

The journey of mahatma gandhi religion essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Movie: Gandhi (1982) directed by Richard Attenborough and starring Ben Kingsley in the title role. This movie won 9 Academy Awards, including Best Picture, Best Director, Best Actor, Best Screenplay and Best Cinematography.

This movie depicts the journey of Mahatma Gandhi from the sole colored (racial discrimination inflicted on him) practicing advocate in South Africa, who is thrown out of a train at Pietermaritzburg on his refusal to shift to a third class coach while holding a valid first class ticket to the leader using the principles of non-violent resistance on behalf of Indian immigrants to his relocation to his mother land, India and inspiring the millions of fellow citizens by his charismatic leadership skills.

The movie also portrays his individuality and relationships with his family, close-associates, friends and leaders of Indian Congress Party. Additionally, the principles followed by Mahatma Gandhi are represented fairly with the right blend of external factors including the British policies, poverty prevalent in rural India and discrimination issues affecting his decisions, outlook and strategies adopted together with the building of his ' Ashram'.

Who was Gandhi?

Mr. Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, bestowed with the title of ' Mahatma'[1] (Hindi word for great soul), lovingly called ' Bapu' (Hindi word for father) by his followers, is the ' Father of nation'[2]of India, who not only raised his voice for ' Swaraj' (home rule for India) and taught his countrymen to fight against the British empire, but led the world to believe and still follow his principles of truth and non-violence.

Mahatma Gandhi was a qualified Barrister, studied law in University College of London, lead a simple life with his wife, Kasturbai Makhanji and four sons, Harilal, Manilal, Ramdas and Devdas. Though a Hindu by birth, he believed in spirituality and not strict adherence to religious beliefs. The dialogue from the movie ' Gandhi' clearly reveals the same: "...I will begin with the Bible where the words of the Lord are, ' Love thy neighbor as thyself'... and then our beloved Gita which says, ' The world is a garment worn by God, thy neighbor is in truth thyself'... and finally the Holy Koran, ' We shall remove all hatred from our hearts and recline on couches face to face, a band of brothers'..."[3].

It is easier to explain the austerity of this great leader by borrowing the condolences of Edward R. Murrow from the 1982 movie ' Gandhi':

'.. Mahatma Gandhi was not a commander of great armies nor ruler of vast lands, he could boast no scientific achievements, no artistic gift. Yet men, governments and dignitaries from all over the world have joined hands today to pay homage to this little brown man in the loincloth who led his country to freedom...'

Guiding principles and followers:

Mahatma Gandhi followed the following 11 vows[4]throughout his life: non-violence, truth, non stealing, self discipline, non-possession, Bread labor, control of the palate, Fearlessness, equality of all religions, use of only locally made goods and removal of untouchability. These vows were envisaged in his book ' Yervada Mandir'. He was unperturbed by the consequences that could follow on pursuing these principles, which undoubtedly made him the

unique leader of East inspiring leaders across the globe, including Martin Luther King and James Lawson, drew from the writings of Gandhi in the development of their own theories about non-violence. Anti-apartheid activist and former President of South Africa, Nelson Mandela, was inspired by Gandhi. Others include Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, Steve Biko, Aung San Suu Kyi and Philippine opposition leader during the dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos, Benigno Aquino, Jr.[5]The Time Magazine in December, 1999 edition named The 14th Dalai Lama, Lech WaÅsa, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Cesar Chavez, Aung San Suu Kyi, Benigno Aquino, Jr., Desmond Tutu and Nelson Mandela as Children of Gandhi and his spiritual heirs to non-violence. [6]

His journey, from a ' briefless barrister'[7]in Bombay to the ' half naked Indian fakir'[8]to the champion of the cause of non-violence and equality, was full of thorns in the form of assorted problems faced by him as well as roses as the numerous followers.

Innumerable writers and leaders world-over have diverse opinion about the greatest spiritual and political leader of India. Whether people follow the principles of Mahatma Gandhi or they loathe him, his immense work cannot be ignored. In the words of Martin Luther King Jr. in the year 1955: " Christ gave us the goals and Mahatma Gandhi the tactics." [9]The ' person of the century'[10]Albert Einstein in his condolence message declared that " Generations to come will scarce believe that such a one as this walked the earth in flesh and blood."

