



# A Fistful of Salt...

## 2020

# A Fistful of Salt...



Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi with stick, Sarojini Naidu, Abbas Tyabji and the marchers at Dandi, 7 April 1930

## Cover Image:

Koli tribal girls with pots containing salt water, Ghansoli, near Bombay, 1930

These children were possibly accompanying their families, as Gandhi's call appealed to all across caste and class barriers.

## Acknowledgments:

Our greatest debt is to A. Annamalai, Director, National Gandhi Museum (NGM), S. Padmanaban, Librarian, Anupama and Neelam of the Photo Section, all of whom were more than happy to cooperate with CWDS once more. All images are from the collections at NGM.

Thanks also to Vasundhara Nath, for help in translating Gujarati captions into English, to Bhaswati Thakurta who shared in the exciting search for appropriate images, and to Sundaresh for working hard on superbly resurrecting useable images from deteriorating newsprint.



Gandhi collecting salt granules at Bhimrad on the Gujarat coast on April 9, 1930.

Three days before, he had gathered the first fistful at nearby Dandi. Gandhi is watched by Mithuben Petit and his son, Manilal



Curation and text: Malavika Karlekar  
Design: Sundaresh and Malavika Karlekar

# A Fistful of Salt...

When, on April 6, 1930, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi lifted a fistful of clayey mud embedded with salt crystals from the sea at Dandi on the Gujarat coast, the small band of 79 men who had walked the 300 odd kilometres with him applauded vociferously. Following the Indian National Congress' call for *purna swaraj* or complete self-rule at its 1929 Lahore session, Gandhi had carefully planned this dramatic phase of his movement. Women had initially been excluded from the march – but some were not to be deterred and had made their way to Dandi. Sarojini Naidu had come by car, and was there when the first fistful was gathered. The Mahatma had apparently accepted her resolve and wrote to Mahadev Desai on the night of April 6, that 'Shrimati Sarojini Devi and Sjt. Abbas Tyabji should go and if the police did not desist they should also dig out salt and challenge them to seize it from their hands.' (CWMG, Vol. 49:3 April, 1930-22 August, 1930: 41). After the arrest of Gandhi and Tyabji in May, Sarojini Naidu took over and led the march and raid on the salt works at Dharasana. Many *satyagrahis* were brutally beaten to death by the police, and the incident received world-wide publicity through the report of the American journalist, Webb Miller.

Perhaps fearing such an outcome, the Mahatma had been ambivalent about women's participation in what could become a difficult protest, saying that just as it would be 'cowardice for Hindus to keep cows in front of them while going to war, similarly it would be considered cowardly to keep women with them on the march' (Basu 2018: 57). Undaunted, Khurshedben Naoroji and Durgabai (later Deshmukh) wrote letters of protest, and Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay recounted later her swift action: she jumped into a bus to Jambusar where the marchers were to halt, and engaged Gandhi in a conversation that ended in his suggesting various activities within the broad rubric of public involvement and protest. Though it was too late for women to join the main march, related activities started throughout the country. Kamaladevi wasted little time in organising volunteers for a variety of programmes, including *prabhat pheris* and gathering salt at Chowpatty and Juhu beaches. In Bombay, the air was soon full of cries of '*namak kaida toda hai*' (we have broken the salt law), '*Inquilab Zindabad*' and '*Mahatma Gandhi ki jai*' (Basu: 63).

Even as women started breaking the salt law in the east and south, Gandhi wrote that though women *satyagrahis* were very keen on joining the growing civil disobedience movement, he felt that they were best suited to picket liquor shops and those selling foreign cloth, and spin *khadi* yarn. On April 10, 1930, in a piece titled 'To the Women of India' published in *Young India*, he wrote:

I feel that I have now found that work. . . . Let the women of India take up these two activities, specialize in them; they would contribute more than man to national freedom. They would have an access of power and self-confidence to which they have hitherto been strangers (CWMG, Vol.49 :3 April, 1930-22 August, 1930: 59).

