

An analysis of mahatma gandhi



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

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

The movie opens with the assassination of Gandhi. It depicts the journey of Mahatma Gandhi from sole colored practicing advocate in South Africa, who was thrown out of a train at Pietermaritzburg on his refusal to shift to third class coach while holding a valid first class ticket – to the leader of community who used the principles of non-violent resistance on behalf of Indian immigrants – to his relocation to his mother land, India and inspiring 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 Gandhi are represented fairly with right blend of external factors including the British policies, his extensive travels, poverty prevalent in rural India and his conviction to remove discrimination issues, which affected his decisions, outlook and strategies adopted together with the building of his ‘ Ashram’, taking up fasting and standing firm on his principles of non-co-operation and non-violence.

The tag line of this movie: “ His triumph changed the world forever” is absolutely true.

Who was gandhi?

Mr. Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, bestowed with the title of ‘ Mahatma’: Great soul (a honorary title first used by Rabindranath Tagore), lovingly called ‘ Bapu’: father, used by his followers, is the ‘ Father of nation’ of India.

This expression was first used for Gandhi by Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose in his condolence message on the demise of Kasturba Gandhi, wife of Mahatma Gandhi in the year 1944. Gandhinot only raised his voice for ‘ Swaraj’ (home rule for India) and taught his countrymen to fight without any arms or ammunition against the British Empire, but led the world to believe and still follow his principles of truth and non-violence.

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 am a Muslim and a Hindu and a Christian and a Jew and so are all of you”.

It is easier to explain the austerity of this great leader by borrowing the condolences of Edward R. Murrow:

“.. 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...”

(Dialogue from the movie Gandhi (1982), directed by Richard Attenborough)

Guiding Principles and followers

Gandhi followed 11 vows throughout his life, which are described in his various writings. These vows are: Ahimsa: non-violence, Satya: truth, Asteya: non-stealing, Brahmacharya: self discipline, Aparigraha: non-possession,

Sharirshrama: bread labor, Aswada: control of the palate, Sarvatra Bhayavarjana: fearlessness, Sarva Dharma Samantva: equality of all religions, Swadeshi: use of only locally made goods and Sparshbhavna: removal of untouchability.

(Source: http://www.gandhimanibhavan.org/gandhiphilosophy/philosophy_11vows.htm)

The Time Magazine in December, 1999 edition named The 14th Dalai Lama, Lech WaÅ, Ä™ 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’.

(Source: <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,993026,00.html>)

His journey was from a ‘ briefless barrister’ (a term used to ridicule him by his fellow legal practitioners, as expressed by Eknath Easwaram) in Bombay to the ‘ half naked Indian fakir’ (as referred by Winston Churchill in his speech in 1930) to the ‘ champion of the cause of non-violence and equality’. This passage 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 expressed diverse opinion about the greatest spiritual and political leader of India. Whether people follow the principles of 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.”

(Source: Life Magazine: Remembering Martin Luther King Jr. 40 Years Later, 2008)

Leadership Qualities and styles

A leader is ' a person who influences a group of people towards the achievement of a goal'. A leader is an individual who first performs and then, leads his followers by example, so that they are motivated to follow him. He must have an innate commitment to a goal and strive to achieve it even if others do not follow him. As defined by Eric Hoffer, " the leader has to be practical and realist, yet he must talk the language of visionary and idealist".

(Source: <http://www.vtaide.com/gleanings/leader.htm>)

The dictionary meaning of the term ' leadership' is the capacity to lead others; an act or instance of guiding. 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' as defined by Chemers. 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".

(Source: <http://www.nwlink.com/~donclark/leader/leadstl.html>)

Viscount Slim listed the traits of leadership as ' courage, will power, judgment, flexibility, knowledge and integrity'. In the words of Hill, characteristics of leader include ' self-confidence, morale qualities, self-

sacrifice, paternalism, decisiveness, dignity, tolerance, enthusiasm, knowledge of man'.

In the light of these expressions, Gandhi was a true leader, who planned and performed the tasks, led by example, had strong conviction to achieve the goal and motivated his followers. The strength and character of Mahatma Gandhi is clear in his own words as: " You can chain me, you can torture me, you can even destroy this body but you will never imprison my mind."

