

LESSON 3

FORGIVENESS AN ACT OF NONVIOLENCE

Forgiving the Attackers in South Africa

In those days of the colonies, any person aspiring to become a lawyer had to study only in England. There was no other place on earth which the English recognised for this profession. And like all other aspirants Gandhi boarded the ship to England to study law. In England, Gandhi became a barrister, a qualified member of the legal profession who presents cases in court i.e., a lawyer in the year 1891.

Dada Abdullah Sheth one of the friends of Gandhi had settled in South Africa. In those days it was much more easier with regard to travel documents since most of the African continent, the Asian continent, Australia, and the American continents were the colonies of the British. They even proudly proclaimed that the sun never sets in Great Britain.

In 1893, Gandhi was invited by this friend Dada Abdullah Sheth to settle a legal case at South Africa. Accepting his invitation, Gandhi went to South Africa. He witnessed the poor conditions of Indians there. He decided to fight against the white (British) rule and started working for Indians. He left South Africa to India in 1896 for personal reasons and his commitment to his family.

When Gandhi came to India, he published a small booklet called *Green pamphlet* which told about the sufferings and grievances of the Indians in South Africa. The *Green Pamphlet* was circulated widely. He also travelled in India widely and publicized the South African problem. This was wrongly projected in the news paper in South Africa that Gandhi spoke against the interest of the White people and their government. This disturbed the white people very much.

In December 1896 Gandhi travelled back to South Africa with his wife and two sons.

At Port Natal, the ship was detained for 23 days, by this time news about Gandhi's return reached the white people. The English did not want Gandhi to set foot in South Africa. He was also severely threatened by an angry white group and his friends advised him not to enter the city during the day time. But Gandhi did not listen to the advice of his friends and the threats of the White. He set his foot on the shores of South Africa. The angry group threw stones, sticks, bricks, and rotten eggs at him. Some one snatched away his turban. The others kicked him and beat him. He received injuries.

Gandhi could not save himself from the death jaws of the attackers. At that time Mrs. Alexander, wife of Superintendent of Police passed that way. And when she found the angry mob was attacking Gandhi, she rushed towards him and saved his life. Two days later a message came from London. Joseph Chamberlain, the then Secretary of the State for the colonies asked the Natal Government to prosecute every man guilty of attacking Gandhi.

When Gandhi was called upon to identify the offenders by the police, he did not want to do so .He refused to prosecute the assailants on the ground of forgiving the enemy. Such forgiveness is a true spirit of nonviolence.

This incident raised Gandhi's prestige and won more sympathy aboard for the Indians in South Africa. Gandhi deeply felt that the act of being forgiven is equally important to the act of forgiving. In the days of youth he was forgiven by his father and he also learnt the power of forgiveness from reading about the life of Jesus Christ from *The Bible*. Thus Gandhi is praised till date for he practised what good he had learnt. Gandhi deeply believed that forgiveness was the best weapon to be used against the wrong doers so that a change of heart in the opponent could be achieved. He believed that change of heart in the opponent is real victory.

Questions:

1. What was the matter the Green Pamphlet contained?
2. Who saved Gandhi from the attack of the furious mob?
3. Why Gandhi did not want to punish his attacker?
4. What do you think and feel about his act of forgiveness?