

# 1

## Boyhood

*Kathiawar, 1869–88*

Porbandar, where Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was born on 2 October 1869, was a coastal town almost wholly encircled by the Arabian Sea and long engaged in trade with the Arab world and Africa. Since legend held that Krishna's friend from childhood, Sudama, had lived there, it was at times called Sudamapuri. A wall of white limestone protected the town from the waves and reflected the sun into the eyes of approaching sailors.

The state of Porbandar (of which the town, with a population of about 15,000 in 1869, was a part) was ruled by an Indian prince on whom a British Resident kept a watchful eye. The India of the British Raj contained more than 500 'princely' states of this sort, some larger than Porbandar, which had an area of about 600 square miles, and others smaller, all shown in yellow on the Raj's maps. Territories ruled directly by the British were shown in red. From Rajkot, an inland city 120 miles to the east of Porbandar, a British agent supervised all the princely states of the Kathiawar (or Kathiawad) region, also known as Saurashtra – the conspicuous peninsula south of Karachi and north of Bombay that juts westward into the Arabian Sea. Gujarati was the language of Kathiawar, as also of the adjacent region (largely 'red' on the map) to its east, where the largest city was Ahmedabad, and of the coastal lands (also 'red') to the north of Bombay, including the port city of Surat, one of Britain's earliest Indian outposts.

Bombay, an island acquired by the British from Portugal in the 17th century, had grown into western India's greatest city (where a majority spoke Marathi), but the Raj's top official, the Viceroy, ruled from Calcutta in the subcontinent's east, on the Bay of Bengal (where Bengali was the principal language). The ancient city of Delhi, where the Mughals had reigned for three centuries (and where the populace spoke Hindustani), lay over 600 miles to the north of Ahmedabad.

In 1857, only 12 years before Mohandas's birth, Delhi and several places to the east, including some yellow 'princely' states, had witnessed a violent rebellion that nearly overthrew British rule in India, which had begun a century before. Learning that the new cartridges they were biting into were greased not only with beef fat, which was forbidden to Hindus, but also pork fat, which was anathema to Muslims, the Raj's sepoy, Hindus and Muslims, mutinied. But the rising was crushed, and British power in India had acquired an air of permanency by 1869, which was also the year in which the Suez Canal was built, shortening the journey between London and India. Songs, including one in Gujarati that Mohandas learnt as a boy, praised the peace the English had brought, yet resentment at alien rule was not far from the surface.

The hierarchy of cities, with London at the top of the heap and, among the cities named, Porbandar at the bottom – below Rajkot, which ranked below Ahmedabad – was matched by other hierarchies in India. Villages were subservient to towns, women to men, the young to the old, the unarmed to the armed, low castes to high castes, the untouchables to everyone else, Indian languages to English, and Indians to the white man.

But between the deeply religious Hindus (a majority in most parts of India, including in Porbandar) and the less numerous yet equally religious followers of Islam, who had memories of pre-British Muslim hegemony, the question was of walls, not levels. Hindus and Muslims lived separate lives, often harbouring strong if uninformed feelings about those on the other side of the divide.



For five generations or more, Mohandas's forebears had served Kathiawar's princes as administrators. Uttamchand or Ota Gandhi, Mohandas's grandfather, was the most successful among them. The ruler of Porbandar made him a diwan or first minister of his territory, and Ota Gandhi, who enhanced the state's irrigation and revenues, obtained for his master a Class One status from the British. Two of Ota's sons – Karamchand, Mohandas's father, and his younger brother Tulsidas – also became diwans of Porbandar.

The Gandhis belonged to what was called the 'Modh' branch of the commercial caste of Vantias (or Banias). While ranked third in the Hindu hierarchy after Brahmins and Kshatriyas, Vantias were seen, and saw themselves, as a 'high' caste.

The three-storey house in Porbandar in which Mohandas was born, and in which numerous Gandhis, young and old, lived as an extended family, had been built about 100 years earlier. It bore marks from shelling ordered by a Porbandar princess serving as regent, Rani Rupaliba, who was angered by Ota Gandhi's support of a state treasurer she disliked.

That an Arab bodyguard had defended Ota Gandhi on that occasion was one of the stories on which his children and grandchildren were raised. We may mark this early link of the Gandhis with the Muslim world, which lay not far across the Arabian Sea and was also connected to a expansive desert that began near Porbandar and extended across Kutch and Sindh into West Asia.

Possessing a meagre knowledge of written Gujarati and none of English, Karamchand, also known as Kaba, had, however, a keen grasp of practical affairs. Putlibai, Mohandas's mother, was his fourth wife. Mohandas, her youngest child, had been preceded by a girl, Raliat, and two boys, Laxmidas and Karsandas. Kaba's first two wives had each delivered a girl; each wife had died soon after giving birth. The third wife, childless, died early. Muli and Pankunwar were the names of Mohan's half-sisters.

When Mohan, or Monia as his parents called him, was four, Kaba moved as diwan to the thakore or ruler of Rajkot and then became diwan in another of Kathiawar's princely states, Wankaner. Putlibai, other relatives, and a loving nurse named Rambha reared Mohan in the Porbandar house. Terrified of ghosts and spirits, he was told by Rambha that the divine name of Rama would drive his fears away. Having 'more faith in her than in her remedy', Mohan recited the name but the terrors did not disappear (Autobiography, hereafter 'A', p 28).<sup>1</sup>

As the favourite child, which he was, of an influential father and of a mother who 'had strong common sense', 'was well informed about all matters of state' and of whose intelligence 'the ladies of the court thought highly' (A 3), Mohan was petted inside and outside his home and probably also in the Dhool Shala ('School in the dust') to which he was sent. Among those offering affection to him were Khushalchand, a cousin 18 years older who had been raised by Kaba and Putlibai and lived in their house, and his wife Deva, who found it hard not to pick up the child, whose partly curly hair and broad face she found attractive.<sup>2</sup>

In about 1876, Kaba Gandhi returned from Wankaner to Rajkot to join the Rajasthanik court which addressed disputes involving members of Kathiawar's ruling families. Putlibai moved to Rajkot with her children. Her youngest son, now seven, took his fears with him to Rajkot, yet much love, too, had been caressed and whispered into the child.



In Rajkot Mohan first went to a primary school and soon thereafter to a taluka or suburban school. In his Autobiography, written when he was in his mid-fifties, he claimed that he could 'well recollect' not merely the names but also 'other particulars' of the teachers who taught him in the primary school when he was seven or eight (A 4). Because of this



*Mohandas with (left) brother Laxmidas – 1886*

capacity to observe and remember, and perhaps some other signs as well, Kaba Gandhi said, when Mohan was ten, that the boy would some day be sent to London for higher education.<sup>3</sup>

‘When I was an urchin of ten,’ Gandhi would recall in his *Autobiography*, ‘I envied the Brahman lads sporting bunches of keys tied to their sacred threads, and I wished I could do likewise’ (A 351–2). His wish was met, for at this time the Banias of Kathiawar were asserting the right to wear the shoulder-to-waist thread. Mohan wore it and also flaunted a bunch of keys tied to the thread, though he did not need them.