Accordingly, a women's conference was held at Dandi on April 13 where a resolution was passed on prohibition. However, that Gandhi had to accept women's unwillingness to be relatively passive participants in his movement is clear from the images in this calendar that commemorates 90 years of the Dandi Salt March.

Garnering photographs was not easy and our best sources were the newspapers – *The Free Press Journal* and *The Bombay Chronicle*. As we scoured several volumes of cuttings at the National Gandhi Museum, it was clear that we would have to do more than a bit of detective work in placing individuals in contexts: many critical photographs did not have place names or dates. Though we knew that Matangini Hazra had participated in Bengal and Rukmini Lakshminpathi in Vedaranyam, we were unable to get any visual evidence. On the whole, Dandi and the events surrounding it that continued well into the Thirties, clearly provided many 'photo-ops' and we have tried to choose our images to be as representative as possible, though expectedly, western India, dominates.

**Malavika Karlekar**

## References:

Aparna Basu, *Women in Satyagraha*, New Delhi: Publications Division, 2018

Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, *Indian Women's Battle for Freedom*, New Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 1983

*Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*,  
<https://www.gandhiashramsevagram.org/gandhi-literature/mahatma-gandhi-collected-works-volume-49.pdf>

## Curator's note

We deeply missed the endearing presence of Aparna Basu, former Chairperson of NGM, and an authority on women's participation in Gandhian movements. Her insightful nuggets would have been invaluable and we memorialise Aparna and her work through this calendar.





Mohandas Karamchand  
Gandhi being greeted by  
Sarojini Naidu at Dandi, April  
6, 1930

As women had not been given permission to march, she had come by car, in time to see the first fistful being gathered. Behind Sarojini is Mithuben Petit.

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
			1 <i>New Year's Day</i>	2 <i>Guru Govind Singh's Birthday</i>	● 3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	○ 11
12	13 <i>Lohri</i>	14	15 <i>Makar Sankranti/ Pongal</i>	16	● 17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	● 25
26 <i>Republic Day</i>	27	28	29	30 <i>Basant Panchami/ Sri Panchami</i>	31	

# January 2020

December							February						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S
1	2	3	4	5	6	7							1
8	9	10	11	12	13	14	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
15	16	17	18	19	20	21	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
22	23	24	25	26	27	28	16	17	18	19	20	21	22
29	30	31					23	24	25	26	27	28	29



From L to R: Ameena Tyabji, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay and Kasturba Gandhi, perhaps at Sabarmati Ashram, April 1930

As women were not to join the march, Kasturba was in charge of organizing them for other protest activities. Ameena and Kamaladevi were soon to take the lead in these even as Ameena's husband, Abbas, Gandhi's trusted lieutenant, was imprisoned. When his leader was put in jail, Abbas took on the leadership of the aftermath of Dandi. This was however, only for a short while as he too was soon to be imprisoned.

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
						1
☾ 2	3	4	5	6	7	8
☉ 9 Guru Ravidas's Birthday	10	11	12	13	14	15
☾ 16	17	18 Swami Dayananda Saraswati Jayanti	19 Shivaji Jayanti	20	21 Maha Shivaratri	22
● 23	24	25	26	27	28	29

# February 2020

January							March							
S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	
				1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5	6	7	8	9	10	11	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	
12	13	14	15	16	17	18	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	
19	20	21	22	23	24	25	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	
26	27	28	29	30	31		29	30	31					



‘When *prabhat pheris* go around . . .’ (translated from Gujarati)

The caption reads: ‘we notice even Muslim women’s hearts have been touched by the message of *prabhat pheris* [early morning processions] when songs of *deshbhakti* [love for the country] were sung. Hundreds of women are seen here singing in the early hours of the morning’. This was possibly a procession organized by Kamaladevi in Bombay.



Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31				

March 2020

February							April						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S
						1			1	2	3	4	
2	3	4	5	6	7	8	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
9	10	11	12	13	14	15	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
16	17	18	19	20	21	22	19	20	21	22	23	24	25
23	24	25	26	27	28	29	26	27	28	29	30		



‘Friends, let us all go together to acquire salt without which there is no taste in food.  
Special photograph for *Hindustan* by Mr. Shivji’ (translated from Gujarati)

In April 1930, Kamaladevi and other women marched to Chowpatty, collected sea water and started evaporating it on makeshift stoves or *chulhas*. Hit by a police lathi, Kamaladevi wrote ‘a rough boot pushed me aside and I came down with my arm on the burning pole’ (quoted in Basu: 64). She refused to call off the protest or go to hospital. Soon, despite police attempts, the crowds grew and hordes of housewives carrying pots and pans joined the ranks.

This image, one of a collage of four, shows women and children returning after collecting salt water.

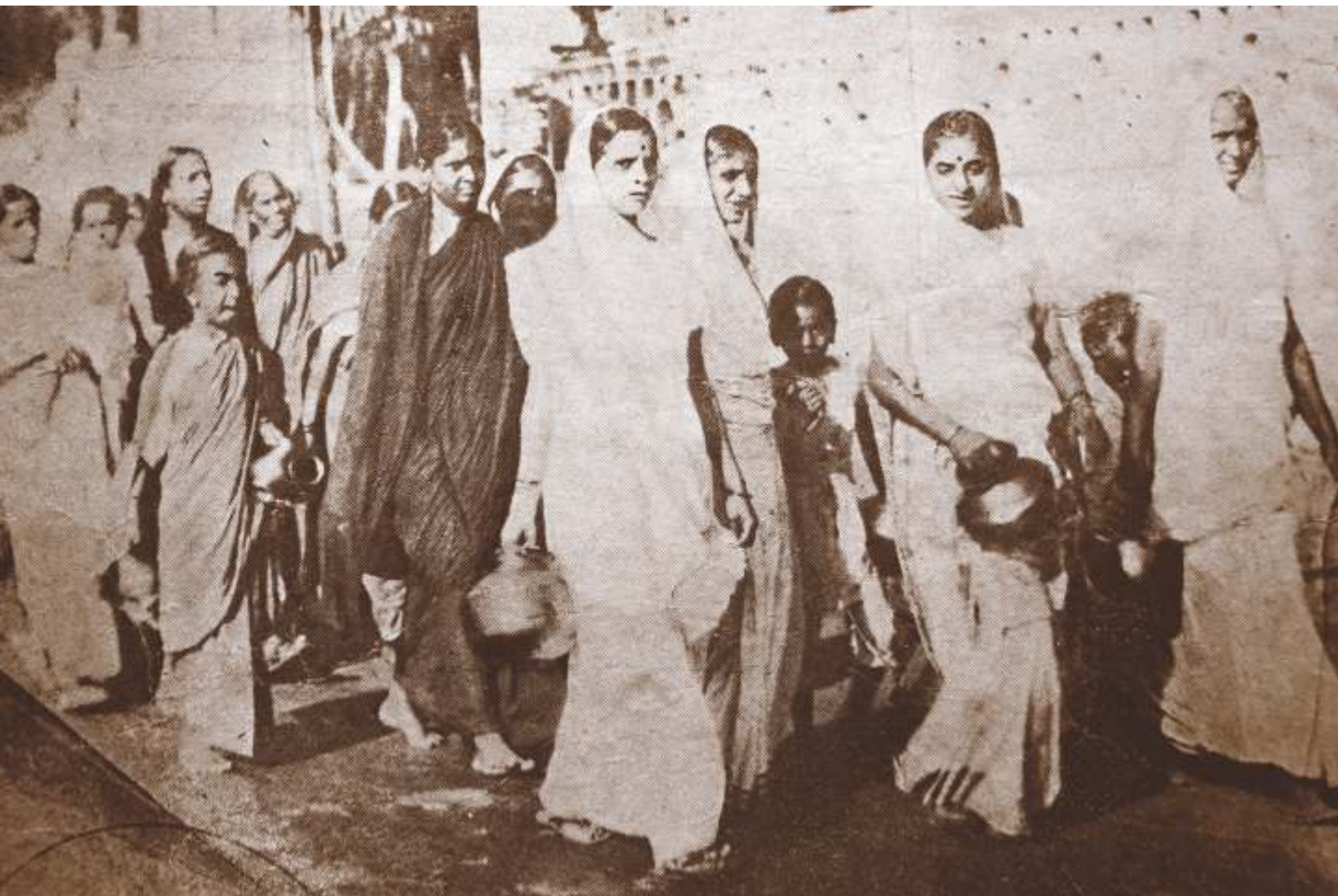
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
			☾ 1	2	3	4
5	6	7	☉ 8	Ram Navami 9	10	11
12	Mahavir Jayanti 13	14	☾ 15	16	Good Friday 17	18
Easter Sunday 19	Vaisakhi/ Vishu 20	Mesadi/ Vaisakhadi(Bengal)/ Bahag Bihu (Assam) 21	22	● 23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30		

