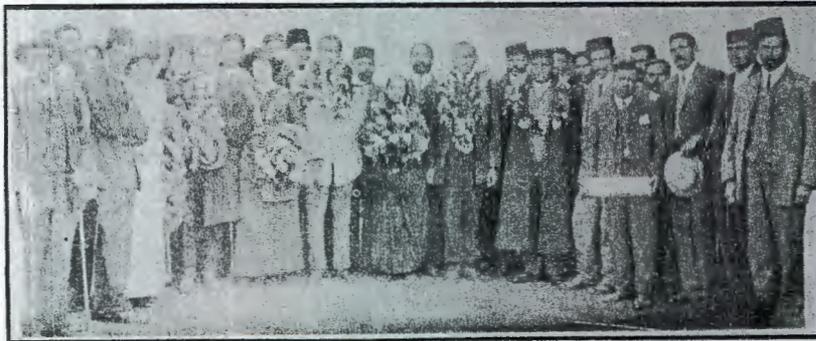


Gandhi in South Africa



The young Kasturba (right) shortly after arrival in 1893 and (above) the last photograph of Gandhi and Kasturba in South Africa taken in Cape Town in 1914 on their departure.

Common ideals formed bond of friendship

1993

"Their grievance is really moral... never will governmental physical force prevail against a great moral and spiritual upheaval. Wasted time and wasted energy, dear Oom Jan- nic..."

General Smuts could not possibly ignore an appeal from her. Gandhiji was invited to Pretoria and negotiations began on January 13. The Reverend C.F. Andrews, who accompanied Gandhiji to Pretoria, wrote: "There can be no doubt that during the days that followed the influence of Miss Hobhouse with the Boer leaders did much to pave the way to a reconciliation."

"While we were in Pretoria she wrote again and again both to Mr. Gandhi and myself. She thus kept herself in touch with the whole negotiations and took part in them." (Article in Modern Review, reprinted in Indian Opinion, December 16, 1914).

Gandhiji was surprised to see a great change in the attitude of General Smuts and that was undoubtedly due to Miss Hobhouse. A provisional agreement was reached on January 22, 1914.

GANDHI IN CAPE TOWN

Gandhiji and Kasturba went to Cape Town in mid-February to bid farewell to the Reverend C.F. Andrews and to follow the developments on the Indian question. Kasturba's condition deteriorated and gave cause for grave concern.

Miss Molteno, Miss Greene and Mrs. Alexander frequently visited the Gandhis at the home of Dr. A.H. Gool where they stayed and enquired about her health.

The aristocracy of South Africa was thus visiting and paying respects to a simple woman from India and her husband!

Miss Molteno was busy introducing Gandhiji to influential personalities. Gandhiji wrote to Kallenbach on February 25, 1914:

"What is happening just now is that I am becoming a society man and Miss Molteno is the instrument... She is undoubtedly a tactful peacemaker." (Kallenbach papers, National Archives of India).

Miss Molteno not only took the Gandhis to the palatial Molteno estate, but arranged for them to meet Miss Hobhouse who was now staying at Groote Schuur, the residence of the Prime Minister, as the guest of General and Mrs. Botha. There they met Mrs. Botha - as well as Mrs. Gladstone, the wife of the Governor-General - who were both friendly and considerate.

Gandhiji had written many times to General Botha for an interview but without success. But a few days after meeting the Gandhis, Miss Hobhouse invited Gandhiji again for a discussion at Groote Schuur - and General and Mrs. Botha joined them.

When Miss Hobhouse died, Gandhiji wrote in an obituary in *Young India* on July 15, 1926:

"She played no mean part at the settlement of 1914..."

"Let the women of India treasure the memory of this great English-woman."

CONTINUING FREINDSHIP

Gandhiji cherished the friendship of these women and tried to maintain continuing contact.

When he went to London in August 1914 - and he soon fell ill - Olive Schreiner was already there and rather ill. They kept in contact through Hermann Kallenbach.

Olive Schreiner, as a pacifist, was very upset when Gandhiji decided to raise an Indian Volunteer Corps during the First World War. But she continued her friendship and spoke at a farewell meeting on the eve of his departure for India.

Also in London, Gandhiji visited Miss Hobhouse who was equally pacifist.

Mrs. Schreiner died soon after the end of the War and I am aware of no letters by her to Gandhiji after 1914. But Gandhiji and Miss Hobhouse continued correspondence until her death.

Mrs. Ruth Alexander sent a letter to Gandhiji on April 4, 1926, through the Reverend C.F. Andrews. She wrote:

"Dear Mr. Gandhi, I am touched more than I can tell you when I look back at the time when you did me the great honour to stay with me and to talk with me, and remembered how patient you always were with me, how uncondemning even of things you must have disapproved. It was wonderful of you.

"Let me tell you, for the pleasure it gives me, that you have always been, since I knew you, and always will be, until I die, one of the three great souls with whom I live from day to day, beyond those who speak to me from the printed pages. My father and Olive Schreiner are the other two..."

"Please remember me to Mrs. Gandhi, whose gentle courage I have never forgotten..."

Yours in love and homage
Ruth S. Alexander"

PACIFIST, FEMINIST, SOCIALIST

I have stressed that these women were pacifists, feminists and socialists: the common ideology not only brought them together, but explains the affinity of Gandhiji to them.

Gandhiji believed in non-violence and was essentially a pacifist but he was recruiting for the army until the end of the First World War because of his faith in the Empire and his feeling that Indians must learn to fight before they can embrace true non-violence. Thus, until 1919, he was not as

strictly pacifist as Miss Hobhouse or Mrs. Schreiner.

Gandhiji had great interest in feminism and his success in encouraging the participation of women in the political struggle was no accident.

When he went to London in 1909, he went to see Miss E. Pankhurst, the leader of the suffragettes, and attended many of their meetings. He wrote often in *Indian Opinion* about equality of women and the role of women in the struggle for justice.

Gandhiji also believed in socialism. He came in contact with socialist thought during his student days in London.

Socialism had not then become rigid or doctrinaire. His thinking was similar to that of Edward Carpenter and others who were concerned not with mechanisation and rising production and consumption, but with equality, quality of life, and protection of the environment.

They believed that man should not be enslaved by machine and alienated, and should not shun physical labour.

Gandhiji knew socialists in South Africa and spoke at least twice at the Socialist Club in Johannesburg.

In 1912, when Gokhale visiting South Africa, J.T. Bain, a socialist, met them and the question came up as to their attitude to socialism.

Gokhale said he was a socialist "to some extent", but Gandhiji declared himself an "out and out socialist". (Wilfrid H. Harrison, *Memoirs of a Socialist in South Africa, 1903-1947*. Published by the author.)

The satyagraha of 1913-14, with the heroism of the poor working men and women, strengthened the conviction of Gandhiji that they were the "salt of the earth" who would free India. He identified himself in dress and living habits with them.

The convictions of Gandhiji explain the bond which linked him to the five courageous and progressive women who helped him and his cause.

They understood him, as did the Indian labourers in South Africa and the people of India.

But those critics who tried to place him in their pre-determined categories - moderate and extremist, for instance; those who assumed that he must be a reactionary if he wore peasant clothes or professed religion; and those who called him an agent of Gujarati capitalists because he did not advocate class struggle and tried to unite the Indian community in the struggle for its dignity and honour - could not understand Gandhiji nor the admiration he evoked among the greatest men and women of this century.

I hope that the new information which is becoming available will persuade scholars in India and South Africa to reconsider their assumptions and understand the real Gandhi.



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