Lacking the sea that in Porbandar evoked a wider world, Rajkot had a parochial air. But it had a larger population (about 23,000 in 1879) and was the seat of the Raj’s political agent in Kathiawar. By 1880, Kaba had built a large house there for his extended family, with high walls around the compound and a prominent gateway. At the age of 11 or 12, after passing an entrance examination where he was placed ninth out of 70 boys, Mohan was enrolled in Rajkot’s Alfred High School, where English was the medium of instruction.

At about this time the governor of Bombay visited Rajkot, and Kaba Gandhi was required by the Resident of Rajkot to appear in European-style stockings and boots at a *darbar* in the governor’s honour. The ‘disgust and torture’ on Kaba’s face while ‘he was putting his legs into his stockings and his feet into ill-fitting and inflexible boots’ was seen by his youngest boy and lastingly remembered.<sup>4</sup> On another occasion Kaba Gandhi objected openly when an assistant political agent, a Briton, spoke discourteously of the Rajkot *thakore*. Asked to apologize, Kaba Gandhi refused, whereupon he was detained under a tree for some hours.

In 1947 Gandhi would provide a glimpse of the climate in Rajkot (and the rest of India) in the 1880s: ‘The [1857] Sepoy War was quelled by means of superior force. Outwardly, things quieted down but the hatred against an imposed rule went deep underground ... The British established schools and law courts and Indians took to these with enthusiasm ... but in spite of this they could not bear the insult or the degradation involved in political subjugation’ (94: 111).<sup>5</sup> In his teenage years in Rajkot, Mohan shared both this enthusiasm and the humiliation.

The Raj’s cultural and political impositions were matched by rules laid down for their children by parents like Kaba and Putlibai. These rules had a religious or cultural basis. Kaba Gandhi was faithful to the Vaishnava tradition he had inherited, which called for ceremonies at temples of Rama and Krishna. More liberal than some other Modh Banias of his time, Kaba and his wife also went to the ‘rival’ Shiva temple, and their home was often visited by Jain monks. At times Muslim and Zoroastrian friends visited Kaba in his home and talked about their faiths – Mohan thought that Kaba listened ‘with respect and often with interest’ (A 29). The worldly-wise Putlibai was also strongly

religious and fasted frequently. The Pranami sect to which her parents belonged was said to bear an Islamic influence and did not worship idols, but Putlibai seemed entirely comfortable with the images of Krishna, Rama and Shiva honoured by the Gandhis; and she respected Jain monks.

When Mohan was 'hardly yet twelve,' Putlibai told her children that they were not to touch Uka, the 'untouchable' boy who cleaned the lavatories in the Gandhi house in Rajkot. Apparently, Mohan had 'tussles' with her on the question and smiled at her reasoning, yet he tried to obey the injunction. Any accidental contact with Uka or any other 'untouchable' called for a cleansing bath. If a bath could not be easily had, Mohan was to cancel the 'unholy touch', his mother told him, by touching any Muslim passing by (23: 42). The second pollution would remove the first. This sense of Muslims as unclean coexisted with Kaba's willingness to hear about Islam; we do not know what steps, if any, were taken to purify the house after a Muslim's visit.

Another firm injunction was against touching or eating meat, from which it followed, and Kaba made this plain, that a medical career was not open to Mohan: it required the dissection of animals. Smoking, too, was forbidden. And like other 'high-caste' boys including his brothers, Mohan tied his hair in a shikha or knot at the back of his head.



Mohan and brother Karsan, two or three years Mohan's senior but only a year ahead in high school, chafed violently at the rules and secretly broke them. To be 'unable to do anything without the elders' permission' was 'unbearable' for Mohan and his brother. They smoked cigarette ends thrown away by an uncle and pilfered a servant's coppers to buy bidis.\* Frustrated by the limited supply of tobacco and coppers, and hating the secrecy they were forced to maintain, they thought of suicide. Fetching poisonous dhatura seeds from a jungle, they sought blessings at a temple and walked to a lonely corner. But their courage failed them and they chose 'to put up with the lack of independence' (A 22-3).

Though this account was provided decades after the incident, the lines hint that even at the time that Mohan contemplated suicide, he was observing himself, and was amused. Yet it is clear that, conscious of his parents' great love for him, Mohan was experiencing intense emotional conflict. An 'agonized lament' of an old blind couple over the death of their caring boy, Shravana, sung by itinerant showmen, and a picture the showmen displayed of Shravana with a pole on his shoulder, with baskets in which his parents sat hanging at its ends, had gripped Mohan.

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\* Handmade cigarettes.

The melting tune moved me deeply, and I played it on a concertina which my father had purchased for me (A 5).

Remembered by relatives as a hyper-active child, Mohan was stirred, too, by a play which he had 'secured [his] father's permission to see'. It told the story of Harishchandra, who clung to the truth even when all his loved ones, and he himself, suffered greatly as a result. The play haunted the 12-year-old boy, who evidently 'acted Harishchandra to [himself] times without number' and wept (A 5). Yet the boy who wanted to be like Shravana and Harishchandra was also the boy longing for independence and stealing coppers to experience it. Moreover, his schooling in the English language was isolating him from others in the family, including his father, who knew no English.

If he argued when not quite 12 with his mother over touching the scavenging boy Uka, he rebelled also against the notion of pollution from contact with Muslims. In 1947 he would assert that his belief in 'complete brotherhood' among Hindus, Muslims and Parsis dated back to 'before 1885' to 'before the Congress was born'. 'At the time that communal unity possessed me, I was a lad twelve years old,' he added (96: 330). That was his age when he joined the Alfred High School, which had Hindu, Muslim and Parsi pupils and Hindu and non-Hindu teachers. A 78-year-old man looking back may of course imagine thoughts in his boyhood that did not exist, yet one has to be impressed by the number of times the older Gandhi spoke of his dreams at the age of 12.

When in January 1948, at the start of what would prove to be his last fast for Hindu-Muslim reconciliation, he again recalled his boyhood 'dream' of 'amity' between Hindus, Muslims and Parsis, he dated that dream to Rajkot and to a time when he 'never even read the newspapers, could read English with difficulty, and my Gujarati was not satisfactory' (98: 235). The description fits his opening year in Alfred High School.

This boy-rebel was also the one, we should note, who 'would not be prompted' when his teacher tried, 'with the point of his boot', to urge him to copy a word from a neighbour's slate, an incident occurring during Mohan's first year in high school, when an educational officer called Mr Giles, obviously a Briton, was visiting the school on an inspection (A 4).