April 2020

March						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31				

May						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
31					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30





‘Avantikabai Gokhale and other women after collecting sea water’  
(translated from Marathi)

Avantikabai was a close friend of Kamaladevi and she organised salt-making at multiple locations. Salt had a great appeal to housewives and the disprivileged. Here she leads a group of women in Dadar who are returning with pots of sea water.



Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
31					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30
Idu'l Fitr						

May 2020

April

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30		

June

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30				



‘The last Satyagrahi blockade at Wadala saltpan’, 16th April 1930

Women led by Lilavati Munshi (head uncovered and wearing spectacles) line up at a wire barrier near the Wadala salt depot in Bombay. Armed Eurasian sergeants are very much in evidence.

Over 500 people led by Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay marched to the Wadala salt depot. English journalist George Slocombe in his dispatch to the *Daily Herald* reported ‘ . . . one of the raiders carried out her mission with quiet dignity, very impressive to behold. It was a woman who emerged from the crowd, climbed through the barbed wire and approached the salt mound as though it was an altar, and filled her sari with salt as part of some unknown ritual’ ( quoted in Basu: 65).

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
	1	2	3	4	5	○ 6
7	8	9	10	11	12	● 13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
● 21	22	23	24	25	26	27
○ 28	29	30				

Rath Yatra

May

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
31					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30

July

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	

June 2020



**‘Woman power engaged in contributing their effort for the national cause’ *Mumbai Samachar*, special edition, June 15, 1930**

Here women pose with their bags of salt collected from the mound at Wadala.

As Kamaladevi wrote in her book *Indian Women’s Battle for Freedom*: ‘The salt satyagraha must stand out as not only unique but as an incredible form of revolution in human history. The very simplicity of this weapon was as appealing as intriguing. So far as women were concerned it was ideally tailor-made for them. As women naturally preside over culinary operations, salt is for them the most intimate and indispensable ingredient’ (p.106).



Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
			1	2	3	4
○ 5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	● 13	14	15	16	17	18
19	● 20	21	22	23	24	25
26	● 27	28	29	30	31	

