

Free essay on gandhi: growth of a national leader

[Countries](#), [England](#)



1

Mohandas K. Gandhi was born in 1869 at the apex of British rule in India. A native of Gujarat state in western India, his life would follow the arc of British colonialism from its late-19th century Victorian golden age through its 20th century descent to the downfall of the Raj in 1947. Gandhi's life spanned a century of remarkable socio-political change in India. Born just 12 years after the bloody 1857 revolt, which ended in a hardening of British rule, he witnessed a change in his country's consciousness that mirrored a phenomenon that was unfolding throughout British Empire. " His life was lived against the backdrop of the monumental changes that brought the British Empire to the peak of its extent across the globe and then its retraction and demise" (Brown and Parel, 11). In a sense, Gandhi's life was always lived on the edge of change. A product of his times, Gandhi symbolized the kind of native self-realization and empowerment that ushered in one of the great sea changes of history, the retrenchment of imperialism as an ideology and the great rise of nationalism that is still very much in evidence today.

As a young man, Gandhi's conception of the world and his personal value system were dominated by the Empire, that great global expanse that tied together disparate parts of the world. Gandhi spent some 20 years in South Africa, working as a lawyer in a country that, like his native country, had an oppressive system based on race and class. This colored his world view, and altered his Anglo-centric view of the world, though he came to believe that an Indian

2

independence movement would have to play out within the British system and under its laws. Gandhi's experiences serving in a British ambulance corps unit left him convinced " that India could achieve her complete emancipation only within and through the British Empire" (Brown and Parel, 21). This is an important point, and illustrates how Gandhi the revolutionary evolved, because his pacifist convictions often obscure the fact that he maintained a degree of loyalty to, and affection for, British law and democratic traditions.

Though he would come to be regarded a wild-eyed radical in the eyes of British statesmen like Winston Churchill, Gandhi's traditional Hindu upbringing would remain with him, though he wrote extensively about the abuse and manipulation of women that Hindu tradition continued to justify down to the present day. Arguing that the servile status of women was not a natural condition, he wrote that "'Of all the evils for which man has made himself responsible, none is so degrading, so shocking or so brutal as his abuse of' women" (Terchek, 65). This represented a radical departure from his Hindu background, and should be seen as the product of his changed worldview, which was enlarged during his years living abroad in South Africa and his trips to England. As with most original thinkers, perspective and a greater sense of the world (and of himself) brought him to a new understanding of society in general.

One key aspect of Indian society that defied Gandhi's attempts to resolve was the great divide between Hindu and Muslim, a problem that has outlived him. He proved to be a galvanizing figure during India's struggle for independence, but once independence came this historic divide reasserted

itself. Gandhi's Hindu co-religionists persisted in a belief that non-Hindu Indians could not truly be called "Indian" (Brown and Parel, 223). This unbridgeable gap

3

remains part of Gandhi's legacy, though it does not marginalize his status as national hero and leader, a role he assumed as part of a lifelong process of personal growth and self-realization.

4

Works Cited

Brown, Judith M. and Parel, Anthony J., Eds. The Cambridge Companion to Gandhi. New

York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2011.

Terchek, Ronald. Gandhi: Struggling for Autonomy. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield,

1998.

1

Gandhi and the Birth of a New Consciousness

Gandhi's accomplishment as a world leader, a spiritual leader and an advocate of conscience, was so great and proved so impactful that it succeeded, over time, in showing the British themselves how they had erred as a supposed promoter of civilization. The Indian independence movement gave him ample opportunity to point out how and where the British

2

Empire had betrayed the principles that it purported to introduce to its subject peoples throughout the world. Gandhi pointed out that "A society

driven by responsibilities is oriented toward service, acknowledging other points of view, compromise and progress – whereas a society driven by rights is oriented toward acquisition, confrontation and advocacy” (Nair, 67). In other words, the class-driven British system had proven inadequate to the demands of its own social aspirations. There are few messages more powerful than the one that exposes spiritual and intellectual hypocrisy and the injustice it produces. This was Gandhi’s greatest accomplishment, and which showed him to be one of the greatest leaders in modern history.

Truly, showing one’s foe where he has undeniably betrayed himself is a remarkable accomplishment. Doing so in a way that pointedly eschews violence is unique. In this way, Gandhi has spawned followers in all parts of the world and in causes that may be seen as a continuation of the fight against injustice, tyranny and oppression of which he was such an important part. Men like Martin Luther King, Jr., and Nelson Mandela inherited Gandhi’s philosophy of non-violence and put it into direct action in ways that cost them both dearly, King having been assassinated and Mandela having spent a large part of his life in prison. And yet the influence of these two men, and of others who embraced Gandhi’s message of peaceful change, have in their turn transmitted the power of his belief to others. In a sermon delivered in 1959, King said that Gandhi and others like him are not liked by the world in general, and almost always end up being killed for their beliefs.

And yet Gandhi’s martyrdom had the effect of enhancing his influence exponentially. “ The man who shot Gandhi only shot him into the hearts of humanity” King assured his listeners (Fields, 47). Gandhi’s accomplishments

as a leader and the power of his message have survived

3

his death and continue to influence the world for good. That is his lasting legacy and the measure of his greatest accomplishment.

4

Works Cited

Fields, Rona M. *Martyrdom: The Psychology, Theology, and Politics of Self Sacrifice*.

Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing, 2004.

Nair, Keshavan. *A Higher Standard of Leadership: Lessons from the Life of Gandhi*. Barrett-

Koehler Publishers, 1994.

