In March 1930, Gandhi, Nehru, and the Congress were to make a call for *purna swaraj*, or complete independence from British rule in India. Coming out of what might be termed a political retirement, Gandhi searched his mind for some action that might ignite the nation and serve as the expression of the will of the general community. The course of action that Gandhi decided to undertake was revealed by a remarkable letter that he addressed to Lord Irwin, the Viceroy, a letter most unusual in the annals of political discourse. "Dear Friend", he wrote to his political adversary on March 2, "I cannot intentionally hurt anything that lives, much less fellow human beings, even though they may do the greatest wrong to me and mine. Whilst, therefore, I hold the British rule to be a curse, I do not intend harm to a single Englishman or to any legitimate interest he may have in India." In a rather detailed analysis, Gandhi was to note the vast inequities in the salaries paid to Indians and to British officials: where the average Indian earned less than 2 annas per day, the British Prime Minister earned Rs. 180 per day, while the Viceroy received Rs. 700 per day; more tellingly, the Prime Minister of Britain received 90 times more than the average Britisher, but the Viceroy received "much over five thousand times India's average income." While not desirous of humiliating the Viceroy, Gandhi apologized for taking a "personal illustration to drive home a painful truth", and asked him "on bended knee" to "ponder over this phenomenon." The system of administration carried out in India was "demonstrably the most expensive in the world", and it had only further impoverished the nation.

If the British were not prepared to combat the various "evils" afflicting India under colonial rule, Gandhi was prepared to commence a fresh campaign of "civil disobedience". As he went on to inform Irwin, he intended to break the salt laws, a gesture that no doubt must have struck Irwin as bizarre. The British exercised a monopoly on the production and sale of salt; yet this was an essential ingredient, required by the poor as much as by the rich. "I regard this tax [on salt]", Gandhi wrote, "to be the most iniquitous of all from the poor man's standpoint. As the independence movement is essentially for the poorest in the land the beginning will be made with this evil." Since Gandhi intended no harm to the Viceroy himself, or indeed to any Englishman, he chose to have his letter delivered in person by a "young English friend who believes in the Indian cause and is a full believer in non-violence". The Viceroy, not unexpectedly, promptly wrote back to express his regret that Gandhi was again "contemplating a course of action which is clearly bound to involve violation of the law and danger to the public peace."

"On bended knees I asked for bread and I have received stone instead", Gandhi remarked, and making good his promise, he set out on March 12 with seventy-eight of his followers and disciples from Sabarmati Ashram on the 241-mile march to Dandi on the sea. All along the way, he addressed large crowds, and with each passing day an increasing number of people joined Gandhi on the march. It is said that the roads were watered, and fresh flowers and green leaves strewn on the path; and as the satyagrahis walked, they did so to the tune of one of Gandhi's favorite bhajans, *Raghubati Raghava Raja Ram*, sung by the great Hindustani vocalist, Pandit Paluskar. On April 5, Gandhi arrived at Dandi: short prayers were offered, Gandhi addressed the crowd, and at 8:30 AM he picked up a small lump of natural salt. Gandhi had now broken the law; Sarojini Naidu, his close friend and associate, shouted: "Hail, Deliverer!" No sooner had Gandhi violated the law than everywhere others followed suit: within one week the jails were full, and subsequently Gandhi himself was to be taken into jail.

It has been suggested by some historians that nothing substantial was achieved by Gandhi through this campaign of civil disobedience. Gandhi and Irwin signed a truce, and the British Government agreed to call a conference in London to negotiate India's demands for independence. Gandhi was sent by the Congress as its sole representative, but the negotiations proved to be inconclusive, particularly since various other Indian communities had been encouraged by the British to send a representative and make the claim that they were not prepared to live in an India under the domination of the Congress. Yet never before had the British consented to negotiate directly with the Congress, and Gandhi met Irwin as his equal. In this respect, the man who most loathed Gandhi, Winston Churchill, understood the extent of Gandhi's achievement when he declared it "alarmingly and also nauseating to see Mr. Gandhi, a seditious Middle Temple lawyer, now posing as a fakir of a type well known in the East, striding half-naked up the steps of the viceregal palace, while he is still organizing and conducting a defiant campaign of civil disobedience, to parley on equal terms with the representative of the King-Emperor." Likewise, even Nehru was to come to a better appreciation of Gandhi following his march to the sea, since many Indians now appeared to understand that the nation had unshackled itself and achieved a symbolic emancipation. "Staff in hand he goes along the dusty roads of Gujarat", Nehru had written of Gandhi, "clear-eyed and firm of step, with his faithful band trudging along behind him. Many a journey he has undertaken in the past, many a weary road traversed. But longer than any that have gone before is this last
journey of his, and many are the obstacles in his way. But the fire of a great resolve is in him and surpassing
love of his miserable countrymen. And love of truth that scorches and love of freedom that inspires. And none
that passed him can escape the spell, and men of common clay feel the spark of live. It is a long journey, for the
goal is the independence of India and the ending of the exploitation of her millions."

The picture of Gandhi, firm of step and walking staff in hand, was to be among the most enduring of the
images of him, and it is through this representation that the Bengali artist Nandîl Bose sought to immortalize
Gandhi. Yet in innumerable other respects, many of which have received little attention (and of which I shall
mention only four), the march to the sea remains an extraordinary event. First, no one knew the meaning and
potential of symbols as much as did Gandhi, but his ability to read and manipulate signs has not been the
subject of any systematic study. Second, unlike most 'revolutionaries', Gandhi thought it no part of his quest for
truth to retain secrecy: accordingly, the Government was informed of his precise plans and invited to arrest him.
Again, though women were full and active members of Gandhi’s community, and many were to be closely
associated with him over a lengthy period of time, no women were present among the 78 people chosen to
accompany him on the march. Gandhi took the view that the presence of women might deter the British from
attacking the satyagrahis, and that no such excuse should be available to the British if they should wish to
retaliate. Behind this lay Gandhi’s distinction between non-violence of the strong and non-violence of the weak;
curiously, Gandhi’s thinking was also informed by a certain sense of chivalry, such that any triumph of non-
violence was diminished if the playing field was not level. Fourth, the walk brought the body into the body
politic, and so belonged with Gandhi’s other practices of the body.