

READ AND COLOUR FREEDOM STORIES

THE STORY OF
DANDI MARCH



*written by SANDHYA RAO
illustrated by RANJAN DE*

Read and Colour Freedom Stories

The Story of Tipu Sultan
The Story of Rani of Jhansi
The Story of Dandi March
The Story of 15th August 1947

Written by Sandhya Rao
Series Editor Radhika Menon

Published by
Tulika Publishers, 7 Prithvi Avenue, Abhiramapuram, Chennai 600 018, India

©1997 Tulika Publishers (text)
©1997 Tulika Publishers (illustrations)
First published in India, 1997

The Story of Dandi March
ISBN 81-86895-03-5

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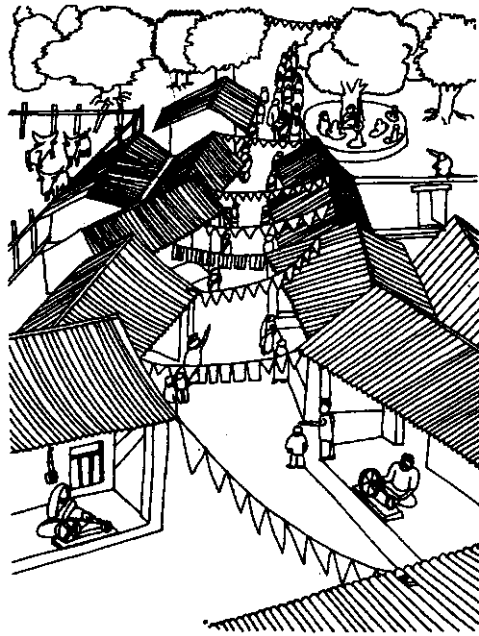
Tulika gratefully acknowledges the assistance of Dr. Parvathi Menon.

Distributed by
Goodbooks Marketing Pvt. Ltd, 7 Prithvi Avenue, Abhiramapuram,
Chennai 600 018, India

Printed and bound at
AIM Visual Communications, 5, Parthasarathy Street, Vellala Teynampet, Chennai 600 086, India

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THE STORY OF
DANDI MARCH



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In 1857, Indians fought the first war of independence against the British. They were brave but were defeated. Nearly 75 years later, Indians fought a very different kind of battle. And won. Their leader was Mahatma Gandhi. All he said was: "Give us our salt!"

On January 31, 1930, Gandhiji found himself writing a letter to the Viceroy, Lord Irwin. The Viceroy was the British monarch's representative in India. "Dear Friend," Gandhiji began. He was always polite, even to people he did not agree with. He was writing on behalf of the Indian people. He pointed out many unjust things the British were doing. One of them concerned salt.

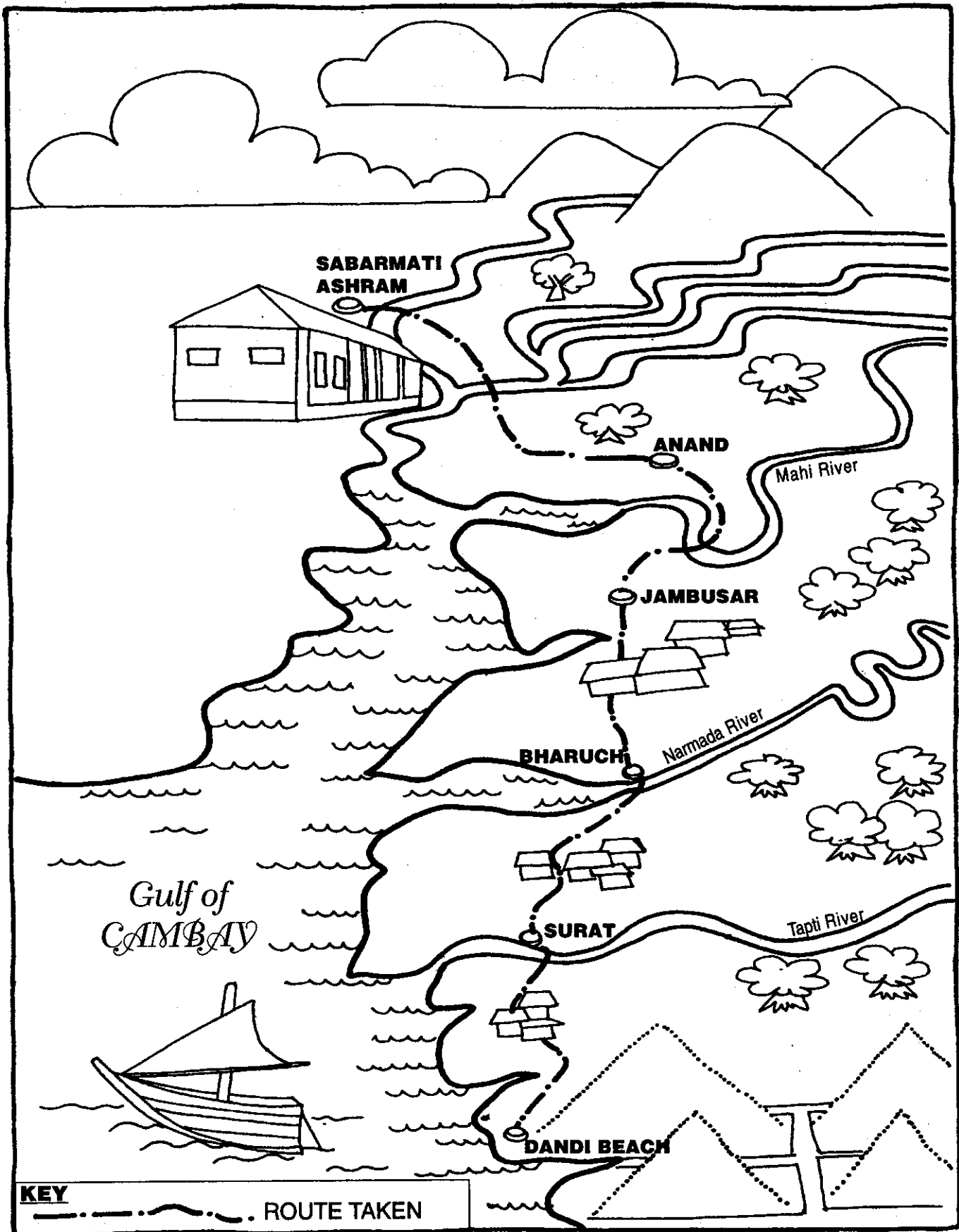
Salt, as you know, comes from sea water. Since India is surrounded by seas on three sides, salt is easily available. Even the poorest persons, who cannot afford anything else, can make their food tasty by adding salt to it.

