
A Biography of Mahatma Gandhi, a Major Leader in the Indian Independence Movement

Mahatma Gandhi was born on October 2nd 1869 and assassinated on January 30th 1948 at the age of seventy eight. Gandhi was a major leader in the Indian Independence Movement and is now considered an unofficial founding father of India. Gandhi was also known for his influences in the Hindu and Jain religions. Gandhi is still recognized and worshiped today by many Hindu and Jain and he is recognized throughout India. Worldwide, Gandhi is most well-known for his work promoting world peace and equality. Many people still observe and live by his wise quotes such as “Whenever you are confronted with an opponent, conquer him with love”. Mahatma Gandhi’s wisdom is timeless and he will continue to enrich the lives of his followers.

Mahatma Gandhi was born into a Hindu family and got much of his religious influence from his parents, Putlibai and Karamchand Gandhi. Gandhi grew up with a comprehensive education, and was an average student. Gandhi was thirteen when his parents arranged for him to marry Kasturba Makhanji. Shortly after the marriage, Karamchand, Mahatma Gandhi’s father died. Just days later, Mahatma and Kasturba delivered their first son who also died days after birth. This double tragedy hurt Gandhi and made this a very difficult time in his youth. After the loss of their first child, Kasturba had four sons, Harilal, Manilal, Ramdas and Devdas.

Gandhi enrolled in Samaldas College in Bhavnagar State to study but did very poorly and suffered from homesickness. After failing his exams, he withdrew and returned home to his family. At age eighteen, Gandhi was offered an opportunity to travel to the United Kingdom and study at University College London. Before his big move, he swore to maintain his Hindu practices by pledging abstinence against alcohol and sex as well as vegetarianism. Gandhi met people with different religious backgrounds which influenced him to pursue the philosophical study of religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism and Christianity.

In 1891, Mahatma Gandhi returned to India where he learned that his mother had died while he was away. Gandhi found that it was very difficult for him to get and maintain a steady job. After many trials and failures, he accepted a job at an Indian firm in South Africa. Although his original contract was for only a year, Gandhi spent a total of 21 years in South Africa. He was employed as a lawyer by wealthy Muslims. The racial segregation and extreme poverty here allowed Gandhi to grow in his political and ethical views and become a leader. Gandhi faced the horrific racism firsthand when he was thrown out of a first class train, although he clearly had purchased a completely valid ticket that permitted him to be there. Another instance was when a

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man demanded that Gandhi remove his turban, which he refused to do because of his religious dedication. Witnessing and experiencing this violent racism stuck with Gandhi and allowed him to grow politically.

Gandhi's life was changing as he developed an understanding and strong opinions about social injustice. Gandhi then became a strong supporting activist for Indian rights and helped found The Natal Indian Congress in 1894. This great organization grew throughout South Africa and gained followers, shaping their ethical beliefs and social system. Indians, however were still faced with brutal racism and had to fight for racial equality. Gandhi brought the skills he had developed in South Africa back to India with him when he returned in 1915. He began advocating his Indian followers to stand up for themselves and their race against racism and inequality.

Upon his return to India, Gandhi gained followers and supporters almost immediately and as a whole and became the leader of the Indian National Congress. He fought for complete independence from the British government by boycotting British goods and encouraging civil disobedience which started the Indian Independence Movement. Gandhi was arrested on March 10th 1922 and served for two years of his six year sentence. After Gandhi was released from prison, he remained quiet for a few years until 1930, after the British had placed a tax on salt. Gandhi then led a massive 250-mile march to the sea to collect his own salt and prove that India does not need Britain's Government to thrive. The British government then realized how influential Gandhi had become as a political leader and had to make negotiations with him regarding Indian poverty and equal rights for women.

World War Two served as another opportunity for India to fight for its independence from Great Britain. On August 9th 1942. Mahatma Gandhi was arrested again and held for two years in Pune. While in prison, Gandhi's wife, Kasturba died in the same prison. Once Gandhi returned to India, he aided in the pursuit of Indian independence and India gained freedom from Britain on August 15th 1947. Gandhi continued throughout his life to advocate toward equality and world peace throughout his life and positively influenced the lives of everyone around him.

Throughout his life, Gandhi survived 6 known attempted assassinations. At 5:17 pm on January 30th 1948 Mahatma Gandhi was assassinated. Gandhi was shot three times by Nathuram Godse while on his way to a prayer meeting. According to Hindu customs, Gandhi's body was cremated and his ashes were spread into a river in Prune, where his wife had died years before. Gandhi's funeral was attended by over two million people who participated in the five-mile walk. The funeral attendees were all of different religious, ethnic and racial backgrounds and gathered to show respect to a political activist. Gandhi's followers and supporters back in India mourned his death.

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Even after his tragic death, Gandhi was influential in the lives of many and his wisdom lives on in the lives of many. Mahatma Gandhi was a very successful civil rights activist and went on to influence Martin Luther King in his fight for racial equality in America and Nelson Mandela in South Africa. Gandhi lives on in India, where his life is celebrated annually on his birthday, October 2nd as a national holiday. Gandhi's life also had a major influence on religions worldwide and sculpted beliefs and views.

Gandhi was able to successfully encourage Muslims and Hindu people to work together against the British and become allies throughout history. Since their cooperation, Gandhi had complete Muslim support in his campaigning and activism. Gandhi was able to share his religious traditions with the world, such as fasting and vegetarianism. He shared their importance to the Hindu and Jain people and worked with people who also supported these habits to spread awareness worldwide.

Gandhi conjured his idea of a perfect economic system, which he called Gandhian Economics. Although India used many of Gandhi's ideas for an ideal government, this was rejected because of its impracticality. This economic system called for the support for poor people and encouraged upper class citizens to help those below them. Gandhi believed that "poverty is the worst form of violence" and did not want anyone to have to suffer from being in the lower class.

Mahatma Gandhi was so successful in his fights because he believed in nonviolence. Every battle fought by Gandhi was a peaceful one that included no fighting or killing. This philosophy led Nelson Mandela throughout his fight for civil rights in South Africa. Mandela looked to Gandhi's past as inspiration for a peaceful and very successful revolution. The nonviolent style came from Gandhi's religious background. Jain and Hindu people do not believe in violence and do not kill anyone, friend or foe. Even animals must be killed humanely in the Jain religion and not at all in Hinduism. By using his religion in his fight, Gandhi was able to spread Hinduism and strengthen the religion.

In 1930, Mahatma Gandhi was labeled the "Man of The Year" by Times Magazine. He was also the runner to Albert Einstein "Person of The Century" award in 1999. The government of India created the Gandhi Peace Prize which is awarded annually. Gandhi was unofficially titled the founding father of India because of his great efforts in the independence of India. Gandhi was nominated for several times, but never won the Nobel Peace Prize and after his death, no one was awarded the prize because there was no one fit worthy of it at the time.

Gandhi's face still appears on all printed currency but one note. His birth and death dates are both celebrated as national holidays in India annually and he is recognized at two temples, one in Orissa and the other in Kadir. His followers and supporters still gather at his temples to worship Gandhi and show their respect to him. He has supporters worldwide and people from

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many different religions still agree with his philosophies.

Gandhi was an influential leader throughout his life. The fact that he was born into a Hindu family really helped him develop his peaceful protesting skills over time. Gandhi's time spent in South Africa opened his eyes to racial and social issues which really bothered him, encouraging him to share his realizations with the world and take part in solving these major social issues. Mahatma Gandhi shared his experiences in inequality with the world and decided to take immediate action and dedicate his life to world peace and social justice. Gandhi will continue to influence people in peace and with his wise words.

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