah; but for his real work he relied on small groups of influential local men whom he educated to be his "subcontractors" in rallying support and organising his campaigns. Such men followed him for a variety of reasons – personal attraction, religious conviction, the prospect of economic gain or increased local prestige, or for lack of any one else.'

Jacques Pouchepadass in his book 'Champaran and Gandhi' has argued that peasants were more active in mobilisation and actions against the plantations in different villages rather than the elite leadership as shown in most of the narratives of Gandhian movement in Champaran. Gandhi's simplicity, determination and civil disobedience along with various rumours about Gandhi's ability to negotiate with the government officials attracted masses towards Gandhi for redressing their grievances. Local leaders used Gandhi's name to mobilize peasants even without the knowledge of Gandhi. Gandhi appealed to the peasants not to resort to violence and made it clear that solution to their problem would come from the government and not from him. But Gandhi's moderating influence failed to restrain the masses from violence where Gandhi was not present. In the opinion of Jacques Pouchepadass there were numerous violent agitations which were directly influenced by Gandhi's campaign in Champaran but Gandhi had practically no control over such mass actions.

Disagreeing with Judith Brown's assumption that "subcontractors" played important role in mobilising peasants Sumit Sarkar has argued that 'the Gujarat peasants had a mind of their own', and they were not simply responding to Gandhi's men. Referring to Gandhi's intervention in Ahmedabad textile workers' movement, Sarkar is of the opinion that Gandhi's approach of peaceful arbitration of disputes between owners and workers was successful in Ahmedabad because of his personal contacts with Ahmedabad mill owners and workers. But 'this Gandhian model, which rejected not only politicisation along "class-war" line but also militant economic struggles, never spread beyond Ahmedabad.'

A close look at the movements in Champaran, Kheda and Ahmedabad suggests that in each place local people first raised voice against exploitation and also initiated mobilisation. The intervention of Gandhi came later on after getting invitation from the local leadership. Image of Gandhi as a leader was not yet much known but his successful movement in South Africa created an image of him as a leader who can confront enemies and fight for justice. His intervention not only provided direction to the movements already started by the masses but Gandhian non-violence provided an effective and legitimate form of movement which was still unknown. In the course of these three movements Gandhi was able to influence local educated youths like Rajendra Prasad, J. B. Kripalani in Bihar, Vallabhbhai Patel, Indulal Yajnik in Gujarat who later on played significant role in nationalist politics. Gandhi had not yet decided about his future course of association with nationalist politics, but these movements definitely laid the ground for Gandhi's greater role as a national leader.

10.8 SUMMARY

This Unit introduces you to emergence of Gandhi in Indian politics. We began our discussion by referring to Gandhi's role in organising protest and leading the movement in South Africa against racial discrimination. His experiment with non-violence and Satyagraha as political weapon in the course of his movement in South Africa was unheard of in political protest. We have explained how his knowledge of Indian cultural tradition and his readings of Western thinkers shaped his political philosophy. He had the ability to integrate diverse ideas depending upon the context and the need. We have also explained that the movements started by peasants and workers in Bihar and Gujarat on local issues, got Gandhi's support later on, and through the method of Satyagraha he tried to redress the grievances of peasants and workers. Whatever success he achieved for the local masses through the movements at Champaran, Kheda and Ahmedabad, these movements raised lot of hopes in Gandhi's leadership and soon he emerged as the leader of the Indian national movement.

10.9 EXERCISES

- 1) What was the significance of the South African experience in formulation of Gandhi's political philosophy?
- 2) Discuss the differences in the social and political conditions in Champaran, Kheda and Ahmedabad.
- 3) Discuss the various views on the significance of Gandhian movements before the Non-cooperation movement.