But the British had their own ideas. They took control of all the salt factories and salt pans in the country. Indians could no longer make their own salt. They were forced to buy from the British.

Not only that, they also had to pay tax, i.e. they had to give the British extra money over and above the price of salt!

This made them very angry. Next to air and water, salt was the greatest necessity of life, especially for the poor. So Gandhiji drew up a clever plan. It was a plan that would help the people fight all the unfair things the British were doing in India.

He told Irwin exactly what he was going to do. He said that if the Viceroy did not accept the 11 demands he had made in his letter, he would break the salt law and encourage all Indians to do the same.



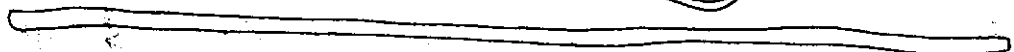
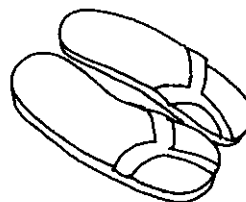
How Gandhiji and his followers went from Sabarmati ashram in Ahmedabad to Dandi.

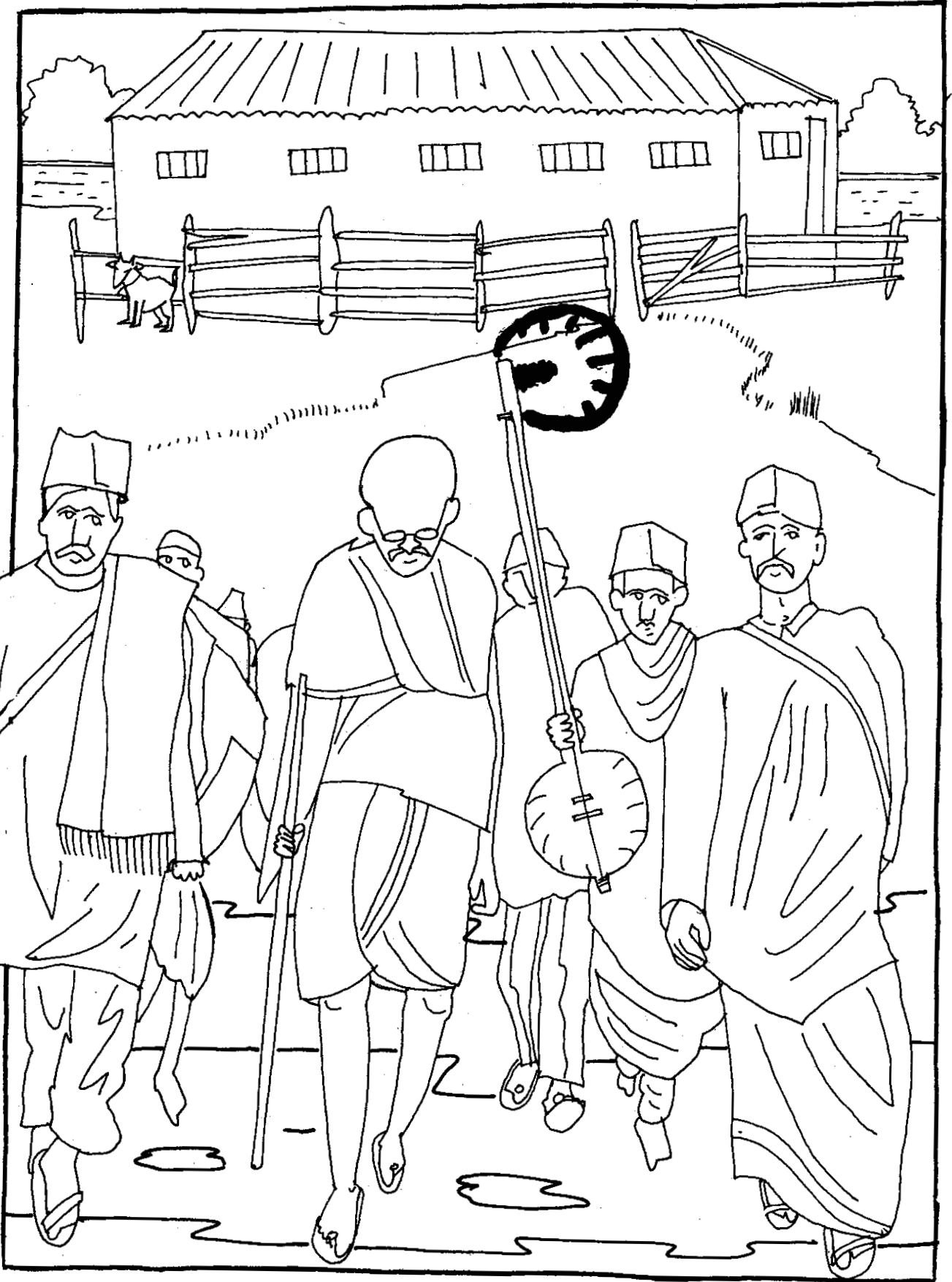
How would he break the salt law? By walking all the way from Sabarmati ashram in Ahmedabad, where he lived, to a small coastal town called Dandi 384 kilometres away. There, the Arabian Sea left large deposits of salt crystals on the shore. Gandhiji said he would pick up a lump of salt to show the world that Indians would make their own salt and sell it. Indians would not pay the unfair salt tax. Indians would not pay any unfair tax. The salt satyagraha was just the beginning.