In 1882, before Mohan was quite 13 years old, he was married to Kastur Makanji Kapadia, a Porbandar girl (with relatives in Rajkot) who was a few months older than him. Karsan and a cousin were also married at the same time. Bunched together for economy, the three weddings took place in Porbandar. The thakore of Rajkot detained Kaba until the last minute but offered stage-coaches that enabled the marriage party to

reach Porbandar in three days instead of the usual five. However, the coach carrying Kaba Gandhi rolled over on the final day, and it was a badly injured and heavily bandaged Kaba who went through the ceremonies.

Excited as the 12-year-old groom was at his wedding, he did not fail to observe his father's 'brave face in spite of his injuries' and 'the places where he sat as he went through the different details of the ceremony' (A 8). Mohan would also remember how he and Kastur sat on the wedding dais, took their seven steps, put sweets into each other's mouths, and held each other's hands 'lovingly and for long'.<sup>6</sup> Putlibai took him and Kastur to several Hindu temples in Porbandar, including the Vaishnava haveli and a Shiva temple and also to the shrine of a Muslim fakir.<sup>7</sup> The older Gandhi would blame his father for his 'Child Marriage' (the title of the chapter in the Autobiography about the wedding), which cost him a year of school. In 1882, however, Mohan thought only of 'the prospect of good clothes to wear, drum-beating, processions, rich dinners, and a strange girl to play with' (A 7).

But the boy had entered a tempest. Though Kastur was often at her parents' home – for three years, in all, out of the first five years after marriage (A 11) – Mohan felt desire for her and could gratify it. Yet Kastur, a beautiful and uneducated Modh Bania girl with a will of her own, offered resistance. She also asserted her independence, running without Mohan's permission to friends and relatives in the neighborhood, refusing to be taught English and arithmetic by Mohan, and shaming him by her natural courage. For his terrors had continued. Haunted by fears of thieves, ghosts, serpents and robbers, the boy-husband 'did not dare to stir out of doors at night' and could not sleep without a light near him. 'Sleeping by [his] side' was the lovely but resisting Kastur who 'knew no fear of serpents and ghosts' and 'could go out anywhere in the dark'. Mohan felt ashamed of himself (A 17). He had read – 'from cover to cover' (A 9) – booklets, presumably in Gujarati, that discussed subjects like conjugal love, thrift, child marriages and the advantages of long walks in the fresh air. The Autobiography does not tell us how he obtained the booklets or who wrote them. Perhaps they were supplied by a high school teacher.

Implementing the advice on walking, Mohan also seems to have accepted the norm of 'lifelong faithfulness' – and watched Kastur to ensure that she too observed it. But 'she made it a point to go out whenever and wherever she liked'. The more Mohan tried to restrain her, the greater the liberty she took. 'Refusal to speak to one another became the order of the day with us, married children' (A 9), but Mohan's male pride also received a blow, though he remained 'passionately fond' of his bride and could not get her out of his mind even at school.

The boy faced other storms. One day, at 'a corner near the high school,' he heard a white evangelist pour 'abuse on Hindus and their gods'. Mohan 'could not endure' what

he heard and refused to go near the man again, and he was also angered by a rumour that a local Hindu converting to Christianity had been forced to eat beef and drink liquor (A 30).

Another storm came in the shape of Sheikh Mehtab, who was a year older than Karsan and thus three or four years older than Mohan. The son of a jailer employed by the British in the Kathiawar town of Gondal, Mehtab evidently lived only 'paces away' from the Gandhis' Rajkot home. Martin Green's research tells us that Mehtab's father, probably a Meman Muslim, earned about 20 rupees a month, compared with the 300 rupees that Kaba Gandhi had been making.<sup>8</sup>

A friend and classmate of Karsan in the high school and attracting a ring of admirers, Mehtab was a rakish youth of strength, speed and daring – he ran fast, ran long distances, did the high and long jumps, swam swiftly and 'could put up with any amount of corporal punishment' (A 17).<sup>9</sup> In all this he provided a complete contrast to Mohan, who did not play either cricket or football in school, partly because he was needed at home to nurse an increasingly sick father, and also because he shrank from, or was not drawn to, competitive games.

Nonetheless, in 1883 or 1884, shortly after Mohan's (and Karsan's) marriage, Mehtab seems to have selected Mohan as a lad to be won over. We have Mohan's account of the start and course of his relationship with Mehtab but not the latter's version. Yet we may guess that Mehtab had heard from Karsan of the ex-diwani's expectations of, and plans for, Mohan, and also that Mehtab had noticed something a little different in Karsan's young brother. It is more than likely, for instance, that in school Mehtab had heard of Mohan's peculiar behaviour during Mr Giles's visit. To Mehtab, Mohan was strange in a deplorable way but also strong. He was worth capturing. To this end Mehtab (joined by Karsan, who had left school after his marriage) mounted a campaign that played on Mohan's eagerness to repair his male pride. Mehtab knew from Karsan of Mohan's cowardly fears and of his frustration at Kastur's independence, and also of Mohan's annoyance at white rule.

'You have to take meat and wine,' Mohan was told by Mehtab. That was the only way to drive out the British. Also, meat would toughen Mohan, dissolve his terrors and, even if this last argument was not explicit, help in putting Kastur in her place. Didn't Mohan know Narmad's verse, Mehtab asked?

Behold the mighty Englishman/  
He rules the Indian small/  
Because being a meat-  
eater/  
He is five cubits tall.

Mohan admitted he knew the Gujarati verse, which was in vogue in the school. Mohan should also know, Mehtab added, that distinguished Rajkot figures were eating meat. Karsan, physically much stronger than Mohan, revealed that he agreed with Mehtab and

had indeed eaten meat himself. 'You know how hardy I am,' Mehtab went on, 'and how great a runner too. It is because I am a meat-eater.' Finally, Mohan was asked whether or not he had the courage to try.

These conversations, punctuated with assurances of faithful friendship from Mehtab, took place over a period of weeks, during which Mehtab also displayed his swimming and athletic skills to Mohan, who was 'dazzled' by Mehtab's 'exploits'. In the end Mohan convinced himself that meat would make him and other Indians strong, enabling them to 'defeat the English and make India free' (A 16–18), and probably also, though he does not admit it in the Autobiography, help him in his relationship with Kastur.