Kenneth Benne and Paul Sheats (1948) defined 26 different group roles that can be played by one or more persons within a group, which were categorised as: task roles, personal or social roles and dysfunctional or individualistic roles. According to these roles, in the group task roles, an individual may be initiator, coordinator, evaluator, critic, orienter or recorder.

(Source: http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTMM_85.htm)

Kurt Lewin led a group of researchers to identify different styles of leadership and established three major styles of leadership as: authoritarian or autocratic; participative or democratic and delegative or laissez-faire.

(Source: <http://www.nwlink.com/~donclark/leader/leadstl.html>)

Participative leader:

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 Gandhi. He brought out the best of experience and skill from the fellow Congress leaders, seniors and followers. He had a strong conviction with right blend of flexibility and chose 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 interactions, function, behavior, power, vision, values, charisma, ethics and intelligence among others.

The following theories are relevant in describing leadership characteristics of Gandhi as explored in the movie:

Charismatic leadership

Transformational leadership

Servant leadership

Authentic and Ethical leadership

Ideal leadership

Follower-centric leadership

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Charismatic Leader:

According to the trait approach, the leadership style is affected and influenced by the individual characteristics and traits of leader. German sociologist, Max Weber distinguished three ideal types of legitimate political leadership, domination and authority: charismatic (familial and religious), feudal or traditional (patriarchs or patrimonialism) and legal (modern law and state).

Weber (1947) defined charismatic leadership as “ resting on devotion to the exceptional sanctity, heroism or exemplary character of an individual person, and of the normative patterns or order revealed or ordained by him”. He defined the term ‘ charisma’ as “ a certain quality of an individual personality, by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural or exceptional powers or qualities, which are not accessible to an ordinary person, but of divine origin or exemplary”. He further added that a charismatic leader has remarkable ability to distill complex ideas into simple messages and communicates by using symbols, analogies, metaphors and stories. Such a leader relishes risk and is an optimist, who rebels conventions.

Robert House (1977) used four phrases to define charismatic leadership: “ dominant, strong desire to influence others, self-confident and strong sense of one’s own moral values”.

(Source: http://www.12manage.com/methods_weber_charismatic_leadership.html)

Gandhi is the best example of a charismatic leader. It was only his divine charisma that helped him fight on behalf of the Indian community in South Africa employing his principle of non-violence and wage a war against the British Empire for Indian independence.

(Source: http://www.12manage.com/methods_weber_charismatic_leadership.html)

Transformational Leadership:

Bass (1985) extended the theory of charismatic leadership to the theory of transformational leadership, where a leader is able to inspire and activate subordinates to 'perform beyond expectations' and to achieve goals beyond those normally set. Transformational leadership as defined by Burns (1978), 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.

(Source: <http://psychology.about.com/od/leadership/a/transformational.htm>)

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, Gandhi was highly visible and used chain of command. He focused on the ideal vision of Swaraj and was surrounded by numerous other leaders who were responsible and accountable for interim milestones leading to attaining the target.

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All the four elements of a transformational leader were evident in 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 inspired his followers, peers and other contemporary leaders. His inspirational motivation and high standards challenged his followers. Also, followers had a strong sense of purpose and responded positively acting towards the attainment of goal. The visionary outlook of Gandhi was supported by his communication skills and conviction, which resulted in making it precise and powerful. He instilled pride in his followers gaining their respect and trust enabling him to obtain their additional efforts.

Servant leadership:

Robert Greenleaf (1977) described that " a servant-leader is a servant first". He elucidates that the servant-leadership begins with a natural feeling that leader as an individual wishes to serve, which is followed by a conscious choice to aspire to lead.

Gandhi, the quintessential servant-leader describes his own motivation to serve as: " service to the poor has been my heart's desire and it has always thrown me amongst the poor and enabled me to identify myself with them."

(Source: http://www.lifepositive.com/Mind/Ethics/Servant_Leadership_stooping_to_conquer22004.asp)

Spears (2002) lists qualities of servant-leader as: listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to growth of people and building community.