"Do what you want," thought Irwin. "I will not change one law set down by my government."

On March 12, 1930, everyone at the ashram awoke early. They bathed, prayed, and gathered around Gandhiji. He talked to them for a few minutes and then he and 78 others set out. Each one carried a jhola with only the most essential items needed for the journey.

This was the Dandi March.





The marchers set out from the ashram

Gandhiji was 61 years old, but he walked very fast. The others had to run to keep pace with him!

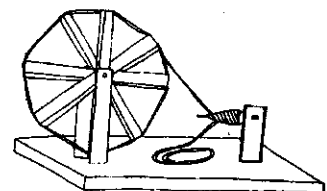
The British government knew Gandhiji was going to break the salt law. Why did they not stop him? "Oh," Irwin said. "Mr Gandhi will never get that far. He will collapse in a heap long before he reaches Dandi." In fact, the British seemed to think the whole idea was a joke.

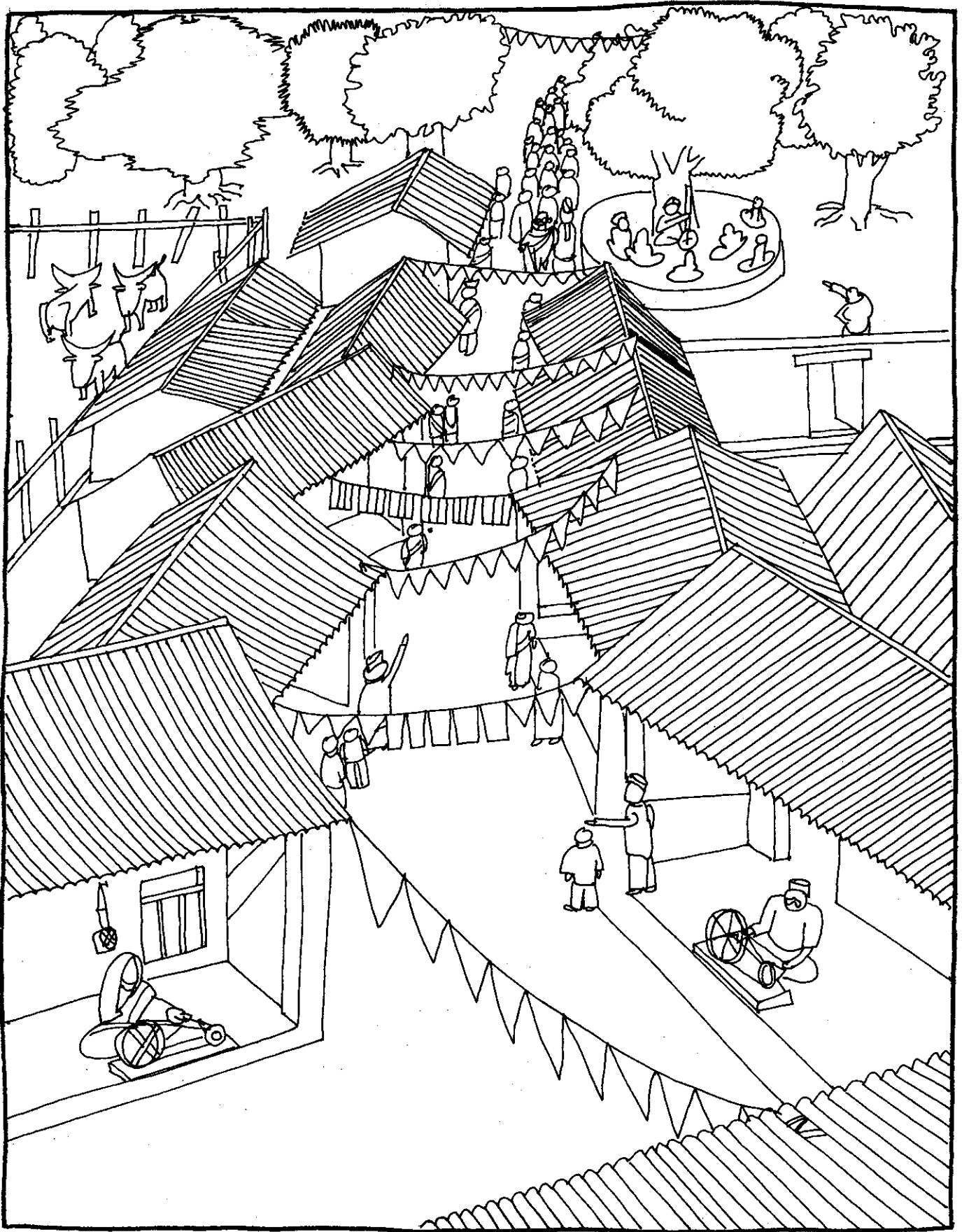
Some Indians too laughed at Gandhiji. Sarojini Naidu, poet and close friend of Gandhiji, once said in a speech how she too laughed. "How will this little man fight the most powerful empire in the world?" she asked, and laughed.