'A day was fixed for beginning the experiment' and a lonely spot by the river was chosen. The anticipated thrill overcame 'the shame of hiding like a thief', and Mohan went with Karsan to the tryst. The goat's meat brought by Mehtab was 'tough as leather' and Mohan could not finish his portion. That night he had a nightmare in which he imagined a live goat bleating inside him. But he had committed himself to Mehtab, who on subsequent occasions cooked other delicacies along with meat, and also found access to 'a State house, with dining hall, tables and chairs, in collusion with the chief cook there'. Mohan started relishing dishes with meat in them. But after about half-a-dozen feasts spread over a year or so, Mehtab (who paid for them in unknown ways) ran out of funds; and in his home Mohan found it increasingly hard to explain to his mother why he was not eating his dinner. Deciding that lying to his parents was worse than not eating meat, he told Mehtab that the experiment was over; but he told himself that he would resume meat-eating once the parents 'are no more and I have found my freedom'. This meat-eating phase probably lasted from some point early in 1884, when Mohan was a few months over 14, to early 1885 (A 17–20).

Here we may note Gandhi's report in the Autobiography that another high school friend of his (a Parsi boy, some think),<sup>10</sup> with whom Mohan had formed a close friendship, forsook Mohan, 'though I never forsook my friend', after Mohan had 'made friends' with Mehtab (A 16).



Two texts he read at about this time affected Mohan. The creation story in the *Manusmriti*, which he found among his father's religious books, not only 'did not impress him very much', it made him 'incline somewhat towards atheism' (A 30). Given his parents' uncompromising vegetarianism, he was also puzzled by positive references to meat in the *Manusmriti*.

But a stanza by the Gujarati poet Shamal Bhatt in a schoolbook gripped his imagination and lodged itself in his memory:

For a bowl of water give a goodly meal;  
 For a kindly greeting bow thou down with zeal;  
 For a simple penny pay thou back with gold;  
 If thy life be rescued, life do not withhold ...  
 And return with gladness good for evil done (A 31).

Soon, help was needed by Karsan, who had notched up a debt of 24 rupees. On his arm Karsan wore an armband of solid gold. Mohan clipped a bit of metal out of it, and the debt was cleared. Whether it was that he could not live with the knowledge that he had cheated his parents on more than one front, or because something unusual had been stirring inside him for a while, Mohan now (in about the middle of 1885) did another peculiar thing: he confessed his theft of the gold.

Mohan did not dare to speak to the former diwan of Porbandar, Rajkot and Wankaner. What he did was to write out a confession and tremblingly hand it to his father while Kaba, suffering from a fistula, lay on a plain wooden plank. According to the Autobiography, Mohan did not fear being beaten, for evidently Kaba had never beaten any of his sons. The Autobiography claims that Mohan's chief fear was that a shocked Kaba would hit himself.

The confession said that his father would now know that his much-loved son was merely a common thief. But the son would steal no more and was asking for forgiveness and also for adequate punishment. The note closed with a request that the father should not punish himself.

I was trembling as I handed the confession ... He read it through, and pearl-drops trickled down his cheeks, wetting the paper. For a moment he closed his eyes in thought and then tore up the note. He had sat up to read it. He again lay down. I also cried. I could see my father's agony. If I were a painter, I could draw a picture of the whole scene today. Those pearl-drops of love cleansed my heart and washed my sin away (A 23).

Biographical or autobiographical literature from 19th-century Kathiawar, or India as a whole, contains few accounts of a similar confession, which was remembered in the family for a long time, including by Mohan's sister Raliat, later a critic of some of her brother's attitudes.

Very few spaces, and very few incidents, in an extended family like that of the Gandhis, were private. Certainly, Mohan's confession was not, and we can only speculate on how Karsan reported the confession to Mehtab, or on what Kastur made of it. It was a brave deed, and yet (as Erikson points out) the Mohan of this confession seems to be in

control. Any anxiety in his mind relates not to what might happen to him, but to what might happen to his father.

We should note, too, what this confession was not – it did not admit his very recent meat-eating. As the Autobiography acknowledges, ‘My parents never knew that two of their sons had become meat-eaters’ (A 20). Mohan did not confess that sin because it would have been too much of a shock to his parents, and also because he fully intended to resume meat-eating in the future.

Which, then, is the real 15-year-old? The boy-husband afraid of the dark? The timid-looking youth on whom Mehtab’s exploits cast a spell? The penitent and brave son who can decide what he will admit and what he will not, and who can calmly study the impact of his apology on his father? A person is many persons. The third Mohan was the reason for Mehtab’s pursuit of him, while the first offered hope that Mohan could be caught.



From the time of his wedding until Kaba’s death at the end of 1885, i.e. from the age of about 13 to when he was 16, Mohan seems to have spent some time each day attending on his increasingly sick father, who had given up his position with the Rajasthanik court shortly before the triple wedding, and who never fully recovered from the injuries he sustained in the stage-coach accident.

Mohan’s caring and nursing tasks – massaging his father’s legs and feet, dressing the fistula that had grown on Kaba’s neck, compounding and administering drugs, and so on – cut into, or cut out, walks, games with school-friends, the possibility of going out to see a play, or reading something he liked. ‘As soon as the school closed, I would hurry home and begin nursing him’ (A 13). Obtaining, on one occasion, his father’s permission to go to a play, Mohan heeded an instinct and left for home before the play started. He found that Kaba had needed him. Similar permission was never sought again.

Despite the price he paid, Gandhi would claim in the Autobiography and elsewhere that he ‘loved to do this service [of nursing his father]’ (A 25). There has to be some truth in the claim, for the lad performing these chores continued in later life to take every chance to nurse people, including political opponents. (Erikson suggests that Mohan got the upper hand over the one he nursed, his father in Rajkot and others later.)

Yet this three-year period included the phase of Mohan’s adventure with meat. During that phase of about 12 months, and even after the adventure was suspended, the devoted yet independent son at the father’s bedside was carrying the weight of a big secret. Some lightness of heart doubtless followed the confession episode, and Mohan would have been moved by Kaba’s words, uttered not long before his death,

that 'Mohan here will keep up my reputation. He will increase the fame of our lineage.'<sup>11</sup>

Yet we should recognize the multiplicity of feelings about the father – not all loyal or kind – within a son-nurse who is also acknowledged, though the youngest, as the father's heir. Mohan liked going to a play but could not go; he liked to read interesting books but where was the time? Recalling his boyhood in a letter he would write from prison (25 Mar. 1909) to his second son Manilal, Gandhi would say: 'Of amusement after I was twelve, I had little or none' (9: 318). In this letter he would claim that nursing his father gave him joy, but that joy was surely joined by unexpressed disappointment. Our inwardly 'amused' boy was also, in another layer of himself, a sad boy.

One draw away from his father would be memorably and frankly recorded by Gandhi: 'Every night whilst my hands were busy massaging my father's legs, my mind was hovering about [my] bedroom. I was always glad to be relieved from my duty, and went straight to the bedroom after doing obeisance to my father' (A 25). An unsurprising outcome was that when he and Kastur were sixteen, she became pregnant.

