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Gandhi's Gentle Righteous Indignation

Mohandas "Mahatma" Gandhi was an Indian nationalist leader and advocate for nonviolent resistance against British colonial rule. In 1930, he and many other Indians protested the unjust taxation the British had imposed on them by collecting ocean salt rather than buying from British vendors. This protest is known as the Salt March. Prior to the protest, Gandhi wrote a letter to Viceroy Lord Irwin, who was a British Crown representative at the time. In his letter to lord Irwin, Gandhi uses a respectful and firm tone, moral and religious appeals, as well as logical reasoning to justify his plan for civil disobedience, appealing to Irwin's conscience while establishing the ethical legitimacy of India's independence movement.

Gandhi begins by establishing his credibility and moral authority to present himself as principled and trustworthy in order to lower Irwin's mental guard. He appeals to Ethos by explaining his cause in a way that makes him seem attuned to his conscience rather than a rebel. For example, Gandhi admits that his choice to be civilly disobedient "might be termed a mad risk" (Gandhi). By doing this, he shows humility and awareness in the gravity of his actions. This emphasises his morality and causes the reader to think of Gandhi as a humble leader. By acknowledging failure, he appears more honest. Another way Gandhi builds his credibility is with how he describes resistance. He recontextualises his goal stating that "I have deliberately used the word conversion [...] my ambition is no less than to convert the British people through non-violence" (Gandhi). The word conversion is important, as it suggests peaceful

transformation rather than violent defeat. By framing it in this way, Gandhi is elevating himself above politics as a teacher or a moral guide. His goal is to inspire change. Gandhi does all of this on purpose; by using calm and sincere language, he disarms Irwin's political defensiveness. This, in turn, leaves Irwin more open to Gandhi's points.

After building his moral authority by emphasizing sincerity, Gandhi strengthens his argument by appeal to Irwin's Pathos. He uses emotional and spiritual appeals, using a respectful and compassionate tone to humanize India's suffering under British rule. He begins by describing how his people's suffering "will be enough to melt the stoniest hearts" (Gandhi). This imagery of "stoniest hearts" attempts to evoke empathy and potentially shame within the reader, as it suggests that even the most brutal oppressors would be moved by the injustice Britain is committing. Rather than invoking anger, Gandhi instead writes compassionately, making his nonviolent path seem more humane. Another way Gandhi appeals to Irwin's emotion is via spiritual language. Gandhi writes about his mission as if it were divinely inspired: "Providence seems to have sent [my messenger] to me, as it were, for the very purpose" (Gandhi). His references to "Providence" and "truth" place the movement in a spiritual context, less as a rebellion and more as a moral calling. This also appeals to Irwin's sense of faith, as in his eyes, moral law is above imperial law. To Irwin, resistance to the independence movement would be sinful, in a sense. Both emotional and spiritual appeals strengthen Gandhi's moral argument. They make his civil disobedience appear as a logical response to oppression, and disincentivize Irwin from intervening in the Salt March.

Gandhi is able to use a variety of rhetorical strategies in order to convince Irwin that civil disobedience is necessary, and that the independence movement should not be met with resistance.