Gandhiji did not care. He and his 78 just continued walking. They had drawn up a hectic schedule. Once they set out early in the morning, they halted only a few times. They had to reach a particular place by nightfall each day.

In towns and villages, people greeted them with great excitement. Flower garlands and streamers decorated the villages. Children sat perched on treetops, competing with each other to see who would be the first to spot the marchers. "I see them! I see them!" a child would scream and run to tell the elders.

Sometimes, the party would stop for a rest or refreshments. Gandhiji would advise the people to be clean and to do their duty. At other times he would write letters or he would spin. He was never idle.





A village all dressed up to greet Gandhiji

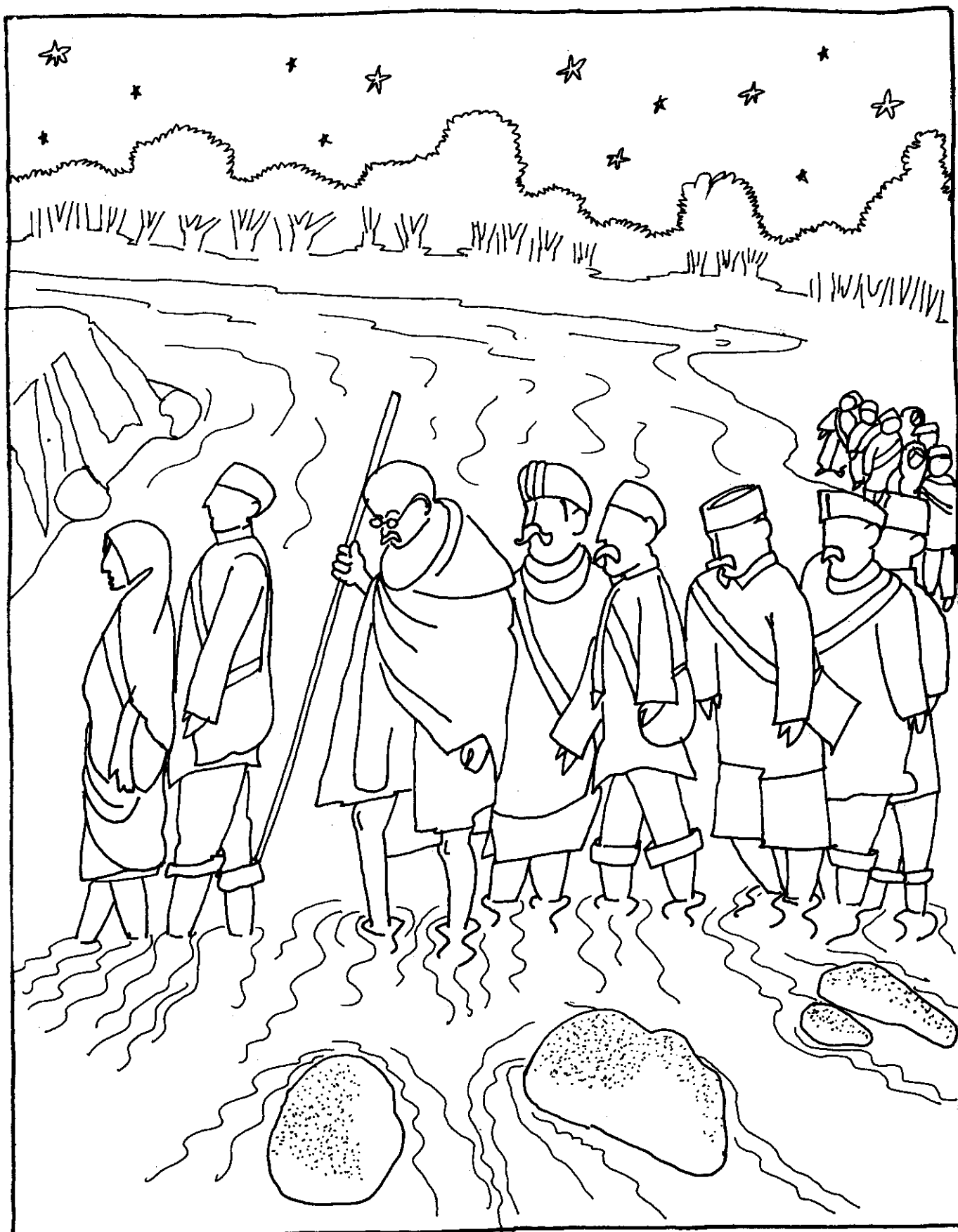
It was a very tiring journey and some volunteers got milk, oranges and grapes from nearby towns. Gandhiji scolded them. He felt that each one had to face up to all hardships. Didn't poor people live like that?