Kaba's health worsened. 'Ayurvedic physicians ... tried all their ointments, hakims their plasters, and local quacks their nostrums.' Finally, a British physician suggested surgery in Bombay, but the family physician ruled that at his age Kaba would not survive it.

Shortly before eleven o'clock on the fateful night, Tulsidas, Kaba's brother, who had come from Porbandar to be of support, offered to relieve Mohan, who was massaging his father. Accepting the offer, Mohan 'went straight to the bedroom' and roused the pregnant Kastur, who was fast asleep. In five or six minutes there was a knock on the door, and a servant told Mohan that his father was no more. Running to his father's room, and wringing his hands in wretched shame, Mohan told himself that '[Father] would have died in my arms' had his carnal desire not cheated him of the privilege, which Tulsidas had faithfully earned. Mohan's devotion to his parents had been 'weighed and found unpardonably wanting' (A 26). These circumstances of his father's death, and the fact that 'the poor mite' to which Kastur in due course gave birth died in three or four days, would leave a permanent mark on Mohan's attitude to sex.



Almost from the very start of their child marriage, Mohan tried to educate Kastur and to help her become a life-partner in a 'modern' sense. The sexual or carnal element, as he calls it, was of course there, strongly so. He underlines that fact, calling himself a 'lustful' husband (A 10). But there was also a longing for mutual strengthening, a wish for a beloved who would also be a lover, not merely in a sexual sense but also in the

psychological one, a partner who would help him become what he longs to be, even as he tries to 'develop' her.

'I wanted to *make* my wife an ideal wife,' Gandhi says in the Autobiography, referring to his early years with Kastur. 'My ambition was to *make* her ... learn what I learnt and identify her life and thought with mine.' (Emphases in the original.) But she was 'illiterate' and 'not impatient of her ignorance'. Also, the 'ambition was all one-sided'.

My passion was entirely centred on one woman, and I wanted it to be reciprocated. But even if there was no reciprocity, it could not be all unrelieved misery because there was active love on one side at least (A 10–11).

These are strong statements, acknowledging the pressure in young Mohan's attempts to turn Kastur into an active sharer of his life and goals, and breathing disappointment that the passion, which here clearly includes but goes beyond sexual passion, was not reciprocated.

He tried hard to teach her, but time and opportunity were hard to find, for in that family household in Rajkot elders were always around, and in their presence there was no question of his even talking to her, let alone teaching her (A 11). Moreover, 'the teaching had to be done against her will'. She resisted him uncompromisingly, and he totally failed. Later, he blamed his carnal desire, arguing that without it he would at least have had more time, in the privacy of their bedroom, to teach her.

We are speaking of a boy in his teens who, while given to unmanly fears, is still conscious of some deep inner stirrings. We may speculate that he senses longings going beyond his extended family and thinks that this pretty wife that has come to him can help realize them if he can but educate her. After long and difficult years, and in ways he might not have thought of in Rajkot, she would indeed become a valuable ally; but in Rajkot in the mid-1880s she resisted strongly, and Mohan reacted with an even stronger effort on his part. It would have been wiser to accept Kastur as she was, and let her be, but with Kastur in Rajkot Mohan was not wise. He was only a disappointed, frustrated and overeager teenager.

This reality was well understood by Mehtab, who persisted with his approaches to Mohan despite the end of the experiments with meat. His closeness to Mohan was not liked by Putlibai, or by his brother Laxmidas, or by Kastur. All three, the Autobiography tells us, warned Mohan that Mehtab (who is not named in the Autobiography) was bad company. Writes Gandhi:

This companion was originally [Karsan's] friend. They were classmates. I knew his weakness, but I regarded him as a faithful friend. My mother, my eldest brother

(Laxmidas), and my wife warned me that I was in bad company. I was too proud to heed my wife's warning. But I dared not go against the opinion of my mother and my eldest brother.

Nevertheless I pleaded with them saying, 'I know he has the weakness you attribute to him, but you do not know his virtues. He cannot lead me astray, as my association with him is meant to reform him. For I am sure that if he reforms his ways, he will be a splendid man. I beg you not to be anxious on my account.' I do not think this satisfied them, but ... they let me go my way.

The fact that Kaba Gandhi is not mentioned suggests that the discussion took place either when he was quite ill or after his death. We can be fairly certain, given family customs in Kathiawar at the time, that the three family members talked separately to Mohan, rather than in one session. As for the 'weakness', mentioned in the singular, the meaning seems plain. The Gandhis viewed Mehtab as a loose character who might corrupt Mohan. It is of interest, nonetheless, and indicative of Mohan's standing, that the 16-year-old is allowed by his mother and a much older brother to 'go his own way'. Older relatives are deferring to this lad. Challenged by his mother, Laxmidas and Kastur, Mohan claimed that the friendship was meant to reform Mehtab. He would seek to turn Mehtab into a 'splendid man' by his own standards, different from Mehtab's, even though Mohan clearly envied Mehtab's capabilities.

As to what 'really' motivated Mohan in this relationship, Gandhi offers one clue: 'As one is always dazzled when he sees in others the qualities he lacks himself, I was dazzled by this friend's exploits. This was also followed by a strong desire to be like him ... Why should not I also be as strong as he?' (A 17) Another clue is presented in a glimpse provided by the older Gandhi in 1927: 'I have a vivid recollection,' he said, referring to his school days, 'of boys who put on an air because they had athletic skill and had physical power'. But 'their pride went before destruction, because weaker ones, realizing their haughtiness, segregated them ... and so they really dug their own graves' (40: 70). This is clearly a description of Mehtab, who was struck off the rolls of Alfred High School in 1884, and suggests that sympathy for a 'segregated' Mehtab may also have entered Mohan's mind. In 1942 he would recall another motivation: 'I believed even at [a] tender age that ... it did not matter if I made no special effort to cultivate friendship with Hindus, but I must make friends with at least a few Muslims' (83: 190).

Other factors, too, may have been at work. Apart from hoping, in Mehtab's company, to become 'as strong' as him, Mohan may have received from Mehtab an affirmation he did not receive from Kastur. For all his mischief, Mehtab had some virtues, to which Mohan referred in those discussions with his mother and Laxmidas. Though these virtues are not named in the Autobiography, an ability to affirm faith in Mohan's future role

may have been one. In addition, we shall soon see, Mehtab provided some amusement for Mohan.

Moreover, some of Mehtab's progressive views were to Mohan's liking, who had reacted against his family's acceptance of untouchability, accepted the principle, if no longer the practice, of meat-eating, and was increasingly critical of his and Karsan's early marriages. Mehtab's stand for the new against the old appealed to Mohan. Both boys wanted 'reform' in Indian customs; the two disliked the hierarchies in the India around them, except for the one between men and women; and no matter how vaguely, both dreamt of Indian freedom.

