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A Lesser Known Incident From Mahatma Gandhi's Life

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https://news24online.com/trending/a-lesser-known-incident-from-mahatma-gandhis-life/176659/

Mahatma Gandhi had been in South Africa at the center of a civil movement for more than two decades but he kept coming to India to attend Congress sessions. There was not much depth in those visits. So when he left South Africa for good and landed in India in the middle of the second decade of the last century, Gopal Krishna Gokhale told him, no public life for you for at least one year. Yes, you have been an outstanding leader in South Africa and you had victories and you have the capability to mobilize people and rally them behind you. Just abstain, observe, watch, travel. Read this country because there are just too many things at too many places. You cannot blindly rush into anything. At the same time, you cannot wait for long. You are already in your 40s and you are well equipped to do something. The kind of experience, the repository that you have cannot be allowed to go to waste. It must be put in the service of the nation. It cannot be immediately rushed.

Gandhiji followed Gokhale's advice. He just kept studying and then he started to get a handle on things. Then came the Champaran movement. It's not that he had consciously selected to be in Champaran. That too was a kind of an accident. When you are prepared, then very solemn accidents and the right things happen to you. So Gandhiji knew that there was something that needed to be done but I don't yet know what it is that needs to be done. There are so many things happening everywhere. It's a very vast country. What do I put my hand into?

So he was reading, he was meeting people, he was traveling extensively, he was studying the Indian landscape and then the accident happened. Somebody from a God-forsaken village, a district in Bihar came to him and kept shadowing him. He said we need you to come and support us and defend our rights. The British masters are forcibly asking us to grow opium on 15% of our land and that's exploitative.

If you are serious about the whole thing, what would you do? You would do what he did. You would read, you would meet, you would travel, you'd observe. All these things are easily available today. You don't need to fly because all the information is available. The videos are there, the perspectives are there. What is it that you want? If you are very concerned with climate change and you do not know the scientific basis for all that is happening. You cannot just rush into some activity. You cannot become a social media warrior or a placard soldier without knowing the fundamentals. Don't you want to study science first? Don't you want to

know what kind of actions are best suited if you want to fight this catastrophe? If you do not know what action is best suited to fight it, how are you taking any action?

How do you know planting trees is the best way to counter this menace? Do you have the numbers without having the numbers? Why do you just want to offer a nominal service to the cause? Shouldn't you study the UN reports first? There are so many other organizations keeping a watch over the climate. If your action is founded on the basis of understanding the ending, then your action becomes irreversible but if your action is coming from some flimsy point, then such action has no momentum. It doesn't have longevity because it doesn't have sincerity.