Sometimes villagers sat quietly outside their homes, spinning, as the marchers went past. Sometimes, men, women and children sang bhajans. The volunteers joined in. In one village, Gandhiji made an appeal to the people. "Give up your government jobs," he said. Remember, the government at that time was the British government! Immediately, 300 young officials resigned from their posts. Just like that.

In another little village called Dehgam, a 105 year-old woman was waiting anxiously. As soon as the group arrived, she went to Gandhiji and bowed before him. Then she put a big red tilak on his forehead and said, "Go now and bring swarajya back with you." Swarajya means self-rule.

Newspaper reporters and radio correspondents were moved by the Dandi March. They reached news of the marchers every day to all corners of India and the world.

Halfway through the march, the volunteers had to cross the Mahi river. But when they reached it, they found it was too deep to wade across. Twilight had fallen. What would they do? Gandhiji led them up along the river to another point where the river was more shallow. By then it was 10 pm. Through knee-deep water and slush the volunteers stumbled and slipped in the dark. At last, after two and a half hours, they were on the other side.



Crossing the Mahi river

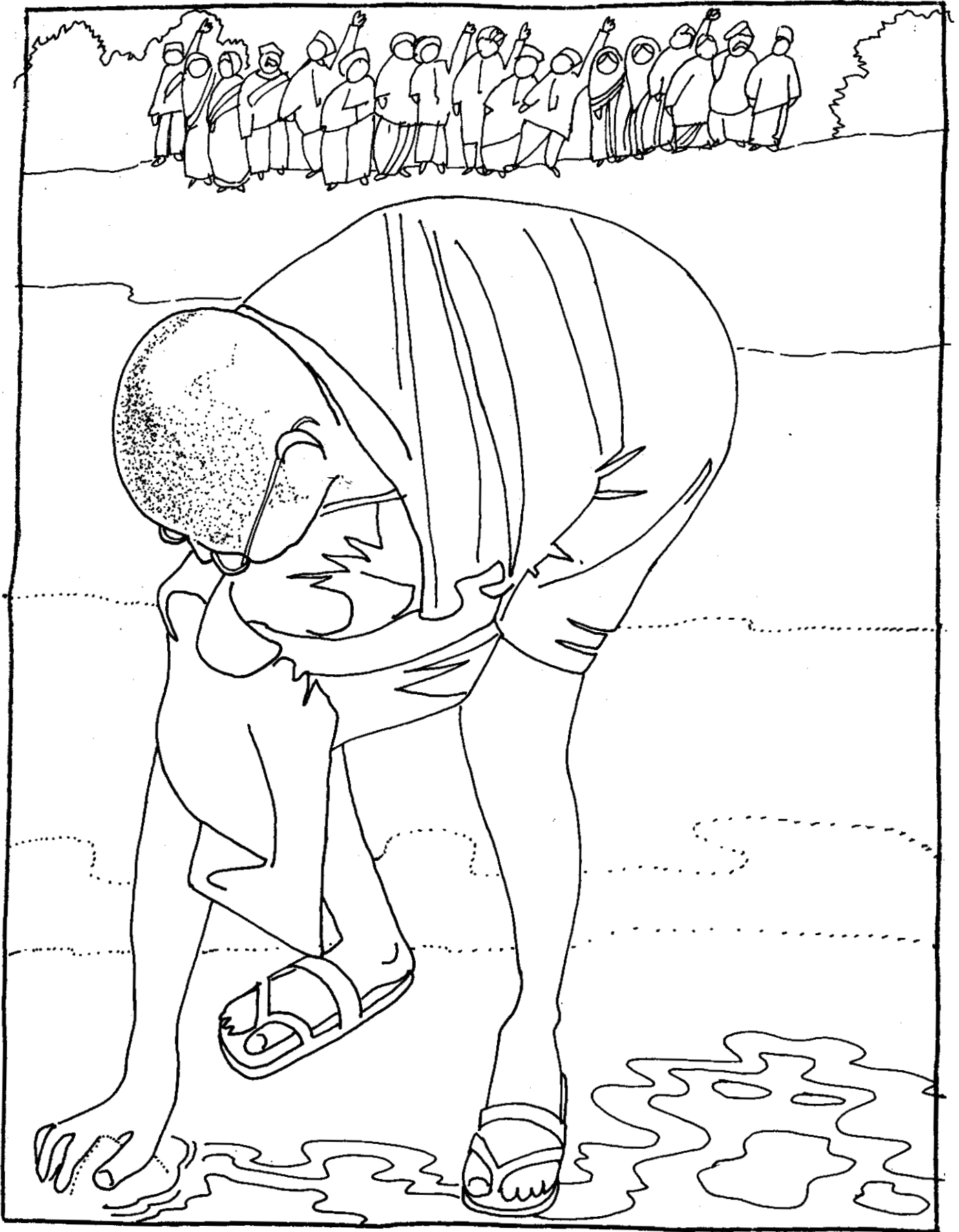
The marchers reached Dandi on April 5. It was late evening. The birds had all gone home. The volunteers were hot and dusty.