In the Autobiography Gandhi writes of how his relationship with Kastur was undermined by Mehtab, who 'fanned the flame' (A 21) in Mohan of unfounded suspicions about Kastur, causing the husband to level cruel accusations at her. As for Mehtab's well-known success (related in the Autobiography) in taking Mohan to a Rajkot brothel, it relied on two simple arguments: you will prove your manliness, and your wife will come running after you if she knows you can go elsewhere. This brothel incident probably occurred in 1886, perhaps when Kastur was at her parents' home. Mehtab took his friend to the house of ill repute, paid the money and sent Mohan in. The woman was all prepared, but Mohan froze, sitting tongue-tied 'near the woman on her bed'. She showed him the door with abuses and insults. Mohan felt 'as though my manhood had been injured, and wished to sink into the ground for shame'. Later he would thank God for this escape from the 'jaws of sin', while admitting that 'the carnal desire was there, and it was as good as the act' (A 20). But at the time he was ashamed of failing a test of manhood, not of visiting the brothel.

The warnings of his mother and Laxmidas had been vindicated, but Mohan did not shake Mehtab off. Upset by his 'failure' with the prostitute, he failed also to perceive Mehtab's mischief. And he continued to imagine qualities in Mehtab, enjoy his friendship, and fancy that he might reform him.



The Mohan emerging from this reading, entering his late teens with prestige in his circle, curiosity about the world around him, a peculiar strength, a weakness for a questionable character, and surprising fears, is different from the popular image of a timid, unimpressive, pious boy awaiting a life-enhancing experience.

Much of the blame for this other image must go to Gandhi himself, for in the Autobiography he mixes frank recollections of his boyhood and youth with the contrition of a later period. ('Autobiography' is a misleading description; what Gandhi wrote was a chronological account, ending in 1920, of his ethical and spiritual experiments.) The

contrition of an older Gandhi, and descriptions of lessons learnt long after the events described, surround the candid recollections and can conceal them, just as accounts of his early fears envelop the revelations of his strength as a lad.

Unless it is carefully read, the self-deprecating Autobiography can also incorrectly suggest that Mohan was a mediocre student. He was one of only two reaching matriculation out of the 38 who had passed the high school entrance examination with him, though when in 1887 he cleared the matriculation, journeying for the first time to Ahmedabad in order to do so, he was placed 404th out of about 3,000 in western India, a decent though not outstanding rank. But in Ahmedabad he was deprived of the emotional and logistical support of his family.

'Sure, I was the leader of the boys in my class,' an older Gandhi said to a close colleague, D B or 'Kaka' Kalelkar, who wanted to know more about his Rajkot boyhood than the Autobiography conveyed.<sup>12</sup> The reference was to his all-round standing in his class, not to his academic performance.

A term in Samaldas College in Bhavnagar, another of Kathiawar's 'princely' towns 90 miles south-east of Rajkot, followed. Mohan would have liked to go to a college in Bombay, but the family's fortunes had taken a dive after Kaba's illness and death, and Bhavnagar it had to be. But he was unhappy and homesick there. When, after the first term at Samaldas College, he returned to Rajkot for the break, an old family friend, 'a shrewd and learned Brahmin' called Mavji Dave, told Mohan, Laxmidas and their mother that the only way to restore the family's prestige was to implement Kaba's old idea: Mohan should go to London (A 32).



In the Autobiography Gandhi says that 'nothing could have been more welcome to me' and that he 'jumped at the proposal'. But he said even more in the Diary he wrote soon after arriving in London: 'Before the intention of coming to London was actually formed, I had a secret design in my mind of coming here to satisfy my curiosity of knowing what London was' (Diary entry, 12 Nov. 1888; 1: 2). Before Dave had spoken, Mohan had imagined London (as he would recall in an interview in England in 1891) as 'the home of philosophers and poets, the very centre of civilization'. Mavji Dave had only 'fanned the fire that was burning in me'.<sup>13</sup> So this timid son of conservative parents had been 'secretly designing' a journey to England. It was Jayshankar Buch, a student in the Bhavnagar college, who first put the thought into his mind (Diary; 1: 3).

Erikson has speculated that curiosity regarding London, the exciting metropolis, was not surprising in a young man in a conservative corner of the Empire. We may speculate in addition that it was not surprising in an Indian youth resenting if also admiring

British rule. What history books he read at Alfred High School and Samaldas College we do not know, but much later (while in England in 1931) he would recall that

as a schoolboy I had to pass a paper in history also, and I read that the page of history is soiled red with the blood of those who have fought for freedom ... (1 Dec. 1931; 54: 221)

In school he had also read (he would say in 1943<sup>14</sup>) Byron's line that 'freedom's battle once begun' is 'bequeathed from bleeding sire to son'.

Mohan's curiosity was not casual, it was earnest; it was a curiosity about a foe that had humiliated Indians but that could not merely be hated, for it formed 'the very centre of civilization'. He said to Dave, his mother and Laxmidas that he wanted to go to England as soon as possible, and qualify for the medical profession. Laxmidas interjected that a Vaishnava could not do that. 'Father never liked it ... He intended you for the bar.'

'I want you to be diwan,' Dave said to Mohan, 'or if possible something better' (A 33). Unlike a doctor, a barrister could become a diwan. (Dave's phrase, 'or something better', is indicative of the potential the 18-year-old Mohan conveyed to at least some observers.) Law was acceptable to him, Mohan said, and Dave ended his visit with a strong exhortation to Putlibai and Laxmidas to send the lad to London, adding that 5,000 rupees, or about £400, would cover the passage, studies and three years of stay in England.

Mohan 'began building castles in the air' (A 33). In fact, to use his own words, whether 'sleeping, walking, drinking, eating, walking, running, reading,' he was now 'dreaming and thinking of England'.<sup>15</sup>

However, Putlibai asked Mohan to travel to Porbandar and seek the consent of his uncle Tulsidas, who was now the head of the wider Gandhi clan. Putlibai thought though that Tulsidas – like her late husband a former diwan of Porbandar – would withhold permission. Supporting the England plan, Laxmidas said that in Porbandar Mohan should also try to meet Frederick Lely, the Political Resident, and ask for aid. Lely had a good opinion of Tulsidas Kaka, Laxmidas added, and in any case the Gandhis were entitled to help from the state of Porbandar.

Mohan set off for Porbandar, a five-day bullock-cart journey across unsafe territory inhabited by supposedly dangerous tribes. Mohan should have felt frightened, 'but my cowardice vanished before the desire to go to England'. On the way, in Dhoraji, the young man in a hurry switched to a seat on the back of a camel. Arriving in Porbandar, he did obeisance to his uncle (that was the custom), described the Dave proposal and sought permission. Tulsidas said that at his age, when he was 'at the threshold of death', he could not support an irreligious act. Indians returning from England knew no scruples

regarding food, 'cigars were never out their mouths', and 'dressed shamelessly'. Yet if Mohan's mother let him go, that was up to her.

