

Early Life

Gandhi was born in western India on 2 October 1869. His father Karamchand Gandhi was the Governor of Porbandar, a state of British India. His mother Putlibai was Karamchand's fourth wife. Having born in a Hindu family Gandhi strictly followed vegetarianism and fasting as means of self-purification. At the age of 13 he was married A girl named Kasturba. In 1885, Kasturbai gave birth to their first child who survived only few days. Later the couple had four sons. Gandhi was an average student and passed his matriculation exam from Samaldas College, Gujarat with some difficulty. On September 4th 1888, he traveled to England to study law at the university College London and to train as a barrister, as his family wanted him to be a barrister.

Civil Rights Movement in South Africa

In South Africa, he had a first hand experience of racial discrimination and prejudice directed at Indians and the injustice imposed on them. Gandhi himself experienced the humiliation and disgrace while in South Africa. Initially he was thrown off a train for refusing to travel in a third class coach while holding a first class ticket. Other similar events including being barred from many hotels in South Africa moved him and encouraged him to work for Indian people there. As a result, he extended his original period of stay to protest a bill passed by the South African government to deny them the right to vote.

In 1906, the Transvaal government launched a new act forcing registration of Indian population. Enraged by the act, a mass protest meeting was held in Johannesburg on 11 September in which Gandhi called on Indian people to resist the new act through non-violent and peaceful means. His methodology of *Satyagraha* (devotion to truth) was adopted by thousands of his followers during the seven-year long struggle; thousands of Indians were jailed (including Gandhi), beaten and punished for striking and refusing to register. Though the government successfully stopped the protest through its harsh methods, the impact of this protest forced the government to compromise with Gandhi. Gandhi's idea of non-violence and truth developed during this period.

Indian Independence struggle and Gandhi (1916-1945)

In India, the lives of farmers was worsened by landlords (mostly British) by imposing taxes and leaving them in poverty. The peasants were forced to grow cash crops instead of food crops necessary for their survival. This led to a situation of famine there. To end the famine and poverty, Gandhi organized a survey about the people. With the information, he began cleaning the villages, building schools and hospitals, encouraging villagers to condemn and combat many social evils. Gandhi organized protests and strikes against the landlords that resulted in the cancellation of the tax raises until the famine ended.

Gandhi employed non-cooperation, non-violence and peaceful resistance as the most effective weapons against the British rule. After the Jallianwala Bagh massacre and the violence that followed, Gandhi felt an immediate need of total control over all Indian government institutions. The concept of *Swaraj* or complete individual, spiritual and political freedom evolved after this. Gandhi urged the people to boycott foreign made goods, clothes, to resign from government employment and to drop British titles and honors. He encouraged people to wear *khadi* clothes instead of foreign made clothes. Gandhi himself wore a traditional Indian *dhoti* and *shawl*, made with yarn he himself spun on a *Charkha*.

The campaign was a big success nationwide and people from all sectors, including women of India participated in it. The movement ended in Feb 1922, when Gandhi was arrested in March and was sentenced to 6 years imprisonment. During his years in prison the Indian National Congress began to split into two parts. As a result, cooperation among Hindu and Muslims also weakened during this period.

Salt March & Demand for Swaraj

The British government appointed a new constitutional reform under Sir John Simon which did not include any Indians. The result was a boycott of the British politicians by all Indian political leaders. In December 1928 Gandhi demanded the British government to give back India's freedom and warned them to face a new non-cooperation campaign if their demands were not met. On December 31st 1929 the Indian flag was raised in many cities. On January 26, India celebrated its Independence Day. In 1930, Gandhi launched a new a protest tax on salt. He marched from Ahmadabad city to Dandi city to make salt himself. Thousands of Indian people joined him in this 400km march which was marked as his most successful campaign against the British hold.

During world war II in 1939, Gandhi opposed the inclusion of India in the war stating that India can not be a part of the war being fought for the democratic freedom, while freedom was denied to India itself. Gandhi and other Congressmen intensified their movement for a complete freedom demanding the British to 'Quit India'. It was the strongest movement in the history of Indian Independence struggle in which thousands of freedom fighters were killed, imprisoned and injured and violent clashes broke in every part of India. The demand this time was a complete freedom and immediate exit of the British from India. Though Gandhi appealed to maintain discipline, he made it clear that even violent acts wouldn't stop their movement this time, as it was a time to Do or Die.

Assassination of Mahatma Gandhi

Gandhi and the committee of congress were arrested on 9 August 1942, and Gandhi was held in Aga Khan Palace for 2 years. During that period his wife Kasturba Gandhi died after 18 months of prison on 22 February 1944. At the end of the world war, Gandhi called off his struggle. Time had come to see an Independent India. Gandhi had always dreamed of India as a place where Hindu and Muslims lived in harmony and thus he was opposed to any plan that partitioned India into two different countries. Against the wish of Gandhi, British India broke into two parts, an Independent India and Pakistan.

Gandhi was assassinated on 30 January 1948 on the grounds of Birla house, New Delhi. The assassin, Nathuram Godse, who had links to the extremist Hindu group Hindu Mahasabha shot him dead because he was against Gandhi's sympathy for Pakistan. Godse and his co-conspirator Narayan Apte were tried and executed on 15 November 1949. Gandhi's memorial on rajghat, New Delhi bears his last words He Ram!