Early next morning, after bath and prayers, Gandhiji walked into the waters of the Arabian Sea. He bent down and picked up a lump of salt. The volunteers and all those who had gathered there cheered loudly: "Mahatma Gandhi ki jai!" Someone shouted "Vande Mataram!" Everyone joined in. Gandhiji had broken the salt law.

This was a signal to the people of India. C. Rajagopalachari (Rajaji) led a group from Trichy to Vedaranyam on the east coast, off the Bay of Bengal. K. Kelappan walked from Calicut to Pavannur on the west coast. Satyagrahis walked all the way from Sylhet in Assam to Noakhali on the Bengal coast.

Elsewhere, everywhere, people made salt in pots and pans. In Allahabad, in Delhi, in Calcutta, in Ghansoli, in Chittagong, in the smallest village. Boldly, openly, the people of India challenged the British government.





Gandhiji picks up a lump of salt from the Arabian Sea and breaks the law!

The government responded with force. They realised, too late, that Indians were using salt to take on the military might of the British.

On April 11, more than 200 policemen and officers swooped down on satyagrahis in Bombay. Women volunteers barred their way but they were pushed aside. The others formed a ring around the salt pans. They too were pushed aside and the salt pans destroyed. Nearly 5000 people watched as the satyagrahis were arrested and taken away in vans. Cries of "Gandhiji ki jai", "Down with the Union Jack", "Hindu-Muslim ki jai" filled the air.

It was the same story all over India.

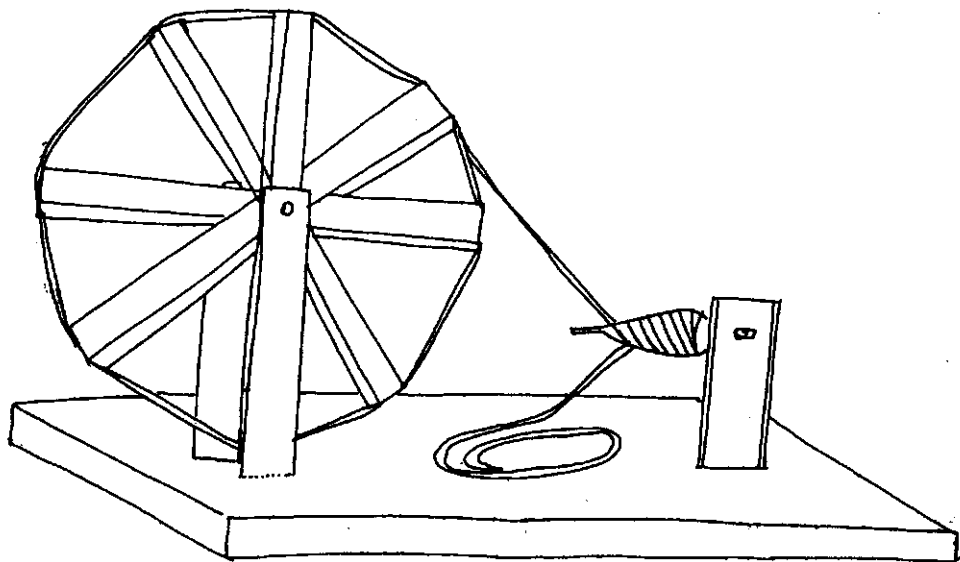
No matter how many salt pans the police destroyed, more came up. No matter how many people they arrested, more appeared. Thousands of women joined the movement. They stood outside liquor shops and shops selling foreign cloth, appealing to the people not to buy these things.

When the British commanding officers ordered soldiers of the Garhwali Rifles to fire on demonstrators in Peshawar, they refused to do so. The civil disobedience movement had begun!



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A poster to colour

The most heroic incident took place a few days later. Gandhiji was in Karadi, about 5 km from Dandi. He informed the Viceroy that he and a group of 2,500 satyagrahis were going to march on the salt factory at Dharasana.