Mohan's request for a letter of introduction to Lely was also turned down by Tulsidas, though he said that Mohan could mention their kinship to Lely. A letter from Mohan elicited an appointment at Lely's home. When Mohan turned up there, Lely was climbing the stairs. Having practised carefully for this first meeting with a British official and nursing high expectations (he had his dream and was moreover the grandson of Ota Gandhi), Mohan 'bowed low ... saluted Lely with both hands' and spoke the Gujarati sentences he had rehearsed. From where he stood Lely curtly replied that Porbandar state was poor. Adding, 'Pass your BA first and then see me,' Lely hurried up the stairs (A 33–4).

Returning to Rajkot, a bitterly disappointed Mohan next tried his luck with the thakore and with Colonel J W Watson, the Raj's political agent in Kathiawar. While the thakore donated a photograph of himself, Watson gave 'a trivial note of introduction which he said ... was worth one lac of rupees' (1: 7). In his London diary Mohan would soon write that these responses made him laugh, and also that the memory of 'the fulsome flattery which I had to practise about this time made me quite angry' (1: 8).

Not all Indians in their late teens would have reacted thus in 1888, when British supremacy was a given. That was the year when John Strachey, a senior servant of the Raj who once acted as Viceroy, declared:

This is the first and most essential thing to learn about India – that there is not, and never was, an Indian, or even any country of India, possessing according to European ideas, any sort of unity, physical, political, social or religious.<sup>16</sup>

Strachey was responding to, among other things, the creation three years earlier of the Indian National Congress. A group of lawyers, doctors and other intellectuals from different parts of India had formed the body, thanks to the goading of a Scotsman called Allan Octavian Hume, who had experienced the 1857 Revolt in Etawah in the United Provinces. The Congress, of which Mohan was evidently aware, sought greater rights for Queen Victoria's Indian subjects and also hoped for Indian unity.



We do not know what Mehtab was doing all this time, except that the Diary written in London tells us that before Mohan left Rajkot for Porbandar, the two had an argument, it is not clear over what. 'I was always quarrelling with my friend Sheikh Mehtab,' Mohan would write (1: 4).

'Quite engrossed in thinking about the quarrel,' Mohan tripped while walking down a Rajkot lane and 'banged [my] head against a carriage'. A little later Mohan fainted and lay unconscious for about five minutes; companions thought he had even died. Perhaps Rajkot's oven-like summer contributed to the incident, yet the tiff had clearly weighed heavily on Mohan's mind.

While Mohan was in Porbandar, Mehtab performed, in his own style, some money-related errands for Mohan in Rajkot. As Mohan would soon note down in his London Diary,

My friend Sheikh Mehtab who, I should say, is full of tricks, reminded Meghjibhai of his promise and forged a letter with my signature in which he wrote that I stood in need of Rs 5,000 and so on ... (1: 4–6)

Though Meghjibhai, a relative of the Gandhis who had indicated that he might help, was taken in at first, the ploy failed. Astute as always, Putlibai had told Mohan that he would 'never get any money from [Meghjibhai]' (1: 3–4). According to the Diary, Mohan managed to see the funny side of these obstacles to his dream, and also to make his mother laugh heartily, including at Mehtab's tricks – an ability to be amused was joined to the resolute chase of a dream.



Though many questioned the London project, including some in the Kathiawar press, Dave did not let up, and neither did Mohan. The options of taking a loan or selling his wife's jewellery were considered. The second was also an accepted course, especially if the ornaments had come from the husband's family.

Laxmidas said 'he would find the money somehow' (A 34). This proved hard, however, and at one point in the summer of 1888, Laxmidas (possibly also influenced by the public criticism) asked Mohan to give up the London project. Coming from one who was not only 'generous to a fault and loved me as a son' but also, after Kaba's death, the head of the immediate family, this advice should have been demoralizing (A 34). But Mohan rejected it. Revising his stance, Laxmidas scraped together some funds.

Yet Putlibai, who had made careful inquiries, was troubled. She asked Mohan – with good reason, as we know, even if she did not – whether he could live in England without meat and without liquor. He would swear, Mohan said, that he would. 'In a distant land?' the practical Putlibai asked. It was only when Becharji Swami, a Modh Bania who had become a Jain monk and who, like Dave, was an adviser to the family, said that he would 'get the boy solemnly to take ... three vows' that Putlibai relented.

With Becharji Swami administering the oath, Mohan vowed not to touch wine, women or meat, and Putlibai voiced, or gestured, her permission. She also tied a string of tulsi beads round her son's neck, a token of her plea to Providence for his protection. The vow could not have been pleasant for Mohan, who at this point seemed convinced, in his own mind, of the benefits of meat, was yet to feel really guilty about his visit to the brothel, and, despite an early acceptance of 'lifelong faithfulness to the wife', might well have been curious about the charms that London might offer. Yet this lad who remembered not only his secrets but perhaps also his response to the tale of Harishchandra, knew that the unwelcome vow had bound him.

Kastur, to whom a boy, Harilal, was born in the spring of 1888, did not feature in these discussions about her husband's plans, even though they would make a large difference to her. Like most other Indian wives of her time and of later times, she was expected to accept what her husband (and her mother-in-law) decided. We have no evidence that Mohan asked for Kastur's views on his plans. Another name, too, is absent from these accounts: Karsan. Discontinuing school after his marriage and drifting steadily downward, he seemed in no position to offer his younger brother counsel.



'It was an uncommon thing,' Gandhi would later record, 'for a young man from Rajkot to go to England' (A 35). His friends and presumably his teachers presented an address to him at the high school. Mohan 'stammered out' a reply in Gujarati. His 'head reeled' and his 'whole frame shook' (A 35).

This reaction in a youth who did not lose his poise at his first-ever encounters with men like Lely, Watson and the Rajkot prince, calls for examination, especially as the quaking Mohandas reappears at times during the next dozen or so years, trembling before gatherings in England, a courtroom in Bombay and before larger meetings in Bombay and Calcutta. Alternating with this shaking Mohan is the resolute young man. Where he faces a hurdle or a foe, or is one-on-one with another, Mohan seems fearless. However, before a group of people, whether peers, friends or strangers, he often seems terrified – often, but not always. Shyness is a considerable element in this fear, and he is afraid of being laughed at. Behind the shyness may be detected an awareness that he cannot impress or please and also that impressing or pleasing an audience will not satisfy him. Even in his late teens he seems to sense that his surroundings – his peers, his people – are asking something more of him.

