



Gandhiji - A Trans National Figure

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Abstract: Mahatma Gandhi's life achievement stands unique in political history. He has invented a completely new and humane means for the liberation war of an oppressed country, and practiced it with greatest energy and devotion. The moral influence he had on the consciously thinking human being of the entire civilized world will probably be much more lasting than it seems in our time with its overestimation of brutal violent forces. Because lasting will only be the work of such statesmen who wake up and strengthen the moral power of their people through their example and educational works.

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Analysis

In India, Gandhi is known as the Father of the Nation. This is for he did more than anyone else to prepare Indians for freedom, to make them aware of the cleavages of religion, caste, and gender, to nurture the democratic and plural ethos of the Indian Constitution. India's debt to Gandhi is immense. Gandhi's own debts, however, ranged beyond India. While influenced by indigenous traditions of non-violence, his ideas were modified and refined through reading the works of the Russian Leo Tolstoy, the Englishman John Ruskin, and the American Henry David Thoreau. And it was South Africa, not India, that was the first, crucial crucible of his experiments in non-violent resistance. Gandhi was, and remains, a genuinely trans-national figure. He was trans-national in the range of his influences and in the reach of his thought. After his death, his techniques of non-violent

protest have been successfully used in several continents. Martin Luther King and his colleagues applied the force of truth to shame the American Government into over-turning racial legislation. Across Soviet-controlled Eastern Europe, Lech Walesa, Vaclav Havel, and their comrades used the power of non-violence to replace Communist dictatorships with democratic regimes. The heritage and methods of Gandhi can also be seen in the movements for democracy recently underway in the Arab world. Even when they are not immediately successful, non-violent protests along Gandhian lines have sharply highlighted the arbitrary use of power by authoritarian governments. The National League of Democracy, led by the indefatigable Aung Saan Suu Kyi, and the movement for Tibetan autonomy, led by the dignified and resolute Dalai Lama, are justly admired across the world. When democracy and pluralism finally come



to Myanmar and China – as they will, and must – the citizens of these countries will have reason to recall, and gratefully remember, the sacrifices of these non-violent resisters.

'Gandhiji's *Satyagraha*' sowed many seeds, seeds of resistance to colonial or authoritarian rule that helped usher in the end of imperialism and the emergence of democratic regimes. Even when countries are formally free, and formally democratic, non-violence can play a crucial role in challenging injustice and discrimination. Such was the case in the United States of the 1950s and 1960s, when the denial of equal rights of citizenship for African-Americans was confronted, and overcome, by the civil rights movement. And such is the case in India today, where multi-party democracy and an independent judiciary exist side-by-side with pervasive social inequalities.

Gandhi influenced important leaders and political movements. Leaders of the civil rights movement in the United States, including Martin Luther King, James Lawson, and James Bevel, drew from the writings of Gandhi in the development of their own theories about nonviolence. King said "Christ gave us the goals and Mahatma Gandhi the tactics." King sometimes referred to Gandhi as "the little brown saint." Anti-apartheid activist and former President of South Africa, Nelson Mandela, was inspired by Gandhi.

In his early years, the former President of South Africa Nelson Mandela was a follower of the nonviolent resistance philosophy of Gandhi. Bhana and Vahed commented on these events as "Gandhi inspired succeeding generations

of South African activists seeking to end White rule. This legacy connects him to Nelson Mandela...in a sense Mandela completed what Gandhi started."

Gandhi's life and teachings inspired many who specifically referred to Gandhi as their mentor or who dedicated their lives to spreading Gandhi's ideas. In Europe, Romain Rolland was the first to discuss Gandhi in 1924 in his book on Mahatma Gandhi, and Brazilian anarchist and feminist Maria Lacerda de Moura wrote about Gandhi in her work on pacifism. In 1931, notable European physicist Albert Einstein exchanged written letters with Gandhi, and called him "a role model for the generations to come" in a letter writing about him. Einstein said of Gandhi:

'A leader of his People, unsupported by any outward authority, a politician whose success rests not upon craft nor the mastery of technical devices, but simply on the convincing power of his personality; a victorious fighter who has always scorned the use of force; a man of wisdom and humility, armed with resolve and inflexible consistency, who has devoted all his strength to the uplifting of his people and the betterment of their lot; a man who has confronted the brutality of Europe with the dignity of the simple human being, and thus at all times rises superior. Generations to come, it may be, will scarce believe that such a one as this ever in flesh and blood walked upon this earth.'

Einstein had no doubt that Gandhi was the greatest person of his age; perhaps of any age. In the early 1930s, when he was teaching in Berlin, portraits of three icons hung in his study. These were the physicists Max Planck and Michael Faraday, and Mohandas K.



Gandhi. In the early 1950s, when Einstein was based in Princeton, a photograph of Gandhi was still displayed in his office. But Planck and Faraday had disappeared. When asked about this, Einstein replied that the discoveries of physics had recently resulted in the atom bomb. On the other hand, the reputation of Gandhi had been further enhanced in the last decades of his life.

Lanza del Vasto went to India in 1936 intending to live with Gandhi; he later returned to Europe to spread Gandhi's philosophy and founded the Community of the Ark in 1948. Madeleine Slade (known as "Mirabehn") was the daughter of a British admiral who spent much of her adult life in India as a devotee of Gandhi.

In addition, the British musician John Lennon referred to Gandhi when discussing his views on nonviolence. At the Cannes Lions International Advertising Festival in 2007, former US Vice-President and environmentalist Al Gore spoke of Gandhi's influence on him.

US President Barack Obama in a 2010 address to the Parliament of India said that:

I am mindful that I might not be standing before you today, as President of the United States, had it not been for Gandhi and the message he shared with America and the world. Obama in September 2009 said that his biggest

inspiration came from Mahatma Gandhi. His reply was in response to the question 'Who was the one person, dead or live, that you would choose to dine with?'. He continued that "He's somebody I find a lot of inspiration in. He inspired Dr. King with his message of nonviolence. He ended up doing so much and changed the world just by the power of his ethics." Mahatma Gandhi's life achievement stands unique in political history. He has invented a completely new and humane means for the liberation war of an oppressed country, and practiced it with greatest energy and devotion. The moral influence he had on the consciously thinking human being of the entire civilized world will probably be much more lasting than it seems in our time with its overestimation of brutal violent forces. Because lasting will only be the work of such statesmen who wake up and strengthen the moral power of their people through their example and educational works. We may all be happy and grateful that destiny gifted us with such an enlightened contemporary, a role model for the generations to come.

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