Three days later, on May 4, as Gandhiji was sleeping on a string cot under a mango tree, he was suddenly woken up. A bright light was shining in his eyes. "You are under arrest," he was told by the District Magistrate of Surat. He was accompanied by two police officers armed with pistols and 30 constables carrying rifles. It was the middle of the night. Gandhiji was taken away and locked up in Yervada prison, Pune.

Sarojini Naidu took over. "Remember Gandhiji's words," she said. "No violence."

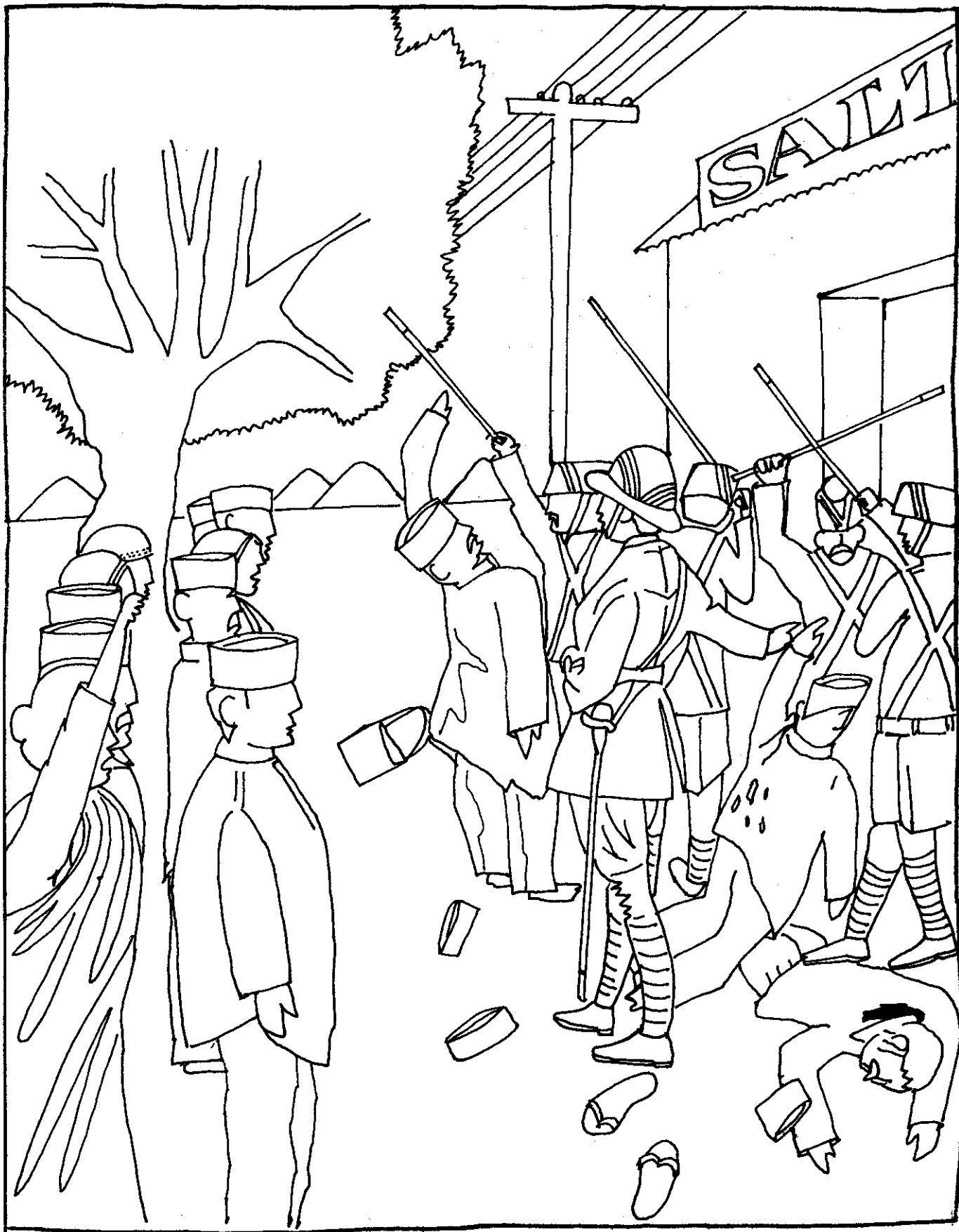
The satyagrahis reached the factory on May 21. It was being guarded by 400 Surat police, a few English officers and 25 riflemen.

The first row walked up to the factory. The police began to hit them with steel-tipped wooden clubs. Many fell down bleeding. The next row walked forward. They too were clubbed down. Then the next line and the next and the next. All of them went down silently. Only the sound of clubs on heads could be heard. The injured were carried away on stretchers by volunteers.

When all 2,500 had gone down, two lay dead. 320 were injured.

Reporters reached this story of British brutality and the heroism of non-violent action to the whole world.