The timid Mohan is also the seeing and listening Mohan who after his arrival in England would sketch in words scenes from Kathiawar, including: 'the shepherd trotting onward in his milk-white suit, worn for the first time, with his long beard turned up

beside his face and fastened under his turban, singing some broken verses', 'a herd of cows, with their horns painted red and green and mounted with silver', 'a crowd of little maids, with small earthen vessels resting on cushions placed on their heads', including one 'spilling some milk from her vessel', 'the great banker' with 'white whiskers and a big white turban, with a long reed pen thrust into his turban [and] a long scarf wound round his waist with a silver inkstand adjusted in the scarf', as well as – let us take note – people who 'have only one meal per day, and that consists of stale bread and salt'.<sup>17</sup>

This witness of hardship around him and of other street scenes was also, we notice, observing his father and teachers (as also his fellow students) and watching caste and religious divides. Referring, two months before his death, to his early years in Porbandar and Rajkot, Gandhi would claim, 'I saw everything that happened there' (97: 428). Not obviously to be taken literally, this large claim should nonetheless enter our reconstruction of Mohan's teenage years. Perhaps the trembling and aware Mohans are inter-related.

The send-off at Rajkot (for Bombay *en route* to London) was portrayed by Mohan in the Diary he wrote after arrival in London:

Many had come to bid me farewell on the night. Messrs. Kevalram, Chhaganlal Patwari, Vrajilal, Harishankar, Amolakh, Manekchand, Latib, Popat, Bhanji, Khimji, Ramji, Damodar, Meghji, Ramji Kalidas, Naranji, Ranchhoddass, Manilal were among those who came. Jatashankar, Vishvanath and others may be added (1: 8).

Actually, therefore, the now-timid-now-audacious teenager observing his surroundings is also a leader in his small world. That many should see him off is not surprising in itself – departures for London were not everyday affairs in Rajkot in 1888. What is striking is Mohan's lack of surprise about the send-off. He takes it for granted, and the way he reels off the names of persons who 'were among those who came' certainly suggests a leader in the making, if not one already made.

*The Kathiawar Times* published (on 12 July 1888) an English translation of what Mohan had said in the high school: 'I hope that some of you will follow in my footsteps, and after your return from England you will work wholeheartedly for big reforms in India' (1: 1). Though he has solemnly taken the triple vow, on the eve of his departure for England Mohan still wants 'big reforms'.

After arriving in London, Mohan would describe his parting from his wife, son and mother. Putlibai cried, but the son successfully fought back his tears. Kastur 'had begun sobbing long before'. 'I went to her and stood like a dumb statue for a moment. I kissed her, and she said, "Don't go." What followed I need not describe' (Interview in *The Vegetarian* of London, 13 June 1891; 1: 45).



The Mohan who copes next with old and new obstacles in Bombay is unrecognizable from the uncertain teenager. He had arrived in Bombay along with Laxmidas (who carried the money that he had put together), Mehtab and a couple of others. Learning that it would be weeks before a ship left for England, Laxmidas returned to Rajkot, entrusting the money to Kastur's brother, who lived in Bombay.

Also living in Bombay were a number of other Modh Baniyas, most of whom disliked the idea of someone from their community going overseas and living and eating in the company of impure whites – thus far no Modh Bania had committed that sin. When Mohan, waiting for news of a sailing, showed up in their district, they jeered at him. A community meeting was convened and Mohan summoned before it. 'Nothing daunted and without the slightest hesitation,' Mohan went. The Sheth who presided was a distant relative and had been close to Kaba Gandhi. In front of a large audience he addressed Mohan:

In the opinion of the caste, your proposal to go to England is not proper. Our religion forbids voyages abroad ... One is obliged there to eat and drink with Europeans!

Answering that he did not agree that going to England was against their religion, Mohan also mentioned his vow, taken before Putlibai, 'to abstain from three things you fear most'. 'We tell you,' the Sheth rejoined, 'that it is *not* possible to keep our religion there.'

'I am helpless,' the 18-year-old replied. 'I cannot alter my resolve.'

'Will you disregard the orders of the caste?'

'I am really helpless. I think the caste should not interfere.'

'Incensed', the Sheth 'swore' at Mohan, who sat unmoved. The Sheth then pronounced his order that Mohan was henceforth an outcast and anyone helping him or seeing him off at the dock would be fined a rupee and a quarter (A 36–7).

To Laxmidas's credit, he sent word from Rajkot that despite the Sheth's order Mohan still had his permission to go, but Kastur's brother lost his nerve and refused to hand over the money. At this Mohan asked Ranchhoddas Patwari, a Modh Bania friend living in Bombay, for a loan to cover his 'passage and sundries' and requested Patwari to recover the loan from Laxmidas.

Patwari agreed (another indication of Mohan's standing), and Mohan bought his passage, Western-style clothes (including a short jacket and a necktie) and foodstuffs. In the Autobiography he writes of an unnamed 'friend who had experience in the matter' who 'got clothes and other things ready'. This may be a reference to Mehtab, who was

in Bombay and was, we know, the one who could get 'things ready' for Mohan. From what we know of Mehtab, he could very well have claimed 'experience in the matter' of clothes for England.

Mohan took care, also, to get rid of his shikha or hair-knot, fearing that it would 'expose [him] to ridicule' in England (A 352). After writing letters to his family that he asked Mehtab to carry to Rajkot, Mohandas sailed from Bombay on 4 September 1888 on the P & O liner, *Clyde*. He was carrying four letters himself. Introducing Mohandas, the letters were addressed to Pranjivan Mehta and Dalpatram Shukla, Kathiawaris in London at the time, Ranjitsinhji, a prince from Jamnagar (another 'yellow' tract in Kathiawar) who had acquired fame in England as a cricketer, and Dadabhai Naoroji, a founder of the Congress who was in London to promote awareness of India.

Mohandas's cabin-mate was Tryambakrai Mazmudar, a wakil or pleader from Junagadh (another princely state near but larger than Porbandar). 'An experienced man of mature age', as the Autobiography describes him, Mazmudar hoped, like Mohan, to become a barrister. Learning that Mazmudar was travelling on this ship, Mohan had asked for a berth in his cabin. Twenty-two years later, speaking of the youth, one month shy of 19, whom he had met on the *Clyde*, Mazmudar would recall that young Mohan (Mazmudar called him a 'child') was 'obstinate' and had untypical 'strength'.<sup>18</sup> 'There is no one more truthful,' added Mazmudar. 'But along with truth he has a lot of ego. Only what he says is the truth.'<sup>19</sup>

Both qualities, strength and obstinacy, were claimed by Mohan in his London Diary:

I must write that had it been some other man in the same position which I was in, I dare say he would not have been able to see England (1: 9).

But I am not a man who would, after having formed any intention, leave it easily (1: 4).