1

Heart and Conscience: Gandhi as an Inspirational Force

In many ways, inspiration lay at the root of Mohandas Gandhi's influence on people and his impact on events. His philosophy of passive resistance, which proved irresistible to the world's greatest empire, relied upon inspiration in order to win supporters to the cause. In truth, submitting to physical violence and imprisonment required a tremendous leap of faith on the part of Gandhi's followers. It would have been easy to give in to primal instincts and respond to violence with violence, yet the power of Gandhi's message of non-violence captured the hearts and minds of the Indian people, Hindu and Muslim, and paved the way to national sovereignty and a new future for millions of people. Inspiration comes in many forms but the man who can inspire faith and loyalty in people while asking them to endure great

hardship has a rare ability and depth of character. Gandhi was an inspirational leader because he could convince people to sacrifice and endure without giving in to their baser instincts.

For Gandhi, the voice of conscience, “ the still small voice,” was the voice of God; he saw no difference between the two (Johnson, 163). It was to this voice that he listened when contemplating his hunger strikes. In his writings, Gandhi is explicit in his belief that inspiration comes from within, and it is from this belief that his leadership style proceeds. As a leader, Gandhi was not ideological or rhetorical. His was the leadership of example, of taking a position and creating a persona that would inspire his followers to follow him, which they did despite the ongoing threat of imprisonment and, in some cases, death at the hands of British security forces.

2

Gandhi’s style of dress became an important part of his persona. As a young lawyer educated in British schools, he had tried to fit in with the English style of dress, which he adopted during his time in South Africa.

Gandhi visited London in the early 1900s. Upon returning to South Africa in 1909, he wrote *Hind Swaraj*, a personal testament to the change in his perspective that his visit produced. “ In it he fiercely criticizes Western civilization as being one that feeds on bodily rather than spiritual needs. He criticizes the view that the European dress would have a civilizing effect on Indians” (Gonsalves, 2010). It is at this point that Gandhi began his transformation, becoming Indian in both mind and body. It is interesting to contemplate to what extent physical appearance played a part in Gandhi’s emergence as a national leader, however, there can be little doubt that his

adoption of Indian dress and, later, of cloth weaving helped inspire faith in other Indians. It inspired Gandhi's fellow Indians who, presumably, would not have been similarly motivated by a leader dressed in English tweed. Gandhi inspired other educated Indians who, like him, had once worn English attire to dress in their native garb. "Those who did not conform felt socially ostracized" despite their social importance or level of educational attainment (Gonsalves, 2010).

Dress was a means to an end for Gandhi, albeit an important means. More importantly, it was Gandhi's ability to reach people at a personal level, at the level of personal conscience, that defined his true genius as a leader. This ability inspired a movement that transcended social and religious distinctions. It has since inspired others to carry on Gandhi's message of justice and brotherhood; to reach people's hearts and to speak to them through the voice of conscience.

3

Works Cited

Gonsalves, Peter. "'Half-Naked Fakir:' The Story of Gandhi's Personal Search for Sartorial Integrity." *Gandhi Marg*, 31(1), 2010.

Johnson, Richard L., Ed. *Gandhi's Experiments With Truth*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006.

1

The Value of Moral Integrity: A Contemplation of Gandhi's Influence

There is considerable value to be derived from contemplating not only those

values that benefit all mankind, but also those qualities that allow great leaders to embody those values in ways that inspire others to do likewise. It is a worthwhile exercise both as a personal reminder of what constitutes greatness in others and of those elements of humanity that must be preserved from generation to generation. A study of Gandhi's life and an examination of his philosophy may well serve as a baseline from which to assess the actions of other leaders. The moral ambiguity that so often clouds the judgment of modern statesmen and heads of state requires a moral compass, some means of maintaining one's equilibrium and ability to judge the policies and values of others. As such, the value of this paper lies in the consideration of those traits and beliefs that have made Gandhi a moral touchstone for some of the 20th century's greatest humanists.

Gandhi himself wrote that there can be no equivocation when it comes to doing the right thing in public life. The idea that political expediency can be used to objectively justify immoral behavior was abhorrent to Gandhi, whose position on the subject is instructive. " We have come to accept that a lower moral standard is necessary to get things done in the real world of politics and business. This is the gospel of expediency – the double standard of conduct. It is fueled by the idea of winning at all costs: that results are the only things that count" (Nair, 13). Gandhi

2

sought independence for his country, but only on terms that maintained his personal integrity and that of his country. As such, the value of this article may be seen in Gandhi's foresight as an exemplar of resolute yet peaceful action in the face of

tyranny. In leading by example, Gandhi showed countless others that the way to lasting change can be found without resorting to violence, physical coercion or cynical emotional manipulation. “ Once you have acknowledged that attachments to privileges and power can be a hindrance to the achievement of a higher standard of leadership, you can take steps to reduce them” (Nair, 40). Gandhi clearly believed in a higher standard of leadership, and that conviction has led others to follow in his footsteps. That, too, is the value of contemplating his ethos.

Gandhi believed that taking the road to a morally superior standard of leadership took courage, and it was courage that he showed his people. Personal courage in the face of great personal danger is a powerful means of inspiring others, and Gandhi’s leadership by example provided a standard of moral rectitude that proved powerfully effective and compromised Great Britain’s moral position. When the British used force to coerce Gandhi and his followers, his answer was not armed insurrection but civil disobedience, general strikes and personal displays of resistance. If Gandhi’s example inspired so many to think and act as he did, then it is reasonable to assume that a study of his methods and beliefs might inspire others to follow his example. As such, there would seem to be considerable value in seeking to understand and affirm Gandhi through a paper such as this.

3

Works Cited

Nair, Keshavan. *A Higher Standard of Leadership: Lessons from the Life of Gandhi*. Barrett-Koehler Publishers, 1994.