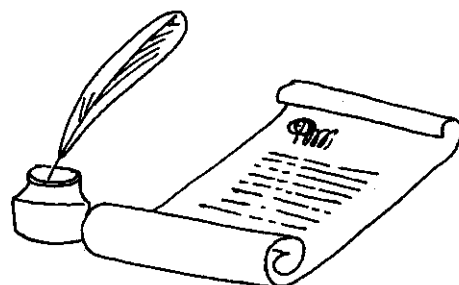


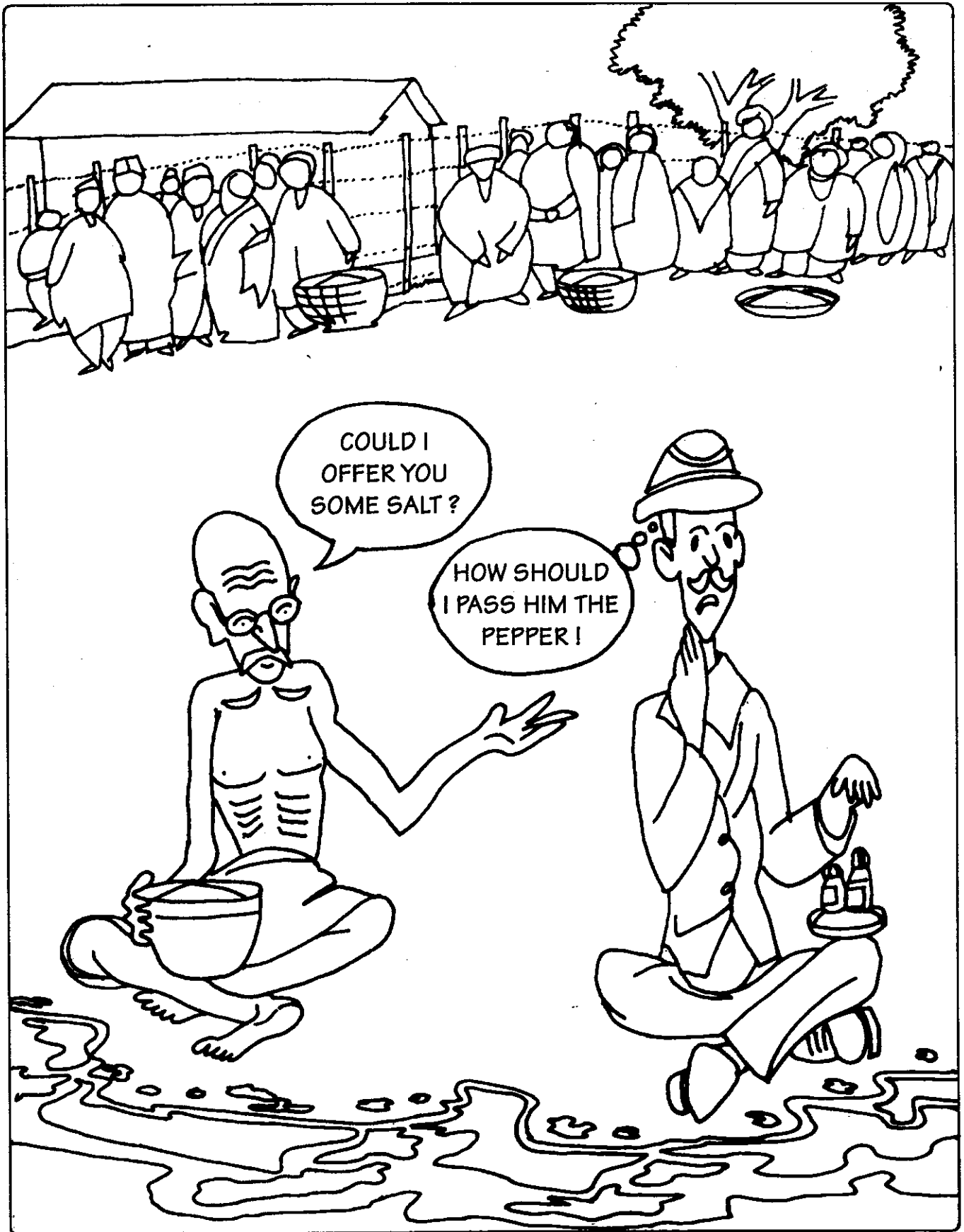
Incident at Dharasana salt works

Nearly one year later, on March 5, 1931, the Gandhi-Irwin pact was signed. The British gave in to many Indian demands. Most important, there was to be no more tax on salt. Indians could make their own salt.

How did Gandhiji manage to win this big victory? As he himself explained: "Supposing ten persons in each of the 700,000 villages in India come forward to manufacture salt and to disobey the Salt Act, what do you think this government can do?" Nothing.

What guns and soldiers could not do, Gandhiji did, quietly and simply. He showed the most effective way to challenge British power. The people of India responded to the call, bravely and unitedly.





A British cartoonist called David Low drew this picture of Gandhiji breaking the salt law.

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This is a set of four colouring books on the story of India's independence. Balancing simple text with detailed line drawings that can be coloured by the child, the books introduce 7 to 12 year-olds to the thrill and excitement of India's history. Older children will be able to read the text themselves. Younger ones may want the stories read aloud. All children, however, will ask questions. Take time to answer these questions and travel with your child on an interactive journey of learning.



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Rs. 40.00

