Gandhi: The Kheda Debacle

Hi, Everyone! Gandhi reconfirmed his offer to be a recruiter in a follow up letter (written before he announced any of the concessions given by the British Government, as will be seen below.)

"*LETTER T0 J. L. MAFFEY*

ON THE TRAIN,

May 18, 1918

In full confidence that the request contained in my letter of the 29th will be accepted, I am busy making recruiting preparations. But I shall not commence work before I have your reply.

(From the manuscript of Mahadev Desai's Diary. Courtesy: Narayan Desai)"

The follow-up letter of Gandhi's given below is written after he announced the Government concessions.

"SABARMATI,

May 30, 1918

DEAR MR. CRERAR,

I have just received Mr. Maffey's letter in which he refers me to His Excellency the Governor regarding the offer of my services which I made immediately after the Conference at Delhi. . . . **Will you kindly let me know His Excellency's wishes regarding my offer and the suggestions made in my letter to Mr. Maffey in so far as they refer to Kaira?**

Yours sincerely,

M. K. GANDHI

(India Office Judicial and Public Records: 3412/18)

What was the Government answer to Gandhi's oh-so-generous offer to be a "recruiting-agent-in-chief" and persistence in getting a reply?

James Crerar, Secretary to the Governor of Bombay, has this to say in his June 1 letter in acknowledgment of Gandhi's letter:

"His Excellency will cordially welcome your co-operation, which he hopes will be directed more particularly to the encouragement of recruiting in the Northern Division . . . As suggested in your letter of April 30th to Mr. Maffey, he will be glad, when the organizations which will, it is hoped, result from the Conference, have been set on foot, to indicate in more detail the directions in which you services can be most profitably utilized.

As regards the revenue situation in Kaira, His Excellency considers that this, like all other questions of internal administration, must be dealt with separately on its merits, and that there should be no confusion of issues in regard to the great and urgent purposes of the Conference, but a whole-hearted and united effort without distinction of race, class or creed. He feels sure that you will concur in this view and by your example and influence support his endeavour to secure the most complete unanimity and co-operation which the present grave crisis requires."

So the Government happily accepted Gandhi's recruiting services, while declining to make any concessions for his Kheda satyagraha . . . !

This might have left Gandhi in a fix, but fortunately for him, he was able to resurrect the meager concessions the Government had granted on April 20, 1918—just days before his proposed bargain with the Viceroy!

That Gandhi was unaware of these concessions until many days later is clear from his speech below. This is what he says, on June 6, 1918, addressing the people of Kheda (after getting the Government response to his “recruitment” offer and their stand on Kheda):

“Orders were issued to all Mamlatdars on the 25th April that no pressure should be put on those unable to pay. Their attention was again drawn to these orders in a proper circular issued by me on the 22nd of May and to ensure that proper effect was given to them, the Mamlatdars were advised to divide the defaulters in each village into two classes, those who could pay and those who were unable to pay on account of poverty.

If this was so, why were these orders not published to the people? Had they known them on the 25th April what sufferings would they not have been saved from!”

There is a distinct note of aggrievement in these words!

How pathetic these concessions were is obvious in the “catch” therein. Who was to decide which defaulters were to be classified as “poor”—the Government! Also,

“The Mamlatdar’s order, to the effect that the rich agriculturists of the village should pay up their dues and **the poor *khatedars* would be given a suspension of the assessment till the next year,** was read out by the *talati*.”

There was a time limit to the relief granted to the “poor”!

But Gandhi grabbed avidly at the concessions and declared a successful satyagraha. As Keer says in his biography (page 270):

“On April 20 the Collector had given orders granting total remission to those who were poor. But it was left to the Government officers to determine who were poor, and the terms were repeated on May 22 to Mamlatdars in the district. Gandhi avidly clung to the offer and agreed to it.”

What was the actual result of this “successful” satyagraha?

“Only 8 percent of the land revenue was in arrears and most of it was subsequently recovered. Yet Gandhi thought he had won a victory! . . .

Which satyagraha by Gandhi fulfilled the essentials of a complete triumph? His much-trumpeted victory did not bring any material remission of land revenue.”

Read excerpts from Gandhi’s letter to see what was actually taking place there:

“51. LETTER TO J. KER

NADIAD,

June 8, 1918

DEAR MR. KER,

I addressed a big meeting in Nadiad and explained the settlement. The speakers got up one after another and then said that executions and forfeiture orders still continued. . . . In Wadthal three writs have been recently issued for the collection of *chothai* to all intents and purposes. It is claimed that the first proceeds of a sale were credited in the *chothai* column. Surely this was wrong. If you restore this to the revenue column there is nothing due. Should these executions not be withdrawn? In three cases in Wadthal forfeiture notices have been issued.

Two men are ready to pay the assessment. Should not these orders be cancelled against payment? In the third case the holder is dead. The holder was in strained circumstances. The heir is still less able to pay. I trust that in this case forfeiture will be cancelled and suspension granted on the ground of poverty. I have approached the Mamlatdar regarding these cases. He says he cannot grant relief without your orders.

In Nadiad a holder owed only two annas on account of principal. He tendered the amount and asked for return of his pots which were distrained. The Mamlatdar refused to restore the pots unless *chothai* was paid. The holder has paid the *chothai* under protest and prevented the threatened sale of his pots. Should not *chothai* be refunded in this case?

Orders of forfeiture have been issued in Sinnaj also and payments offered after the date of settlement have not been accepted.

Yours sincerely,

M. K. GANDHI

From a copy: C.W. 10698. Courtesy: Chhaganlal Gandhi”

There are more of such letters written by Gandhi in the following days.

Follow my blog tomorrow to see how Gandhi starts a furious campaign of recruiting Indians for the WWI.

Anurupa

Mahatma Gandhi Facts: Gandhi Revealed.