(Source: http://changingminds.org/disciplines/leadership/styles/servant_leadership.htm)

Gandhi's desire to serve a cause and adhere to his principles was evident in South Africa. His mission to serve humanity began with his concern for the equal treatment of Indians, followed by raising his voice against the Bill, which was sought to deprive Indians of their freedom.

“ First they ignore you, then they laugh at you, then they fight you, then you win.”: These words of Gandhi echo his persuasiveness and precision.

Authentic and Ethical Leadership:

In wake of financial, ethical and societal crises, people have begun clamor for authentic leadership. It is defined by Walumbwa as “ a pattern of leader behaviour that draws upon and promotes both positive psychological capacities and a positive ethical climate fostering positive self-development”. The traits of authentic leadership embraces self-awareness of a leader, relational transparency, balanced processing of information and internalized moral perspective.

(Source: http://johnmolson.concordia.ca/images/stories/graduate_prog/msc/docs/msc-agre/briand_melanie.pdf)

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Luthans and Avolio define authentic leadership as “ a process that draws from both positive psychological capabilities and a highly developed organizational context, which results in both greater self-awareness and self-regulated positive behaviors on the part of both leaders and associates, fostering positive self development.” Authentic leaders inspire others by modeling positive organizational states of confidence, hope, optimism, and resiliency. By responding transparently to moral dilemmas, authentic leaders become ethical role models. Thus, authentic leadership is an umbrella that comprises of ethical leadership as well.

(Source: <http://leadershipskills.org.au/interpersonal-leadership/authentic-leadership-explained/>)

In the words of Gandhi: “ Everyone who wills can hear the inner voice. It is within everyone”. He demonstrated characteristics of an authentic leader by being committed to truth. He knew himself well and was absolutely clear about his ideals and values. He illustrated self-discipline. Even in the movie, the dialogues between Ba, Mirabehn and Margaret Bourke-White, evidence that he strictly professed celibacy.

Gandhi was extremely compassionate and genuine. Even during one of his train journeys, he releases his head cloth to a poor woman, across the river, who apparently was not wearing any proper clothing. Being an authentic leader of course, emanates from his rich experience and commitment towards serving humanity.

Good leadership refers not only to the competence of leader to lead his followers to perform a task, but his responsibility for ensuring standards of

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moral and ethical conduct and in transforming people. Ethical leadership combines ethical decision-making and ethical behavior. Key responsibility of a leader is to make ethical decisions and behave in ethical ways and to ensure that his followers understand and practice the ethical code.

(Source: <http://studentorgs.unomaha.edu/documents/EthicalLeadership.pdf>)

An ethical leader must emphasize and reiterate the statements about importance of ethics. He must disseminate ethical guidelines to his followers. Gandhi, indeed is considered one of the most ethical leaders. He modeled his ethical behavior and set a visible example for others to follow. He set rules for himself and also, his followers as regards the do's and don't's of moral behavior. This code was followed religiously by him. He criticized all unethical behavior and in case of any such unethical act by his followers, he went on to fasting as a penance.

Gandhi considered that “ Always aim at complete harmony of thought and word and deed.”

Ideal leadership:

Ideal leadership or Inter-Disciplinary leadership is a scientific leadership theory propounded by Larry Stout (2001), which identifies six critical capabilities that are grouped under leadership capital and four capacities under leadership conditions. The six critical leadership capital capacities are vision, values, wisdom, courage, trust and voice to influence followers. The four vital leadership conditions vital for these capacities are place where the

leader can hold sway, period that calls for his or her leadership, position that conveys leadership authority, and people who are ready for leadership.

(Source: http://www.az-encyclopedia.info/i/1329282_Ideal_leadership/)

This theory states that leader is one who leads his organization forward in a positive direction. The conditions determine who gets to be a leader in the first place – a person must be in the right place, at the right time, doing the right things, with the right people in order to have an opportunity to lead.

(Source: http://www.idealleadership.com/talking_about_leadership)

His positive thoughts are amply clear from Gandhi's words: " An eye for an eye makes the whole world blind."