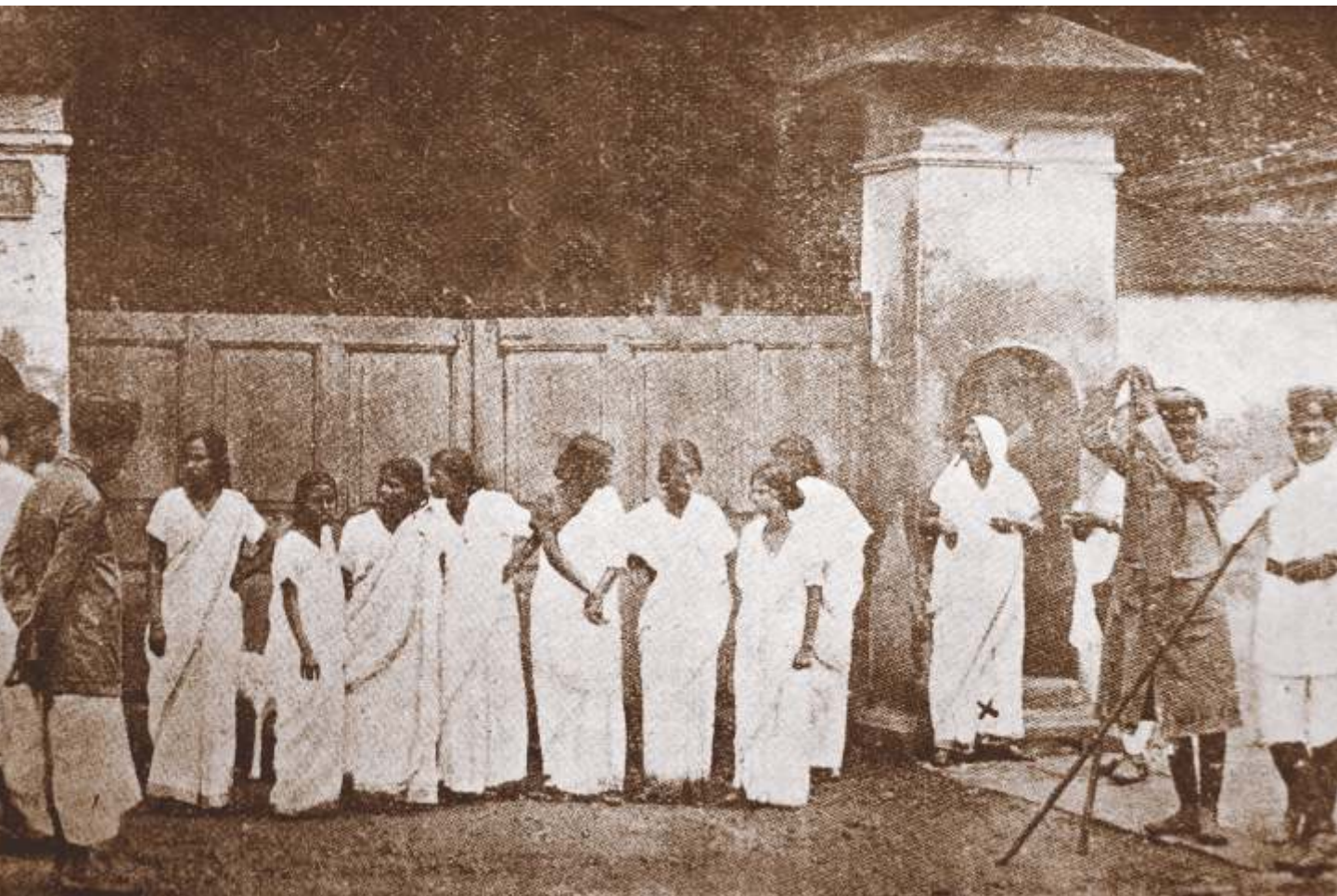
June

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30				

August

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
30	31					1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29

July 2020



**'Picketing in Calcutta', *The Bombay Chronicle*, August 17, 1930**

'Lady volunteers picketing at the gate of Bethune College under the command of Mrs Sen (marked X).' Bethune College, established in 1879, is the oldest women's college in Asia and it is possible that these are students preparing to picket shops nearby that either sold liquor or foreign cloth. 'Mrs Sen' is in all likelihood, Mrs Nellie Sengupta, an Englishwoman who was a Gandhian activist and became President of the Indian National Congress in 1933.

Four women to the left of the image appear to be having an acrimonious exchange with the two men. The policemen at the right seem totally disinterested in the proceedings while Mrs Sengupta looks rather anxiously in the direction of those engaging the men.

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
30 Muharram	31 Onam or Thiru Onam Day					1 Id-ul-Zuha (Bakrid)
2	○ 3 Raksha Bandhan	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	● 11 Janmashtami (Smarta)	12 Janmashtami	13	14	15 Independence Day
16 Parsi New Year's day/ Nauraj	17	18	● 19	20	21	22 Vinayaka Chaturthi/ Ganesh Chaturthi
23	24	● 25	26	27	28	29

# August 2020

July

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	

September

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30			





### Women collecting mud with salt crystals, Vedaranyam

On 13 April 1930, C. Rajagopalachari, a close associate of Gandhi, began the march at Trichinopoly (now Tiruchirappalli) with 150 volunteers. The marchers reached Vedaranyam, a small coastal town and began collecting salt directly from the sea. Rukmini Lakshmi pathi was a prominent participant. The campaign came to an end on 28 April 1930 when several protesters were arrested and Rajagopalachari was imprisoned for six months. This march, along with the ones at Dandi and Dharasana, drew worldwide attention to the Indian independence movement.



Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
		1 ○	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10 ●	11	12
13	14	15	16	17 ●	18	19
20	21	22	23	24 ●	25	26
27	28	29	30			

# September 2020

August							October						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S
30	31					1					1	2	3
2	3	4	5	6	7	8	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
9	10	11	12	13	14	15	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
16	17	18	19	20	21	22	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
23	24	25	26	27	28	29	25	26	27	28	29	30	31

‘વાવડો છોડો!’



‘Leave the flag, Let go of the flag’

On October 26, as a part of the activities following the Dandi Salt March, Avantikabai Gokhale organized a hoisting of the Congress flag at Azad Maidan in Bombay. As this was in violation of the Police Commissioner's ban on such activities, she was arrested and imprisoned for six months.

In this photograph, a police sergeant is snatching the flag from Avantikabai's hands.

સુખદેવી જીશક્તિના હાથમાંથી આઝાદ મેદાન પર સારંગીટ વાવડો છુટવે છે.

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
				1	○ 2	3
					Mahatma Gandhi's Birthday	
4	5	6	7	8	9	● 10
11	12	13	14	15	16	● 17
18	19	20	21	22	● 23	24
					Dussehra (Maha Saptami) Additional	Dussehra (Maha Ashtami) Additional
25	26	27	28	29	○ 30	31
Dussehra	Vijay Dashmi (Bengal and Kerala)				Milad-un-Nabi or Id-e-Milad (Birthday of Prophet Mohammad)	Maharshi Valmiki's Birthday

# October 2020

September

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
			1	2	3	4
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30			

November

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30					





**At the end of a meeting,  
Bombay, 1930**

Detail (hence grainy) of a  
newspaper photograph of  
women and young boys  
attending a meeting addressed  
by Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay.



Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
1	2	3	4 <i>Karaka Chaturthi (Karva Chouth)</i>	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14  <b>Diwali (Deepavali)</b> <i>Naraka Chaturdasi</i>
15  <i>Govardhan Puja</i>	16  <i>Bhai Duj</i>	17	18	19	20  <i>Pratihara Sashthi / Surya Sashthi (Chhat Puja)</i>	21
22	23	24  <i>Guru Teg Bahadur's Martyrdom Day</i>	25	26	27	28
29  <b>Guru Nanak's Birthday</b>	30					

# November 2020

October							December						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S
				1	2	3			1	2	3	4	5
4	5	6	7	8	9	10	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
11	12	13	14	15	16	17	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
18	19	20	21	22	23	24	20	21	22	23	24	25	26
25	26	27	28	29	30	31	27	28	29	30	31		



. . . and womens' participation in the salt satyagraha continued well into the 1930s

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	☾	8	9	10	11
13	●	14	15	16	17	18
20	21	☾	22	23	24	25
27	28	29	○	30	31	
				Christmas Eve	Christmas Day	

# December 2020

November							January						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	31					1	2
8	9	10	11	12	13	14	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
15	16	17	18	19	20	21	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
22	23	24	25	26	27	28	17	18	19	20	21	22	23
29	30						24	25	26	27	28	29	30



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