

Mahatma gandhi's death

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What are we to make of Gandhi's life? How should we judge this homespun-wearing politician-saint, the man who brought down an empire by preaching brotherhood and nonviolence? At the very end, with his beloved India reaping its own destruction, Gandhi considered himself a failure. But his place in history is secure, and it does not diminish his greatness to point out that in some respects, he had failed. He had spent his life working toward the achievement of independence for India without violence or division—"you can cut me in two if you wish," he famously told Muhammed Jinnah, "but don't cut India in two. Yet in the end, he was forced to watch as his newborn country was torn by one of the great human calamities of the century. Gandhi had made India ungovernable for the British, but in the autumn of 1947, it became ungovernable for anyone. If his political dream was in some sense a failure, so too was his dream of an India cleansed of the age-old inequities of caste and prejudice, and yet uncorrupted by modern technology and industry. He imagined a country where countless Indian peasants wove their own clothes and tilled their own land, without what he considered the ruinous effects of modernity.

But after his death, history passed him by: his great disciple, Jawaharlal Nehru, was an ardent socialist, and by the 1950s Nehru's five-year plans were turning India into an industrial state—and eventually, a nuclear state. Meanwhile, the iniquities of class and gender that he had so loathed persisted, even into the 21st century. Yet Gandhi had to aspire as high as he did to achieve what he did; indeed he won triumphs for India that less idealistic leaders would never have dreamed possible.

No one did more than Gandhi to improve the lot of poor Indians, and if his dreams fell short of reality, it was not because the dreams were flawed, but because the human race, which he loved so much, could not rise to the standard he set. It is true that India split after independence, but without Gandhi's labor, without the power of his person, there would have been no India at all. The nationalists of the Indian National Congress fought for independence, but they were, and always would be, a Westernized elite, out of touch with the vast masses inhabiting the real India.

It was Gandhi, the Mahatma, who made the people of the subcontinent believe in the idea of an Indian nation; indeed, it was he, the frail, bespectacled figure with the simple clothes and the ready smile, who embodied this idea throughout the long decades of struggle. To the Indian people, Gandhi gave a nation. To the world, he gave satyagraha, arguably the most revolutionary idea of a long and ravaged century. He showed that political change could be affected by renouncing violence; that unjust laws could be defied peacefully and with a readiness to accept punishment; that "soul-force," as much as armed force, could bring down an empire.

He drew this lesson from his readings of the Bible and Tolstoy and the Bhagavad-Gita, and he taught it to Martin Luther King Jr., Nelson Mandela, and countless other political protestors who would follow his example in the years to come. In some sense, Gandhi's greatest achievement lay in his legacy; for his ideals, and the example he provided in living them out, inspired, and continue to inspire, people of all nations to take up the peaceful struggle for freedom from oppression.

India won independence in 1947, followed by the Indo-Pakistani War of 1947, and partition of India. Gandhi said, " Before partitioning India, my body will have to be cut into two pieces. " About one million people died in the bloody riots until partition was reluctantly asserted by Gandhi as the only way to stop the Civil War. He urged the Congress Party to accept partition, and launched his last " fast-into-death" campaign in Delhi, calling for a stop to all violence.

Gandhi also called to give Pakistan the 550, 000, 000 rupees in honor of the partition agreement. He tried to prevent instability and anger against India. Gandhi was shot three times in the chest and died while on his way to a prayer meeting, on January 30, 1948. His assassins were convicted and executed a year later. The ashes of Mahatma Gandhi were split in portions and sent to all states of India to be scattered in rivers. Part of Gandhi's ashes rest in Raj Ghat, near Delhi, India. Part of Mahatma Gandhi's ashes are at the Lake Shrine in Los Angeles.