Follower-centric leadership:

Gandhi's relation with his followers can be classified into the approach of being follower-centric.

In accordance with this approach, it is pertinent that the leadership is focused on followers, and not on the leader. The leader should give attention to his followers and make them feel proud on being part of the team. In the words of Warren Bennis: " Good leaders make people feel that they are at the very heart of things, not at the periphery." The follower-centric approach to leadership emphasises the information processing aspect in leadership dyads.

(Source: <http://learningleaders.blogspot.com/2007/12/being-follower-centric.html>)

Meindl propounded this theory on the argument that “ it is the followers rather than the leaders who construct both the phenomenon of leadership and the images of specific leaders.”

Gandhi followed and advocated strategies that were dependent on circumstances and his followers. For instance, when he was in South Africa, he launched his protests in a suit and a tie, whereas, when he came back to India, he dressed only in Indian self-made clothing - Khadi and launched non-violent protests on an immense scale.

(Source: [http://www. rediff. com/money/2003/apr/11spec2. htm](http://www.rediff.com/money/2003/apr/11spec2.htm))

Contemporary Leaders OF GANDHI

There were several leaders of that era, who were contemporaries of Gandhi, including the members of Indian National Congress, striving for independence. Jawahar Lal Nehru, Sardar Vallabh Bhai Patel, Maulana Azad, Bhagat Singh, Chander Shekhar, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the leader of Muslim league, to name a few.

In the movie, Muhammad Ali Jinnah is depicted as one of the strong leaders, who even went to the extent of defying Gandhi. Jinnah demanded for a new Muslim nation named ‘ Pakistan’. This was completely against the principles and philosophies of Gandhi.

Jinnah is officially known as Quaid-i-Azam (Father of nation) in Pakistan. He advocated two nation theory, which was opposed to Mahatma’s ideology of United India.

As depicted in the movie, there were several instances where Gandhi interacted with Jinnah. First encounter of Gandhi with Jinnah was in Patel's Garden. They subsequently met during a meeting for demanding Home rule for India, later at Jinnah's residence at Bombay and on various other occasions.

Muhammad Ali Jinnah studied law, which led him to start thinking about Indian freedom through constitutional methods and Hindu-Muslim Unity. Jinnah was the leader of Muslim community of India.

The leadership style adopted by Jinnah was authoritarian and charismatic. His charismatic style helped him to gain confidence, acceptance and support from Muslims, consequently, obeying his orders. His leadership style is very well depicted in the movie during his talks demanding Home rule for India and the immediate response and enthusiasm among public. His authoritative style of leadership kept the party together where he held decision making power and exercised complete control over his follower.

On comparing, leadership styles of Jinnah and Gandhi, it is evident that Gandhi was accepted among different sections of Indian society and across all castes and religions (including Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs and others). On the other hand, the

popularity and acceptance of Jinnah was limited to only one community.

Mahatma Gandhi's ethics, authenticity and ideal leadership made him the leader of masses.

analysis of followers

According to Hill, leadership is product of projection and transference process of followers. The followers play a significant role in constructing leadership. They have cognitive schema through which they identify and assess their leaders. Once they identify small number of prototypical leadership in a person then they designate him as a leader.

As depicted in the movie, Gandhi has follower driven leadership. It is amply clear that Gandhi's follower played significant role in the construction of leadership. Mahatma Gandhi always worked in the best interest of his followers.

Conclusion

“ MY LIFE IS MY MESSAGE”

Gandhi was a great leader and independence fighter whose personality and leadership qualities widely influenced his followers. He accomplished his vision of Independent India by following on his principles of non violence and non cooperation. Opponents could never challenge his ideas and beliefs and later, he became ideal of many great leaders.

Using principles of Satyagraha, he led the campaign for Indian independence from Britain. Gandhi was arrested many times by British for his activities in South Africa and India. He believed it was honourable to go to jail for a just cause. Altogether he spent seven years in prison for his political activities. Gandhi used fasting to impress upon others the need to be non-violent. India was granted independence in 1947.

In the words of Indian poet, Pradeep: “ You gave us freedom without any sword or shield, you are a miracle.”