Johanna Macgeary, a journalist with Time magazine quoted: “ His generation knew him as a radical political agitator; ours shrugs off a holy man with romantic notions of a pure, pre-industrial life.” Further reporting that even his principal adversary, the Afrikaner leader Jan Smuts, recognized the power of his idea: “ Men like him redeem us from a sense of commonplace and futility.”[11]

The President of USA, Mr. B. H. Obama at the Wakefield High School speech in September 2009, quickly responded to a question posed on him as ‘ who was the one person, dead or alive, that he would choose to dine with?’ as “ Gandhi!”, who he considers his biggest inspiration.[12]

Leadership style:

Leadership is a ‘ process of social influence in which one person can enlist the aid and support of others in the accomplishment of a common task’.

[13]There are diverse opinions and theories regarding definitions and classifications of leadership styles. Nevertheless, in the words of Vance Packard - ‘ Leadership appears to be the art of getting others to want to do something you are convinced should be done’.

Leadership style is the summation of manner and approach of a leader in providing direction towards the accomplishment of a common task, implementing plans and motivating people. Kurt Lewin[14]led a group of researchers to identify different styles of leadership and established three major styles of leadership[15]as: authoritarian or autocratic; participative or democratic and delegative or laissez-faire.

Participative leader:

Mahatma Gandhi definitely was a participative or democratic leader, who involved the whole team in planning and goal setting, problem solving and emphasised team building; on the other hand, he retained his decision making authority that could not be challenged. Rather than deciding in an autocratic manner, he involved other people in the process, including his subordinates, peers, superiors and other stakeholders.

Since the political situation then, was dynamic and changing frequently, the required democratic leadership flowed from Mahatma Gandhi. He brought out the best of experience and skill from the fellow Congress leaders, seniors and followers. He had a strong conviction with the right blend of flexibility and chose the appropriate approach to be followed. The communication channels used were open and transparent; and in case of any changes, the strategy was explained unambiguously.

Theories of leadership:

Various theories have been propounded on the concept of leadership based on varied attributes of a leader including traits, situational interaction, function, behavior, power, vision and values, charisma, and intelligence among others.[16]

Transformational Leadership:

Transformational leadership[17] as defined by Burns, is the process of motivating the team by leader to be effective and efficient and engaging their commitments in the context of the shared values and shared vision. It involves relationship of mutual trust between the leaders and the followers.

Mahatma Gandhi beyond doubt was a transformational leader. He utilised his communication skills for facilitating and focusing his peers and followers on the final desired outcome or goal attainment. In consonance with Burns' analysis, Mahatma Gandhi was highly visible and used chain of command. He focused on the ideal vision of Swaraj - Home rule for India, and was surrounded by numerous other leaders who were responsible and accountable for the interim milestones leading to attaining the target.

All the four elements of a transformational leader were evident in Mahatma Gandhi's leadership: individualized consideration, intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation and idealized influence. He attempted to attend to his follower's individual needs, acting as their mentor and addressing their concerns. He unconditionally supported his followers and respected their individual contributions. The followers also had aspirations for self development and were motivated towards accomplishing their responsibilities. He was never averse to taking risks and was open to nurturing associates and followers. He articulated a common vision which inspiring not only his followers, but his peers and other contemporary leaders. Leaders with inspirational motivation challenge followers with high standards, communicate optimism about future goals, and provide meaning for the task at hand. Followers need to have a strong sense of purpose if they are to be motivated to act. Purpose and meaning provide the energy that drives a group forward.

The visionary aspect of leadership are supported by communication skills that makes it precise and powerful. The followers are willing to invest more

effort in their tasks, they are encouraged and optimistic about the future and believe in their abilities.

4. Idealized Influence - Provides vision and sense of mission, instills pride, gains respect and trust. It involves having a clear vision and a sense of purpose. Such leaders are able to win the trust and respect of the followers. They build a base for future mission, which enables them to obtain extra efforts from the followers.

Charismatic Leader

Till now we have read about different types of leaders but some times it happens that we are awed by a leader and follow him/her blindly. The personal charm of the person influences us. These types of leaders are known as charismatic leaders. Mahatma Gandhi was also an example of charismatic leader. The charismatic leaders have the ability to carry the masses the them. They have a great deal of emotional appeal. Swami Vivekanand was another charismatic leader. Some characteristic of charismatic leaders are -

- followers accept the leader unquestioningly.
- followers obey the leader willingly.
- followers beliefs are similar to the leader's beliefs.
- followers trust the correctness of the leader's belief.

Servant leadership:

Contemporary leaders: